



GINGER PAQUE

BACKGROUND

I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA and, with six sisters and three brothers, I learned to work in groups pretty early. I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1974 with a BS in Education and a wide background in film arts. After graduating, I travelled to Venezuela on what I hoped would be a tour of South America, including especially Machu Pichu, before starting a professional career—but I never left. I did basic coursework for an online MBA in 2000-2001, but foreign exchange controls in Venezuela forced abandonment of that project.

After discontinuing the online MBA, I took a Human Rights Defender and Voting Observer course with the United Nations Association of Venezuela, where my interests in voting rights were strengthened. As a natural outgrowth of translating documents from English into Spanish, which involved learning new jargon, concepts, and policies, I took charge of the United Nations Association activities for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). I acted as the representative on the World Federation of United Nations Association's Task Force on WSIS, which launched me into Internet governance, although I had been a computer fan from the moment the first desktop computers came out.

TODAY

I'm currently involved in the DiploFoundation Internet Governance Capacity Building programme (IGCBP) research phase. I read about the IGCBP on the WSIS Plenary List, and thought it would be perfect for me as a chance to fill in some of the weaknesses in my policy background. To my surprise and pleasure, I was accepted into the programme, and have enjoyed every text, assignment, and project. I had actively enjoyed proofreading and post-proofing projects for other online initiatives, but I found Diplo to be a more personally stimulating online activity. Going to conferences, networking through Diplo links, and working on the task force, I became familiar with other organisations active in IG.

Sebastian Bellagama, Pablo Hinojosa and other LACNIC members are examples of people who motivated my affiliation to ISOC and ICANN. Other relationships grew online long before I ever met some people in person. As a volunteer translator I worked with CPSR and met Katitza Rodriguez, who later was a participant in the first bilingual group in the Diplo IGCBP07 which I tutored. Other people weave into the fabric of meetings—I first met Robert Guerra at one of the WSIS PrepComs, and he seems to be everywhere, including Diplo. I knew Diplo tutor Veronica Cretu online before meeting her at the 1st IG Forum in Athens, then in Puerto Rico at the ICANN meeting. But most of my relationship with her has been online chatting, exchanging notes!

I'm looking for final financing for solar and wind powered sustainable community Internet centres for the Venezuelan coastal towns of Chuao and Cepe (which have no road access). I chose these two towns as I tried to reconcile risks, remoteness, and need with the changes the Internet might bring to an area that was not yet linked to information technology. Chuao and Cepe are both remote from and part of the modern world. They have exciting, vital populations working to retain their heritage while taking advantage of new technologies. This is not an outside imposition of technology, but an enthusiastic acceptance of support. I think this is the ideal situation, where just a push, just a bit of help, can enable the local population to maximise use of resources under their own direction. The project aims to leave a self-sustaining Internet centre in each town, which will cover its maintenance costs by offering Internet services to tourists.

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THE EFFECTS OF THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

A particular, very personal effect the IGCBP had on me was the result of the levelling and non-discriminatory nature of the programme, the facilitators, and the groups, enhanced by the online environment. These factors affected me in two ways: first, it was easy to perceive and accept the work of each colleague without prejudice regarding their backgrounds. We all sat down at our computers and started “new.” I took each and every colleague as a professional on the basis of their inputs, not on their curriculum or background.

The flip side of this was that my own self-perceived weaknesses did not come into play, and I have learned that they do not have to be negative. One such factor is age. At 54, I am one of the oldest Diplo fellows. While I feel young inside and out, I tend to allow age to be a complicating factor: I am “older” physically, and “younger” in Internet governance. I come from a completely different career, used to being the “boss,” into a new set of parameters. With Diplo, this has seemed completely irrelevant. The programme seems to have the “just do it” attitude: take the tools and get to work. That is empowerment without politics.

My programme culminated in a fellowship to the opening of the Internet Governance Forum in Athens. This was a wonderful experience for me, as much in the interpersonal exchanges as in the formal proceedings. Coming after



frustrations and victories in the WSIS process, the Forum left me with questions I continued to examine this year. I am going to the second Internet Governance Forum asking questions I would like to see aired, but do not ask, because I am not sure if they are disruptive to the process. For instance, I would like to ask some online forums to question whether we might have been better off taking all of the WSIS and Forum monies and installing Internet access throughout several African countries, instead of talking, writing papers, doing research, and filling conference rooms. Did we really help anyone besides ourselves and our own careers?

THE FUTURE

So my focus or vision for the future is to become more concrete, physical, and local, and less theoretical and global. The exception is my plans for online education, which will give tools for local and regional work. This interest in educational tools has motivated my interest in the current project for the two coastal Venezuelan towns of Chuao and Cepe. Working with Scott Phipps, who originates from Canada and has spent most of his life studying and working around much of the planet, I hope to establish community Internet centres which will give access to the local community and allow the community to cover costs by offering Internet access to tourists and travellers. With this, we will achieve real, concrete change for real people, not theoretical change for theoretical groups..