How effective is direct remote interaction in EuroDIG?

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Abstract

EuroDIG is the annual Internet governance regional meeting for all of Europe. It was established in 2008, with support from the Council of Europe and other stakeholders, following the commissioning of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) by the Secretary General of the United Nations in 2006. Its debates and messages are fed into the global forum.

Like similar Internet governance meetings, EuroDIG has a commitment to raise awareness and be inclusive of all stakeholders at the heart of its mission. Following the example of the IGF, remote participation mechanisms were introduced in 2009. First seen as a tool to increase awareness of the issues and debates, their potential to improve inclusiveness was soon realized, and a greater effort to promote remote interaction has been supported since.

This report describes the evolution of remote participation in EuroDIG and provides an assessment of the current situation, focusing on the issue of inclusiveness by direct remote interaction. It also provides steps to improve and put in greater perspective the effectiveness and reach of remote participation hubs, as well as outlining further directions research can take regarding the networks of people and organisations mobilised in the process.

Keywords: EuroDIG; IGF; remote participation

Introduction

Understanding EuroDIG

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is an annual meeting commissioned by the United Nations since 2006, following a mandate from the World Summit on the Information Society. Its objective is to create an international environment where the complex and intertwined issues related to the Internet could be openly discussed. Two of its founding principles are multistakeholderism and inclusiveness, which means the forum should organise itself to be inclusive of all interested sectors of society, governments and corporations. Its mission highlights the importance of raising awareness of the global population to the issues and discussions taking place there (IGF, 2009).

After the establishment of the forum, the idea of regional meetings for local coordination and preparation for the forum gained strength. It served both commitments of inclusiveness and raising awareness, since the global forum by itself could become isolated from local issues and because local stakeholders might not have the resources to participate effectively in a larger and usually remote meeting. The regional meetings inherited the basic principles and missions of the forum and are currently eight in number (IGF, 2011).

EuroDIG (European Dialogue on Internet Governance), is the European annual regional meeting started in 2008, organised with support from the Council of Europe (CoE) and other stakeholders.

Understanding remote participation

There are many ways in which participation in a meeting may take place remotely. The more intuitive one is *direct output*: a text, audio and/or video recording of the meet-

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ing is made available through the Internet, ideally in real-time. There is also *direct interaction*, where input from remote participants is fed into the meeting. *Indirect internal participation* is also possible, when remote participants whose input is being fed to the meeting interact among themselves. And finally there is *indirect external participation*, whereby communication takes place in media not specifically purposed for the meeting. These include blogs, microblogs and social networking tools, and are not necessarily used by people whose input is being directly fed to the meeting.

In this division, we can relate *direct output* and *indirect external participation* with the function of raising awareness, while *direct interaction* and *indirect internal participation* can be related to inclusiveness of stakeholders (Table 1). In the case of the EuroDIG, these were introduced incrementally, as we shall see in the next section.

Footprints: Evaluating direct interaction in previous EuroDIGs

Remote participation in EuroDIG started during the second event in 2009, with the publicly available streaming of sessions and parallel on-line discussion in microblogs, blogs and wikis (CoE, 2009). More inclusive interaction, however, first occurred during EuroDIG 2010, when *remote participation hubs* were first organised with support from CoE offices.

Remote hubs are local meeting places where a hub coordinator – someone experienced in Internet governance issues and procedures – sets up a public space with Internet connectivity and invites people to gather and follow the sessions of the main meeting through live video streaming. Besides participating remotely, hubs are expected to hold debates that bring forward perspectives

particular to their location and also promote local awareness of Internet governance issues.

In 2010, they were stationed throughout Europe and nearby Asia in ten different cities (RPWG, 2010): Baku (Azerbaijan), Yerevan (Armenia), Sarajevo (Bosnia), Toulouse and Strasbourg (France), Tbilisi (Georgia), Chisinau (Moldova), Bucharest (Romania), Belgrade (Serbia) and Kiev (Ukraine). Communications software was made available for them to interact amongst themselves, and a moderator in charge of bridging both discussion spaces was present.

These hubs followed the remote participation model from the IGF (2010). There were hub organisers locally responsible for the coordination of session attendance and discussions and remote moderators at the main event responsible for relaying the hub's questions and comments.

In preparation for more detailed research, the present report will focus on revisiting two readily available sources of information: transcripts from the sessions (EuroDIG, 2010) and an earlier survey with remote hub organisers (RPWG, 2010).

Digesting transcripts

Unfortunately, transcripts from the communications software – chat logs – were not saved or are not publicly accessible, preventing us from evaluating *indirect internal participation*. Only the transcripts of the meeting sessions are available, and even those were not carefully standardized and are not precise. Instead, our focus will be on *direct interaction* of remote participants with the sessions taking place in Madrid.

Table 2 features the respective quantities, plus the relevant excerpts, of remote interactions extracted from those transcripts. There are two

Table 1. *Progression of remote participation channels in the EuroDIG.*

Kind of participation	Main related commitment	EuroDIG introduced
Direct output	Awareness	2009
Direct interaction	Inclusiveness	2010
Indirect internal	Inclusiveness	2010
Indirect external	Awareness	2009

sessions of uncertain remote participation. They are WS7 (EuroDIG, 2010b), for which there is no transcript available, and the WrapUp (EuroDIG, 2010c), although some numbers on remote participation were reported during the session.

Existing survey results

After EuroDIG 2010, the remote participation organisers sent a survey out to the hub coordinators. Their replies were summarized in a report, together with information from remote moderators (RPWG, 2010).

The main results of this short report indicate a good, but not excellent, level of satisfaction from hub organisers with the experience of remote participation, both on the technical and the human side. More interestingly, it also includes numbers on the volume of remote participants and of questions asked by them, even if only for part of the sessions. The numbers for questions are sometimes at odds with the transcripts, as we shall see below.

Consolidated data

Presented in Table 2 is data on remote interaction according to the transcripts and the report, as well as data on interaction with the audience – also sourced from the transcripts. These will be used as a basis for comparison to evaluate the relative effectiveness of remote participation.

Remote interventions usually refer to the remote moderator speaking for the remote participants. Remote questions were asked online in a chat room visible to the moderator. Each intervention may contain more than one question, as can be seen in Table 3.

For the sake of completeness – and to offer a more concrete view of what we're calling interventions – we present all excerpts originating from remote participation found in the transcripts (Table 3). Inspecting the text also gives a rough idea of the volume of questions reported by moderators that actually got conveyed to the meeting.

Table 2. *Numbers of remote and audience direct interactions during Eurodig 2010.*

Session	From the audience	From remote participants	
	Transcript	Transcript	Report
Opening session (EuroDIG, 2010d)	3 interventions	3 interventions	no record
National debates (EuroDIG, 2010e)	3 interventions	1 intervention 1 pre-recorded video	between 4 and 5 questions
Workshop 1 (EuroDIG, 2010f)	8 interventions	0 interventions	1 question
Workshop 2 (EuroDIG, 2010g)	over 12 interventions	1 intervention	1 question
Workshop 3 (EuroDIG, 2010h)	uncertain number of interventions	1 intervention	3 questions
Workshop 4 (EuroDIG, 2010i)	10 interventions	0 interventions	no record
Workshop 5 (EuroDIG, 2010j)	19 interventions	0 interventions 1 pre-recorded message	no record
Workshop 6 (EuroDIG, 2010k)	6 interventions	0 interventions	no record
Workshop 7 (EuroDIG, 2010b)	unknown interventions	unknown interventions	no record
Plenary 1 (EuroDIG, 2010l)	17 interventions	0 interventions	no record
Plenary 2 (EuroDIG, 2010m)	2 interventions	0 interventions	no record
Plenary 3 (EuroDIG, 2010n)	between 10 and 17 interventions	3 interventions 1 pre-recorded video	4 questions
Plenary 4 (EuroDIG, 2010o)	3 interventions	0 interventions	0 questions
Plenary 5 (EuroDIG, 2010p)	6 interventions	1 intervention	1 question
Wrapup (EuroDIG, 2010c)	14 interventions	0 interventions	no record

Each intervention may stand for multiple questions, but comparing the text to the number of questions reported in Table 2 reveals that only part of the questions was conveyed.

How present is not present?

What conclusions can we draw from such incomplete and imprecise data? First and foremost, that there is a need to standardise and create procedures to ensure data collection so the efficacy of remote participation can be better assessed. Still, a few important remarks can be made from looking at the information available.

Even if only for the sessions where we have data from remote moderators, the discrepancy between the number of questions reported by them and the number of questions that made it to the session – which can be accounted by inspecting the excerpts of the transcripts – is troubling. In effect, over a third of the questions seem to have never been conveyed to the session.

If we take the sum of 185 participants in remote hubs, as reported by hub organizers (RPWG, 2010), against the sum of 291 people attending the event (CoE, 2010), and compare the number of interventions per capita from each group – as counted in the transcript of events and excluding the Wrap-up session – then remote participants only managed to make approximately one intervention for every five from the audience. Therefore, if we trust the available data, we can infer remote participation was five times less effective than attending the event (Table 4).

Table 3. *Text of remote moderator interventions resulting from remote participation during EuroDIG 2010.*

Session	Transcript excerpts
Opening session (EuroDIG, 2010d)	>> *REMOTE PARTICIPANT: How do you see the development of Internet governance in east and west Europe attending to the technical differences between east and west Europe. So --* >> *REMOTE PARTICIPANT: The on-line journalism in Europe, what do you think about this development?* >> *REMOTE PARTICIPANT: Can we regulate the copyright on Internet and how?*
National debates (EuroDIG, 2010e)	>> *LEE HIBBARD: Thank you, Anders. And I'll -- we just received a question from the remote. We will not answer it now but we will answer it later, from the remote hub in Strasbourg. They said it's the first time they heard about the French IGF. We will not answer it now, we will answer it later, and they want to know how they can join. But this is just an example of how it can create outreach to your IGFs. We hope that is the case. Thank you, Anders.* PRE-RECORDED VIDEO: *We thank you for this opportunity. As a part of the Internet community, we share the importance of the formal development of the information society with the Internet community. It's essential. But we are also worried about the necessity of the international governing and the basis for the economic, social and scientific projects. So we support the right of users to privacy. But we have to remember about such problems as children, pornography spreading, or terrorist group activity in the Internet. That's why we are interested in the mutual cooperation and we will be so glad to present our ideas and projects.*
Workshop 2 (EuroDIG, 2010g)	>> *REMOTE PARTICIPANT: Yes, we have one from a participant named Alfred. Have there been reports that the trademark issue within the IDN TLD is not as critical with TLD? Do the speakers think this is the case and can we explain why. This was for the trademark.*
Workshop 3 EuroDIG, 2010h)	>> *Questions from the Armenian hub. The first one is concerning copyright, which is in some cases protecting copyright means ensuring that the state has a monopoly over content and Internet access. And what tools are in place in order to ensure that there isn't a monopoly but, nevertheless, there is copyright protection?* *And the second one is concerning business models, and the Internet facilitates a new business model that can be called wide area telecommuting, which means that an individual lives in a country but works for a company that is registered in another country. And so that poses a lot of financial and legal problems. And how can the participants of this conference -- do they have any experiences in that regard, and how can they ensure that there's active debate on this issue?*

Session	Transcript excerpts
Workshop 5 (EuroDIG, 2010i)	PRE-RECORDED MESSAGE: >> *REMOTE PARTICIPANT: Not really from a remote participation because there are not that many who have joined yet. Have we received the report from our colleagues in Moldavia who had their workshop yesterday and the day before on this topic? And they sent us a number of questions or comments and outcomes of their workshop. And I just wanted to give you one interesting comment that was made, a question or comment because it comes from a different part of Europe. They have very specific concerns there. And the one big concern was that in apparently Moldavia a lot of parents have to work abroad. So the children are termed "very little supervision". I wanted to say that this is a big problem for them because they believe since the parents can't be there with them a lot but as mentioned before they are afraid that they do not get enough protection and they wonder what can be done there. It is a bigger question. I think it goes beyond just the Internet as for now. But I think it was quite an interesting impression from that part of Europe.*
Plenary 3 (EuroDIG, 2010n)	>> *REMOTE PARTICIPANT: So we have actually a number of questions coming from people in Europe, but also Georgia and all the way from Brazil as well. And the questions are mainly about the user viewpoint. There's a lot of questions that come in that say how do we ensure that we have principles in place that guarantee net neutrality, depending on how exactly you call that notion, how you define it, but are guaranteed from a user viewpoint?* *There are a lot of people saying we are hearing this from a telecoms perspective, not a user perspective, so how do we ensure we really have the user in mind when we apply those principles?* *And related to that, a lot of questions from both within Europe and outside Europe are do we actually need regulation to guarantee those principles and to enforce them? And if so, how should it happen? And I think it's interesting to see from Europeans, who have just heard from the Commission, there doesn't seem to be an understanding that European regulations are, as they stand, enough to protect net neutrality. So if you could comment on that, then we'll do a quick summary of where we're at before we move on.* *>> Okay. Now it's working. Thank you. I have missed the first part of this session, so I don't know whether this has already been covered, but listening to what you have said about the different layers of where net neutrality is an issue or should be an issue, you have the content layer, then you have the service providers and the bandwidth layer, and there's another layer, I don't know whether you discussed this, I just want to raise this issue, is the hardware layer, actually.* *If you take the example of I want to buy an iPhone, and maybe in my country there's only one telecom provider who has contracts to sell iPhones, but this telecom provider does not allow me to use Skype or other services, do you think this is also an issue of network neutrality, or is this rather something that is competition law and vertical separation? What do you think about the hardware component that is -- all software and hardware.* *>> REMOTE PARTICIPANT: Okay. Here we go. From Venezuela, hello, everyone. Thank you for this opportunity. Thanking the speaker who brought net neutrality to the question of principles, I would like to reiterate that as users, we know that we must pay for our services, that there must be efficient management to adjust critical agency and bandwidth use. But we also need to know are you filtering, are you slowing, are you carrying on behind-the-curtain violation of neutrality in the name of network management? We need to have openness and transparency of the policies you use to manage that bandwidth. Thank you.* PRE-RECORDED VIDEO: (too long, by Ivan Brincat from the European Commission about an incoming public consultation)
Plenary 5 (EuroDIG, 2010p)	>> *JOAO BARROS: All right. I'm authorized to say that remote participants express support for Wolfgang's points that the RP in EuroDIG has shown this positive side and this progress towards inclusion that is happening in the MS processes. If you know the acronyms, you will know what this is about.*

Table 4. *Summary of the data in terms of the resulting number of interventions by participant.*

Type of participation	Participants	Interventions	Interventions per capita
Audience	291	99	0.34
Remote	185	13	0.07

This indicates a situation where remote participant contributions are significantly less likely to have an impact on the workshops and panels, and consequently on the messages from EuroDIG, that is, the resulting document that summarizes the output to be taken to the IGF.

Given the nearly unavoidable inequality between on-site and remote interface participation in events (CoE, 2010), it would be fair to demand a stronger reinforcement of the inclusiveness aspect of remote participation, together with a more careful and complete reporting of what takes place in each session, both in the remote interfaces and on-site.

EuroDIG 2010 was the first event to include this aspect of remote inclusion, and the progress and results are admirable. However, that should not be an excuse to be negligent in its improvement, especially if it is deemed a necessary quality of the event.

Right here, right now

Currently, the process for the 2011 EuroDIG is underway. From its inception, the opportunity for remote participation has been greater, due to the possibility to contribute during planning meetings and in the composition of the agenda and program. The on-line process so far has included: a survey on the area and topic priorities , direct interaction during the first and second planning meetings, a call for issues and workshop proposals, and a comment system along with an agenda draft composed from previous input (EuroDIG, no date).

Although these initiatives contribute much to inclusiveness, the range and depth of improvements to be made during the event itself is still unclear. For instance, measures that address the shortcomings discussed here.

On the data front, these could include: training remote moderators and hub organisers to raise their care for consistent and detailed data collection, perfecting the software and mobilising the technical team so that chat logs and attendance statistics are sharply recorded, advising the event organisation to keep and publish on-site attendance records on a session basis, and requiring that session transcribers indicate clearly in the text whether an intervention originated from the panellists, audience or whether there was an element of remote participation. Most importantly, the data must be made available publicly in an orderly fashion.

On the participation front, hub organisers should more actively demand that their questions and observations be represented, and remote moderators should be careful not to let the flow of face-to-face discussion close the window for them to intervene. Technologically, remote hubs could share video presence among themselves and in the main meeting, where the remote moderator would first intervene and then pass the word to the remote participant.

Connecting

Beyond making sure remote participants get represented during the event's preparation and sessions, it is also important – for the sake of both inclusiveness and awareness – to be mindful of each hub's connections within its country and with other stakeholders in general. With that in mind, we propose a few questions that should be asked to hub organisers and/or participants to evaluate an individual hub's contribution to inclusiveness in its local context. These questions could be incorporated into the survey sent out to hub organisers after the event, but they would be ideally asked in advance, perhaps during hub subscription.

These questions should allow a researcher to investigate whether a hub might be missing out on some segment of local stakeholders or the population, as well as understand the local ties between stakeholders and their struggle for participation. This is especially important in view of the selectiveness of those few who have the means to be present in the event. The following are some sample questions that reflect this concern.

- Regarding your country, can you tell which stakeholders (corporations, both for-profit and not, universities, government agencies, social movements, etc.) you consider most

important to Internet governance issues?

- Can you tell whether those stakeholders were represented in the remote hub? Which ones were?
- Which regional stakeholders had strong ties to international ones? Could you describe those connections?
- Was the hub in contact with other hubs directly? How so?

A more complete set of questions for both remote hub organisers and participants is being developed and is open to collaboration. It can be found on-line (Abdo, 2011).

Messages

Remote participation is a major instrument for effecting EuroDIG's commitment to inclusiveness, and has been progressing steadily. There is still much room for improvement, beginning with a more careful and complete recording of both the remote activities and those on-site so that more faithful and meaningful comparisons can be made to evaluate its effectiveness.

As remote participation progresses, we must address the visible disadvantage experienced by remote participants compared to those attending the event when it comes to bringing their points of view together. Again, having quality information is an enabler of these improvements.

Finally, since remote hubs are the primary means of direct interaction with the main event, we should look to more in-depth research on their relational structure – both in fostering possible collaborations among them and in terms of their position and connections within their local stakeholder environment.

Acknowledgements

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