

Position of the Board of Internet Society – Italy Chapter on the IGF Italy 2019

25 September 2019 – Unofficial translation

Internet Governance Forum: the traditional "mission" of the initiative betrayed by a top-down, self-referential, opaque and non-collaborative management approach, incompatible with the values that inspire the action of the Internet Society.

We have long reflected on the opportunity to make public our discomfort with the methods of managing the process of the Internet Governance Forum in Italy, and we feel obliged to express, in a manner of total transparency and consistency, our distancing ourselves from the "modus operandi" which characterized the work of the IGF ITALY Program Committee, traditionally dedicated to defining the organizational model of the annual event, reduced to a mere self-referential "catwalk", without effective forms of collaborative participation, totally contrary to our values.

We are aware of the intolerance that many people, who have always been at the forefront of digital innovation, shared with our community about the criticality of the work of the Program Committee and - even following the resignation formalized by some members - we want to take responsibility for explicitly declaring our position, to publicly stimulate a serious moment of reflection on the work of IGF Italia, in the exclusive interest of defending a process of national dialogue that has the task of working on complex social, economic and technological issues associated with the Internet. In this scenario, the role of the Italian Government - present with AGID in the Committee - which should have continued in the important stimulus action, avoiding actions to control the process, is fundamental.

After actively participating in the planning of as many as nine editions with respect to the total eleven promoted - including the Turin stage of this year - since the original constitution of IGF Italia dating back to 2008, the reasons that led the Program Committee to suspend any type of preparatory planning of the activities, at first for the period of the summer holidays, and subsequently for "unavoidable work commitments" of individual members until the end of September remain incomprehensible to us, with the start of the works foreseen at the Polytechnic of Turin from 29 to 31 October 2019. We believe that the Program Committee should work daily to assist the local host the effective organization of the conference, define which topics to deal with between the various sessions, constantly promoting dialogue between the parties. None of this. Indeed, we have the impression that there are limited decision-making groups in charge of defining the entire program, subjected to mere formal ratification of the remaining members, feigning a fictitious opening to the contributions of others that are never taken into consideration. It is our duty to highlight how no one knows how decisions are taken concretely, in line with the opacity tradition of the Forum of Rome of the past year which, contrary to the self-celebrating narrative described in the final Report, determined the lowest level of participation ever recorded in IGF Italia (the final plenary session is

emblematic, in which the number of personalities seated as speakers more or less corresponded to the number of participants present).

We consider the dynamics that govern initiatives dedicated to young people to be equally obscure, where they constitute one of the main lines of intervention that the Internet Society Italia pursues with concrete examples of coherence, commitment and active responsibility of the generations of digital natives. First of all, it is not clear to us what the participation of "Youth IGF Italia" members is envisaged. We have learned with surprise the existence of a youth IGF Italy recognized by global IGF since 2018, composed of only 2 members of which there seems to be no knowledge of actions, projects, initiatives carried out over time, consistent with their mission to promote a debate that is open, transparent, inclusive and multi-stakeholder. It is - once again - "dark" and self-referential designations.

Concerned about IGF in Italy and more generally for everything that is dangerously distancing the Forum from the achievement of its mission, we feel obliged to report that the 2019 event definition phase took place in a way that did not respect the stakeholders and the tradition of transparency and inclusion that we expected. We will strive to bring the IGF process back to the consistency tracks, denouncing our concern in the appropriate places of competence.

Everything described above is incompatible with the spirit and identity of our association, committed to the commitment, with transparency and full involvement from the bottom up in the decision-making processes.

It is with great regret that we are forced to withdraw our representatives from the Program Committee, while renewing esteem, trust and collaboration at the Polytechnic University of Turin (Organizing Committee of IGF Italy 2019, local host), which is making every effort to guarantee the success of the Forum at the end of October.

The IGF is a process in which we strongly believe, which risks being shipwrecked. Today more than ever we need to commit ourselves with determination, enthusiasm and trust. We will do this to give even stronger support to the Internet community, acting with transparency and loyalty for the good and in the interests of all.