

Global Network of Internet & Society Research Centers Roadmap 2017-18

I. Background

There is a growing interest in academic research in the field of Internet & Society. In the recent years, diverse disciplines, methodologies and viewpoints intertwined in order to provide a better understanding of the impact of digital technologies on society. In a highly connected world, in which public and private choices are shaping every sphere of individual activity, it is challenging to provide an encompassing answer that translates and map ahead the changes in a wide range of topics. New research questions emerge as debates over privacy, artificial intelligence, intellectual property, freedom of expression, security and many more reach an increasingly interested audience.

Acknowledging a lack of internationally coordinated research and engagement activities in Internet & Society areas, a group of academic centers launched the Global Network of Internet and Society Research Centers (in the following referred to as 'NoC' or 'the Network') in 2012, in the context of a Symposium on Internet-Driven Developments held at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. The NoC is a collaborative initiative among academic institutions with a focus on cross-disciplinary research on the development, social impact, policy implications, and legal issues concerning the Internet. This collective aims to increase interoperability between participating centers in order to stimulate the creation of new cross-national, cross-disciplinary conversation, debate, teaching, learning, and engagement regarding the most pressing questions around new technologies, social change, and related policy and regulatory developments.

The NoC has grown rapidly, bringing together more than seventy participants from around the globe. The Network has been incubated by the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University and then coordinated by the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIIG) (2012-2014) and the Nexa Center for Internet & Society at Politecnico di Torino (2014-2016). The Institute for Technology and Society of Rio de Janeiro (ITS Rio) will act as coordinating center for the next term (2017-2018).

II. Roadmap 2017-2018

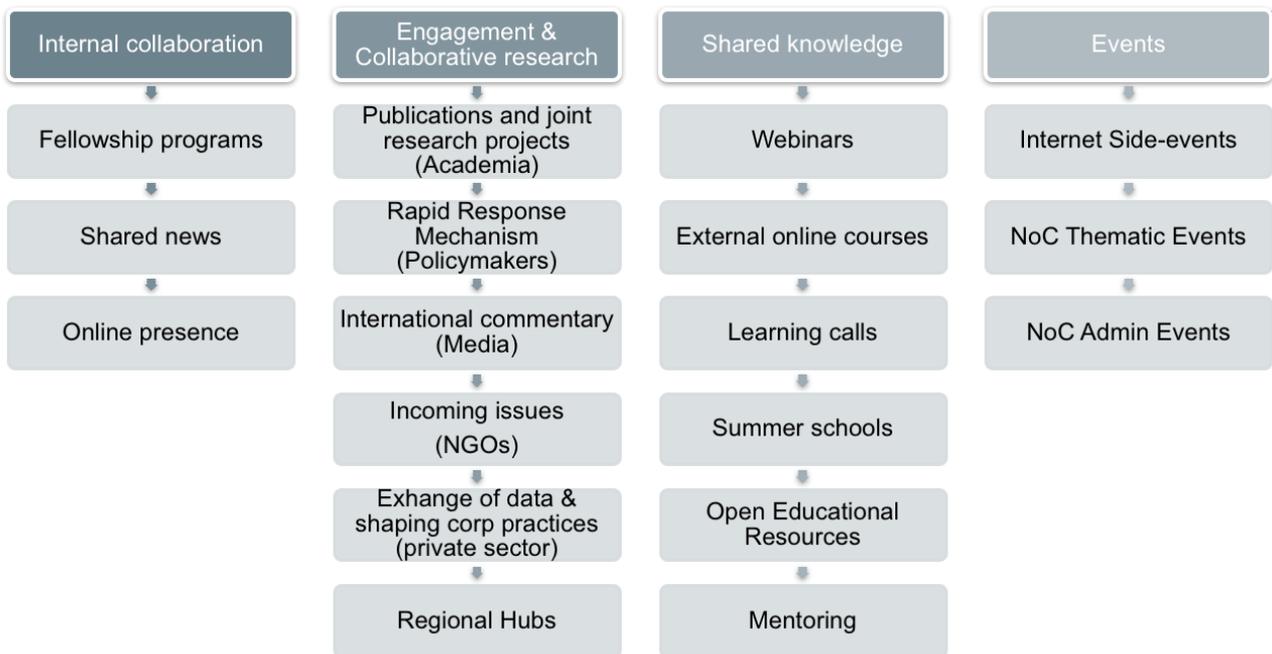
As a collaborative initiative among *academic institutions* with focus on interdisciplinary research, the NoC has dedicated much of its activities on academic-to-academic interactions. One challenge that lies ahead to the Network is to reflect on how the academia can interact with other stakeholders. What are the objectives, the parameters and the expected outcomes of such interactions? In fostering a debate over how such interactions can take place, the NoC might not only bring an original contribution to the debate, but also use the gathered experience as guidance for future initiatives.

It is important for the next term to understand the role of the NoC in a policymaking context "that involves a greater variety of actors and voices, often collaborating in formal and informal networks,

taking part in a public consideration and debate of policy questions via digital media".¹

Based on the benchmark from previous roadmap, having in mind the networked policymaking context and the low definition of strategies of interoperability of NoC centers other than academia-academia, we suggest the adoption of four broad areas of activities.

Such activities require controlled levels of investments and build on existing activities of the participating centers. The chart below summarizes the four areas and the types of activities suggested:



1. Internal collaboration: Focusing on activities that increase the exchange of information and researchers, as well as improving the public outreach of the NoC.

- a. Fellowship programs: Internal collaboration among the centers could be improved through fellowship programs. Giving visibility to the existing programs and promoting the inclusion of members from participating centers could foster collaboration. *There will be a Fellowship Working Group that will engage with the centers to promote the participation of researchers affiliated with NoC centers on the Fellowship programs organized by NoC members.*
- b. Shared news: Creating a simple newsletter would be a great addition to the efforts concerning internal collaboration among the members of the NoC. This newsletter could aggregate selected blog posts from participating members, as well as provide information on forthcoming events and other research opportunities. *A bi-monthly newsletter can share information of past relevant activities, as well as open opportunities to engage with other participating centers. This information can be collected in one month, and shared in the following.*

¹ Ashar, Amar and Faris, Robert and Gasser, Urs, Networked Policy Making Avenues: Assessing the Role of Academics in Digital Policy (September 26, 2016). Berkman Klein Center Research Publication No. 2016-14. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2842796>

- c. Online presence: Keeping an updated online presence and expanding the contents of the NoC website. Additional efforts could be put into creating a better form of visualization of the members that are part of the network. *This activity will be easier to perform after the completion of the first yearly update, expected by March, 2017.*

2. Engagement and collaborative research: *This is the area that most directly represents the mission and the objective of the NoC. This area encompasses joint research efforts among participating centers (as representatives of the academia) and other key stakeholders.*

- a. Publications and Joint Research Projects (academia <-> academia): As members of the Network, participating centers can work together to develop a joint research project. This project might be one that has been previously commissioned to one center and this center then invites others to join the research. The Executive Committee might as well decide to take a specific project as a NoC activity. Joint research projects might result in publications and in the organization of events. *In previous years, participating centers have published the results of joint researches such as Multistakeholder as Governance Groups: Observations from Case Studies and Governance of Online Intermediaries: Observations From a Series of National Case Studies.*
- b. Rapid Response Mechanism (academia <-> policymakers): Based on pressing issues, windows of opportunities (that can be national, regional or global) might appear and offer to NoC members the chance to tap into the group to produce a rapid response. The idea is to help articulate with participating centers to create an output useful for different stakeholders (including policy makers) when analyzing a selected issue. *For instance, pending a debate over the passing of a Bill of Law, members of the network could submit contributions explaining why the adoption of such a measure might have negative impacts based on their own national experience.*
- c. International commentary (academia <-> media): The NoC can become a hub to deal with national and international requests that might come from the press. Several members of the NoC are quite used to interact with the media, offering specialized commentary on issues concerning Internet and Society. *In this area we could imagine two different activities. The first one is the availability of other NoC centers to act as an international expert that might help out in the framing of a specific story, offering comparison with solutions that have been adopted in its home country or elsewhere. Another activity is to promote a conversation among participating centers on their specific experience in interacting with the press. This dialogue could prove useful to many members of the network.*
- d. Incoming alerts (academia <-> Civil society): Most of the centers in the NoC identify themselves with the academia. However, in some degree, some centers end up interacting a bit more with civil society, even partnering with NGOs on campaigns for certain causes. In order to differentiate the role of an academic center and the role of an NGO, the NoC could try to promote a debate on the boundaries of the two stakeholders and how academia could prove useful to civil society organizations, especially in alerting about upcoming issues so that NGOs can promote campaigns

and general awareness. *For instance, the debate on encryption has led civil society and law enforcement agencies to a polarized debate, while centers such as the Berkman Klein in their report "Dont' panic" outlined how commercial interests and the increasing prevalence of networked sensors in machines and appliances point to a future with more opportunities for surveillance, not less.*

- e. Exchange of data and shaping corporate practice (academia <-> private sector): Some research agendas might depend on information or documentation that companies could provide for the academic work to be done. At the same time, by analyzing corporate practices, the academia might offer a neutral perspective on how such practices could be changed in order to comply with privacy or free speech requirements, for instance. The NoC could develop not only researches on specific topics, but also engage in a more methodological debate on how academia and private sector might interact in order to achieve results that are interesting to both stakeholders, without compromising academic impartiality. *For instance, the Lumen project collects and studies online content removal requests. It seeks to facilitate research about different kinds of complaints and requests for removal – both legitimate and questionable – that are being sent to Internet publishers, platforms and service providers.*

Another form of collaboration that is proving very fruitful is the creation of **regional Hubs**, such as the Digital Asia Hub. Bringing together a diverse group of academic, civil society, and private sector partners, the Digital Asia Hub provides an open and collaborative platform for research, knowledge sharing and capacity building related to Internet and Society issues, focusing on Asia.

As a global network, the NoC is the perfect platform for the creation of such groups in other regions. The groups could vary in terms of scope, size and membership (allowing the participation of external partners or being restricted only to participating members of the NoC), but they all share the notion that the network serves as an incentive for the members to meet and to foster joint research activities. In addition to the Digital Asia Hub there is also an European Hub being created as a regional chapter that congregates members of the Network.

Initially organized by the Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG), in Berlin, the European Hub could undertake activities such as: (i) cooperation of European members of the NoC in events, research and knowledge transfer; (ii) contributions of European Centers within the global network (e.g. initiating global project, hosting NoC events); and (iii) creation of knowledge bases and building capacity for decision making of political institutions at all levels in Europe.

3. Shared knowledge: *Promoting learning opportunities to exchange knowledge between participating centers and the general public.*

- a. Webinars: Providing online talks to members of the participating centers on key Internet policy issues. The webinars are oriented to new members of the centers (e.g. those recently hired by NoC participants) as well as expert members of the centers exploring new fields of research (e.g. a blockchain talk to familiarize researchers from other areas with the general information concerning this topic).

- b. External online courses: The experience with the Webinars could lead to the launching of online courses to the general public. Alternatively, as part of the research exchange between members, participating centers could be invited to teach on another center's online course. *For instance, since several members of the Network serve as a satellite for the CopyrightX course, the interaction between the courses could be stimulated.*
- c. Learning calls: Online courses focus on lecturers and students, assuming that there is an uneven level of expertise. On the other hand, learning calls are oriented to peers with similar levels of expertise to discuss areas of uncertainty or lack of information. The calls aim to prepare for incoming activities of the NoC (e.g. discussing concepts of joint publications) and can also be used to explore windows of opportunity in terms of policy engagement. *For instance, learning calls were a key knowledge sharing tool on the work Governance of Online Intermediaries: Observations from a Series of National Case Studies, where participating centers engaged in a serie of calls to discuss the role of online intermediaries in various forms – including search engines, social media, or app platforms.*
- d. Summer Schools: Organized by one or more participating members, summer schools might be a good opportunity to improve collaboration among centers, offering teaching opportunities for their members. *For instance, The Centre for Communication Governance at National Law University, Delhi, the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, the Hans Bredow Institute and the Faculty of Law at University of Hamburg are organizing a week-long summer school on contemporary issues of information law and policy, focusing on hate speech. The Summer School will take place from March 14 - 21, 2017 at National Law University, Delhi.*
- e. Open Educational Resources: Since the constitution of the NoC there has been interest in educational activities regarding Internet & Society topics. Given the size and the broadness the Network has reached, there are huge exploitable potentialities in this field. Across the NoC, for example, there is a wealth of Internet & Society-related Educational Resources, e.g., videos, podcasts, documents, presentations, syllabi, entire courses, etc. One of the first goals in this sense is therefore to promote discoverability and reuse of (Open) Educational Resources, by giving the opportunity to the NoC Centers to learn and take inspiration from each other and build on top of existing educational material. This could be extremely useful for the mentoring activity.
- f. Mentoring: Many of the centers of the NoC are well-established ones, profiting from more than a decade of experience in doing research in the field of Internet and Society. To create and to run a research center is no easy task. One activity that is in the DNA of the NoC is to share the acquired knowledge and help newcomers to develop their own research initiatives. For such a purpose, bringing mentoring as one of the activities of the NoC for next term is fundamental in the effort to forge new international research partnerships that could connect established researchers and research centers with emerging ones. Not only would these partnerships have an important mentorship component, but they would also enable new research reflecting the geographic and experiential diversity of the research partners. *For instance, the SIRCA programme is now in its third iteration (SIRCA III) and is a*

research grant award focused on cross-cutting theoretical frameworks in the area of Open Development, creating opportunities for senior researchers to supervise the work of a younger researcher. The initiative is led by the Singapore Internet Research Centre.

4. **Events:** *Events are a key opportunity for participating centers to meet F2F, as well as to include key external collaborators involved in NoC activities. NoC events can be organized as a stand-alone congress, for instance, or might take place as a side-event of pre-existing events that gather some of the members.*
 - a. Internet side-events: *During key annual events attended by participating members, it could be advisable to run side-events to increase NoC visibility among stakeholders and to increase the interoperability of activities of the participating centers. In the past years the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has proven to be a good opportunity for organizing a NoC side-event, such as the one organized in the 2016 edition that included a public and a closed-event with participating centers.*
 - b. NoC Thematic events: *Thematic events, hosted by a participating member in order to explore a specific research agenda and to share knowledge among the network. Since the first meeting of the entire network was organized five years ago, it would be very productive to organize a new event to gather the network during the 2017-2018 term. For instance, the NoC hosted in 2015 the event Internet policy in Latin America: Between borderless governance and national initiatives to look at the challenges for addressing Internet governance with national policy instruments and institutions, in Buenos Aires.*
 - c. NoC admin events: *Associated to side-events or thematic events. Closed sessions to organize NoC administrative activities.*

III. NoC Mission and Values

All activities of the Network shall adhere to the NoC Mission and Values. The Network seeks to promote internationally coordinated, interdisciplinary research on the development, social impact, policy implications, and legal issues concerning the Internet and aims to increase interoperability between participating centers in order to collectively confront transnational issues on a global level. In doing so, the Network strives to be as inclusive as possible while preserving its effectiveness as well as the quality of its output. The Network continues to follow a set of Guiding Principles (Annex I).

IV. Roadmap 2017-18 focus areas

Below are some topics that might be developed as research agenda for the next term based on the interest of participating members or research projects already announced. Some topics are more broadly framed than the others as to allow different perspectives, research methodologies and possible outcomes.

- a) Ethics and Governance of Artificial Intelligence

The ordinary life of every person is rapidly being impacted by decisions taken by machines (artificial intelligence) and complex algorithms. To better understand how such choices are made and to provide an ethical balancing in the very creation of the algorithm is a research task that could not be more urgent. This is a research that naturally demands expertise from different fields and fits nicely in the interdisciplinary ethos of the NoC. Currently there is a joint research project, led by Harvard's Berkman Klein Center and MIT Media Lab, to tackle issues concerning the ethics and governance of AI. This is an opportunity for NoC engagement as well.

b) Freedom of Expression, Right to be Forgotten and Jurisdiction

Several participating centers have conducted research in the area of freedom of expression. Recently, the debate around the so-called right to be forgotten caught all the attention especially after the decision of the European Court of Justice in the Google Spain case. As an outcome of the decision, Google has been forced to delist search results globally and not only in the country of the requester. There is plenty of room for collaboration between the centers as right to be forgotten lawsuits are being brought in many different countries. To understand their impact and how jurisdiction concerns might be raised is a possible area of joint research among the centers.

c) Freedom of Expression and Hate speech

Online hate speech is an ongoing and serious concern for Internet stakeholders. The complex tangle of issues include its implications for disempowered groups, Internet enabled anonymity, its cross-border nature and the effects of regulation on freedom of expression.

d) Encryption and Law enforcement concerns

The debate that opposes privacy concerns on one side and national security demands on the other is increasing when it comes to encryption. Law enforcement agents stress how encryption cannot be a shield that renders access to user's data impossible. At the same time, mobile instant messaging apps rely more and more in encrypted communication. Academic research can be done to bridge the gap in this conversation, providing evidence to policy makers that strong encryption is key to protect the privacy and the security of its citizens.

e) Internet blocking : App blocking

Countries around the world have been resorting to the blocking of the Internet or of a specific application for several reasons. A joint research project on the impacts of the blocking could provide evidence of the negative outcomes of such a measure, exploring the legal and economic aspects of the worldwide blocking trend.

f) Blockchain

Several centers of the NoC have been researching blockchain and its applications. Some of them are focusing on bitcoin, but many others are doing research on smart contracts and other topics. The NoC could profit from the simple fact that many researchers are already in touch and promote the creation of a dedicated research group on blockchain.

ANNEX I

GLOBAL NETWORK OF INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERNET & SOCIETY RESEARCH CENTERS (NOC)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Mission

The global Network of Internet and Society Centers is a collaborative initiative among academic institutions with focus on interdisciplinary research on the development, social impact, policy implications, and legal issues concerning the Internet. It aims to increase interoperability between participating centers in order to collectively confront transnational issues on a global level.

2. Core Values

The Network participants are committed to the principles of openness, collaboration, and diversity. The Network operates independent from governments, political parties and economic interests and does not take formal positions on policy issues.

3. Governance

The Network is peer--based, collaborative, and entrepreneurial, with all participants invited to contribute to and engage in proposed activities and discussions. It is currently guided by a Steering Committee, which consists of director-level liaisons of the initial participating centers. Decision-making is based on "rough consensus" and occurs in close consultation with all Network participants. Participants will assess the model periodically to determine how adjustments should be made. The administrative lead will alternate among the centers to underscore and embody the value of collaboration and diversity. Differences in material resources shall be taken into account.

4. Activities

Through facilitation, periodic consultation, and collaboration, the Network seeks to create meaningful synergies among the research activities of the participating centers, which remain exclusively in charge with determining their respective research agendas. The Network's envisioned activities include learning calls, meetings, conferences, researcher exchanges, collaborative project work, co-teaching, and related academic activities.

5. Membership

The Network is incubated from the bottom--up and will expand over time, building upon existing and future collaborations with the initial participating centers and collectively evolving its structure and practices.

6. Funding

The participating centers of the network can individually and collectively engage in fundraising efforts on issues relevant to the Network. The activities are governed by the respective rules applicable to each participating center (e.g. University's fundraising and conflict of interest policies). The Steering Committee is responsible that any funding directed towards the activities of the network will respect and bolster the values of the Network.