THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNET - HOPES AND FEARS

Exclusive interview with Dr. Konstantinos Komaitis, Director, Policy Department, ISOC
Q. The Internet Society is celebrating in 2017 its 25th anniversary. The world in 1992 was so different - from today's world. What would you consider as the main stepping-stones over this period? Why Internet matters?

A. Formed in 1992, the Internet Society's mission is to make sure that the Internet is for everyone, everywhere in the world. For 25 years now, the Internet Society has been home to a global community of people who are driven by a common idea: that when people get access to the Internet amazing things can happen. This year, we celebrate 25 years of dedication to an open, secure Internet that benefits all people throughout the world.

The Internet has come a long way since the early 1990's. As the Internet ecosystem becomes increasingly complex, so too do the issues it faces. At the Internet Society, we believe we have an important role to play in highlighting the challenges that need attention and in mapping out a path forward to safeguard and protect the Internet we believe in.

To this end, we have been working hard to promote the life-changing benefits that access to an open Internet can bring as we work to extend its reach to those who are not yet connected. Moreover, considering that trust is one of the most significant challenges currently facing the Internet, we have been focusing on security for its users as a priority. No other set of issues affects the mission of the Internet Society more today than the existential threat posed by a growing range of security challenges and the erosion of trust amongst users. There is much at stake for the Internet.

In many ways, the Internet sits at the forefront of the current world affairs. This is the reason that now, more than ever, it is important that we reaffirm its value. The Internet has unlocked so much potential for there to be more creativity, innovation, art, humor, and knowledge in the world. It has opened up new economic activities providing governments and businesses with relevant tools to take advantage of this digital transformation. And, finally, it has provided unprecedented opportunities for advancing social and cultural understanding.

Q. According to ISOC what are the main challenges ahead? What will the future of the Internet look like and how is ISOC shaping the future?

A. In 2016, the Internet Society initiated a process to solicit input from the global Internet community about the key forces of change – including key uncertainties – that they believed would drive the future evolution of the Internet.
The goal of this process was to explore the hopes and fears for the future of the Internet, guided by a central question: How do we ensure the continued development of an Internet at the service of all people? Unlike other similar initiatives, this has been driven by the perspectives of a diverse set of stakeholders across the global community. A report of this two-year process will center around a qualitative analysis of the inter-linkages, trends and uncertainties surrounding the key forces shaping the Internet.

Some key takeaways from the report include:

1. There is a sense of both optimism and disillusionment about the future promise of the Internet.
2. Civil Society is seen as more important than ever, but support for it is seen to be declining.
3. Addressing cyber threats should be the priority – it is critical for individual safety and for the future Internet economy.
4. New thinking, new approaches and new models are needed across the board, from Internet policy to addressing digital divides, from security approaches to economic regulation.
5. Ethics will grow in importance as technical innovation accelerates and impacts people’s lives.
6. We are seeing what it means for the global Internet to reflect society; we should not be surprised that bad behaviors from the offline world are seeping into the online world.

Q. How can multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as eTrade for all, work effectively?

A. Many people talk about ‘the multistakeholder model’ as if it is a single solution. But, in reality there is no single model that works everywhere or for every issue. Instead, the multistakeholder approach is a set of tools or practices that all share one basis: Individuals and organizations from different realms participating alongside each other to share ideas or develop consensus policy. There are two questions we should be asking...
ourselves when thinking about the multistakeholder model: What is it about the multistakeholder approach that makes it so useful, robust, and adaptable? And, how can we make sure it continues to successfully answer the most complex questions of our globally interconnected and interdependent world?

In answering these two questions, we have come up with a list of attributes for multistakeholder decision-making. Our focus is on how it can best be done, not in idealising a perfect model. This is because we believe multistakeholder decision-making is a set of behaviours and practices that can be applied almost anywhere. They will make each organisation or process’s ways of working more robust, more effective, and better able to deal with the complex, cross-border issues the Internet comes with.

More specifically, these attributes include:

1. **Inclusiveness and transparency**: constitute the basis of legitimacy in collaborative decision-making;

2. **Collective responsibility**: All stakeholders share collective responsibility for the continued vitality of the Internet and the benefits it brings our societies and the global economy. In the technical community, we share a sense of collective stewardship of the Internet and the open standards its technologies are based on.

3. **Effective decision-making and implementation**: The most effective decisions are those based on an open and deliberative process that consider a broad range of information sources and perspectives. This holds for both the quality and implementation of the decision.

4. **Collaboration through distributed and interoperable governance**: Collaboration is the process of two or more people or institutions coming together to achieve a common goal. The Internet is the outcome of the collaborative efforts of different actors. It benefits from an increasing amount of actors teaming up and working together. Generally speaking, the Internet Society believes that multistakeholder decision-making can be accountable, sustainable and – above all – effective. The better the inputs and the more inclusive the process, the better the outcomes and their implementation.

**Q.** Is there something else you would like to share with the eTrade for all family?

**A.** I would like to draw your attention to some relevant policy documents we will be releasing in Q4 of this year:

**Community Network Spectrum Paper**: This paper focuses on spectrum and policy options to make spectrum available to community networks (CNs). We plan to release the paper before the International Telecommunication Union’s (ITU) World Telecommunication Development Conference 2018 (WTDC-18), and to work with regional colleagues during WTDC to promote community networks as
a solution for providing affordable access to the underserved in rural, remote, and urban areas.

Community Network Paper with the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF): This paper focuses on lessons learned and recommendations from one of ISOC’s long-term partners in India - DEF. We have been working with DEF since 2010 to develop community networks in rural and remote communities in India through a joint project called the Wireless for Communities project (W4C). This paper provides insight into W4C’s project work and policy recommendations to enable CNs in India. The paper will be released in tandem with a CN workshop in Delhi on 20 September that ISOC, DEF, and APC are sponsoring together.

Barriers to Connectivity in Land-locked Developing Countries: A study on land-locked developing countries will be released in tandem with the ITU WTDC-18. The report focuses on barriers to connectivity and recommendations for removing those barriers. Case-studies across many regions will accompany the paper.