Inequities of access in/at spaces of global Internet governance dialogue and exchange

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Abstract

Taking a multi-sited approach this paper presents research undertaken at three spaces of 'global' Internet governance dialogue and exchange, taking place both in-person and virtually online in the wake of the pandemic: Mozilla Festival or Mozfest by Mozilla; RightsCon by Access Now; and the global Internet Governance Forum, which is a part of the United Nations system. Focusing on the work and perspectives of youth activists and collaborators, this paper explores how inequities of access are experienced and conceptualised in/at these research sites. With a view to escaping technocentric notions of Internet access and exploring alternatives the paper embraces myriad inequities of access at once, including access to resources, networks, connectivity, cultural capital, physical and online space.

1. Introduction

In 2021 Internet access is tantamount to a human right, and universal access a global norm. This has been amplified further by the global covid-19 pandemic, which has seen a growing impulse for replacing physical meetings with virtual ones, and in-person systems and processes with those that can be conducted online in order to avoid potential exposure. Yet even as the number of people able to exercise

benefits from Internet access has grown in some contexts, existing gendered socioeconomic inequities have found expression in the sociotechnical, and it is these issues with which this paper contends.

Scholars have done important work to move away from determinist thinking, arguing that a binary on/off measure is insufficient for considering access (Vehovar et al., 2006). Research has argued for a move away from conceiving of one or many 'digital divides' to unpacking the many layers of availability and affordability of devices, availability and quality of connectivity, data affordability, availability of time, literacy, skills, availability of content (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001; Warschauer, 2002). However, a technocentric idea of 'plug and play' connectivity as access persists (Kvasny, 2006, p. 174; van Deursen and van Dijk, 2015, p. 376; Warschauer, 2002), with commercial and policy discussions using number of broadband connections/mobile SIM contracts as their measure of "penetration".

A decolonial perspective highlights the danger of viewing the sociotechnical as technical alone, blackboxing political relations in the guise of neutral automations (Ali, 2018, p. 133). To examine the sociotechnical Internet is to look at the co-constitutive elements (Franklin, 2009, p. 223), a material wires-and-cables structure and an "idea of (global) interconnectivity" (Franklin, 2013, p. 1) When we count SIM registrations or broadband lines as a primary way of measuring access, what space is there for the 'next billions' to shape the idea and the imaginary of the Internet? Particularly considering that those billions are either young or unborn, and at the sharp end of gendered geopolitical, socioeconomic and environmental inequities?

Taking a multi-sited approach this paper presents research undertaken at three spaces of 'global' Internet governance dialogue and exchange, taking place both in-person and virtually online in the wake of the pandemic: Mozilla Festival or Mozfest by Mozilla; RightsCon by Access Now; and the global Internet Governance Forum, which is a part of the United Nations system. Focusing on the work and

perspectives of youth activists and collaborators, this paper explores how inequities of access are experienced and conceptualised in/at these research sites. With a view to escaping technocentric notions of Internet access and exploring alternatives the paper embraces myriad inequities of access at once, including access to resources, networks, connectivity, cultural capital, physical and online space.

2. Literature review

2.1. Decolonial definitions of Internet governance

The definition of “Internet governance” and thereby the remit of the field of scholarship has long been contentious. To explore the changes in definition, and understand their implications, requires a look into the history of both Internet governance research and practice which are deeply entwined (Mueller in DeNardis, 2014, p. 72).

The term ‘Internet governance’ emerged in the literature during the period 1996-1999 when legal scholars became invested in the political movement that saw the USA’s unilateral control over the Domain Name System (DNS) and IP (Internet Protocol) addresses through the DARPA-funded (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) contested. This eventually led to the creation of The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) which saw these functions somewhat divorced from the US government, but still eliciting challenge given its status as a private California nonprofit corporation (Badei and Mueller in DeNardis et al., 2020, p. 70).

Dissatisfaction with the structure of ICANN was a part of discussions at the World Summit on the Internet Society (WSIS) which soon followed, beginning in Geneva in 2003, with its second meeting in Tunis in 2005. The UNESCO-run (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) meeting saw the

European Union (EU) take issue with the United States' preponderant role with regards to the DNS, setting in motion further decoupling processes[1] (Singh and Gurumurthy, 2006, p. 878). This is a space where newly independent nations' ongoing concerns with regards to communications policy were voiced, reflecting many of the issues raised in the 1980 MacBride Report, stressing topics such as the need for greater media literacy, the development of capacities for local content production and widening of access (Mansell and Nordenstreng, 2007, p. 17).

Here it is useful to pause and consider another possible timeline. Decolonial researcher Daniel Oppermann's history of Internet governance begins with the postcolonial period, tracing from the 1955 Bandung Conference[2], to the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), concluding with the same forums described above. This historical framing brings an important dimension to the narrative, demonstrating that Southern struggle towards co-designing global communications policy, including Internet governance, has a long history, with demands consistently opposed and unmet by the North (Oppermann, 2018, p. 32). This has been facilitated by ownership of prior (colonial) networks and their relationship to emerging socio-technical networks such as the Internet, for example, the use of undersea telecommunications cables which were built to administer, mainly the British empire (Mattelart, 2000, p. 11).

In this light, WSIS becomes a significant juncture for Southern governments. Writing contemporaneously Singh and Gurumurthy describe the WSIS as an ill-defined project without the mandate of a clear "problem" leading to "fuzzy" outcomes. Yet they find the WSIS process to have allowed for "considerable progress in terms of a broader and certainly more legitimate conception of a global information society[3]"

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[1] Processes which were to take much, much longer to gain effect, it wasn't until 2016 that official control of IANA was handed over by the US National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to ICANN.

[2] A gathering of postcolonial African and Asian countries which took place in Bandung, Indonesia and a precursor to the Non-Aligned Movement which sought to guard members' independence in the Cold War.

[3] Bold claims for social justice were documented to have been put forward, 2003's civil society plenary declared its four broad commitments to: Social Justice and People-centred Sustainable

(Singh and Gurumurthy, 2006, p. 876) as they look with particular optimism at the creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) (Ibid 2006, p. 878).

Among the reasons to be optimistic was the new definition of Internet governance which came from the Geneva phase of WSIS. The 2003 meeting gave rise to the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), a multistakeholder group tasked with investigating and making proposals on the future of Internet governance in the period prior to the Tunis meeting in 2005. WGIG's report includes a widely cited definition, marking another beginning:

> *Internet governance is the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.* (*Report of the Working Group on Internet Governance*, 2005).

Whilst Singh and Gurumurthy, writing from a Global South perspective perceive an opening up to their needs through WGIG, for Mueller this definition remains too narrow (albeit along a different analytical axis). He argues that Internet governance cannot be solely confined to formal 'global governance' institutions such as the UN, ICANN or WSIS. Most 'real-world' Internet governance, he writes, is both "emergent and decentralised," (2010, p. 9) including, as examples, "interconnection agreements among Internet service providers (ISPs), routing arrangements, content filtering by national governments, or the control of spam, copyright infringement and botnets" (Van Eeten and Mueller, 2012, p. 721).

Development; Centrality of Human Rights; Culture, Knowledge and the Public Domain; and Enabling Environment. The first including under its remit, for example, *"Conscious and purposeful actions need to be taken in order to ensure that new ICTs are not deployed to further perpetuate existing negative trends of economic globalisation and market monopolisation. Technological decisions should be taken with the goal of meeting the life-critical needs of people, not with the goal of enriching companies or enabling undemocratic control by governments."*

A narrower perspective involves viewing the technical standards that enable the architecture of the Internet as the centre of Internet governance. This again provides another timeline and starting point, shifting to the advent of "Internet-unique" protocols, and making the definition of the field of scholarship called "Internet governance," to her mind, somewhat a paradox (DeNardis, 2014, p. 18) considering the technologies come long before the field is named as such.

2.2. Access to Internet governance

Looking to the practice of Internet governance, it becomes important to examine the tenet of multistakeholderism which has, since WSIS, become synonymous with the field, the WGIG report cements this norm (*Report of the Working Group on Internet Governance*, 2005, p. 10) making it a part of the IGF (Ibid 2005, p. 11).

Multistakeholder participation in Internet governance promises high levels of representation, a diverse range of interests and the benefits of expertise, yet scholars of many stripes express skepticism in these bold claims[4]. Whilst hopeful, Singh and Gurumurthy note the context into which WSIS/WGIG was brought forth; criticism of US unilateralism on Internet matters, with world governments feeling 'left behind' by technology-specialist corporations in search of further influence (Singh and Gurumurthy, 2006, p. 878). Arguments that multistakeholderism provided a way to deflect criticism whilst giving a show of shared decision-making resonate with

[4] Perhaps the most clear example of multistakeholderism perceived as a smokescreen to the maintenance of inequitable power relations is the case of NETMundial/NetMundial. In 2014 the Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance, or NETMundial was called, and took place in São Paulo, Brazil with a view to "crafting Internet governance principles and proposing a roadmap for the further evolution of the Internet governance ecosystem" (2014). Musiani and Pohle write that this event was a thinly veiled attempt at challenging US dominance, finding its legitimacy in the Snowden revelations (Musiani and Pohle, 2014, p. 2). Months later, claimed an outcome of the meetings, the NetMundial Initiative (NMI) was inaugurated with immediate criticism leveled its way due to its structure (that included permanent member states, considered to be similar to the UN Security Council) and links to the World Economic Forum (WEF). With opposition from Internet Society and the JustNet Coalition# who refused to participate and called the project a "an attempt by economic and political elites to secure a central role in Internet governance" (Civil Society Coordination Group and NETmundial Initiative Information in 2015) the NetMundial ultimately failed, showing that where multistakeholderism fails to uphold its image, the legitimacy it can provide can also be taken away.

these circumstances and with research suggesting that multistakeholder systems tend to increase Global North overrepresentation and neglect Southern governments (Pohle, 2015).

At the furthest end of the critical spectrum multistakeholderism can be seen as serving to mask and maintain colonial power relations in Internet governance (Ali, 2018, p. 111). Yet this approach does not explore the complexities of Internet governance. Singh argues that the Internet's diffusion around the world cannot be boiled down to great power interests alone, emphasising the "inter-actional circumstances of the Internet" (in Eriksson and Giacomello, 2009, pp. 220–221). Even if it is argued that the discursive framing of the field of so-called Internet governance is dominated by the North Atlantic, is it definitional exclusion which removes engagements from newly wealthy countries and the South from the field? (Franklin, 2019, p. 193).

Multistakeholder spaces can also be considered as arenas which enable more people to speak, and perhaps be heard (Franklin, 2013, p. 140). An open structure, which allows anyone to attend (if they have the awareness, time and resources) allows critics such as journalists and academics to observe, a departure from the earlier 'closed shops' of UN meetings (Ibid 2013, p. 149) making space for usually siloed groups such as technologists and policymakers to meet (Ibid 2013, p. 142).

A reformist position charts somewhere in between even if show was made of failed multilateralism to make way for the smokescreen of multistakeholderism -- a proxy for corporate power (Gurumurthy, 2016) -- this does not necessarily mean we throw it out. The work now is to improve multistakeholderism and hold it to account for its stated aims, not to do away with the system entirely (Gurumurthy, 2013).

A common assertion in the literature questions whether the IGF, or other spaces of Internet governance are simply 'talk shops' (see Badei and Mueller in DeNardis et al., 2020, p. 68). This reflects a tight definition of Internet governance that hugs

close to technical and formal institutions giving primacy to the first movers, actors from industrialised societies and the Global North. However, 'talk' is not without significance. Sociocultural decisions in view of the Internet are of serious importance for those excluded or at the margins of decision-making (Franklin, 2013, p. 138).

This paper follows the contention that Internet governance takes place in "multiplex settings" that see the terrain, the actors, the stakes, and the means all multi-sited and multidimensional (Franklin, 2013, pp. 178–179). Such a view reintroduces subalternised histories of Internet governance, and subalternised groups and their interests back into the field (Ali, 2018, p. 112).

2.3. Inequities of access

The digital divide metaphor remains a significant metaphor when examining inequities in Internet access. Emerging in the 1990s 'digital divide' refers to "a form of socioeconomic inequity demarcated by the level of access that one has to IT" (Gunkel, 2003, p. 503), this divide is "the gap between those who have and do not have access to computers and the Internet" (van Dijk, 2006, p. 221)[5]. The predominant studies of this time saw the problem of the divide as the lack of access to ICTs. To close the divide, connectivity and devices needed to be diffused more widely and once present their use was a foregone conclusion (Mwim and Kritzinger, 2016, p. 4). In its early days criticised for a lack of interdisciplinarity (van Dijk, 2006, p. 232) the digital divide field was made up of mainly empirical studies (Srinuan and Bohlin, 2011, p. 6) focused on description, with limited theoretical engagement (van Dijk, 2006, pp. 231–232).

[5] The idea of 'the digital divide' emerged in the 1990s, and although there is some disagreement over its precise origin, is widely cited to have become popularised by the US Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) after the release of its *'Falling Through The Net'* report (Srinuan and Bohlin, 2011, p. 5).

Critics argue that this early field oversimplified the issue. Firstly, as one involving two defined groups with a gap between them (van Dijk, 2006, p. 233), and furthermore that the group considered the 'have nots' were conceived to bring nothing to the table but lacking (Warschauer, 2002). Secondly, the field was in danger of further entrenching this gap, suggesting it a difficult problem to solve; thirdly, painting the problem as one of absolute inclusion and exclusion, rather than gradation; fourthly, crystallising the gap as static rather than shifting (van Dijk, 2006, p. 222). Ultimately, digital divide theorists, intentionally or not, assert that disadvantage comes from not having access, but insufficiently treat how access is restricted by disadvantage (Warschauer, 2002). Rather than one digital divide there was "a constellation of different and intersecting social, economic, and technological differences" (Gunkel, 2003, p. 503), yet the metaphor posited socioeconomic issues as technological puzzles to be solved by the provisional of tech solutions (Gunkel, 2003, p. 517). This provided a backdrop to the prioritisation of hardware, software and connectivity as the most important aspect of widening access (Kvasny, 2006, p. 174; van Deursen and van Dijk, 2014, p. 376; Warschauer, 2002).

This criticism saw revisions to the 'overly technical' focus, going 'beyond access' through the addition of social, psychological and cultural considerations (van Dijk, 2006, p. 224). Access was found to be constituted of a number of aspects: the availability of computers and Internet; of skills and technical capability; the ability to use information for social gain; the ability to use the Internet for political participation (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001; Mossberger et al., 2003, p. 6). In light of this, the literature come to address a wide variety of divides spanning: geography, both globally and rural-urban; age (Yu, 2006, p. 240); skills and literacy; culture and language; content availability; attitude and education (Mwim and Kritzinger, 2016); gender and race (Jackson et al., 2008); disability (Gorski and Clark, 2002); community and institutional structures (Warschauer, 2002); global digital divide, between countries; the social divide, between the rich and poor within countries;

and the democratic divide, between those who do and do not use digital resources to engage with public life (Norris, 2001, p. 4).

Researchers have looked to order the manifold differences, distinguishing between the first-level digital divide as related to connectivity, the second-level as related to skills and the third-level as related to whether access to ICTs could produce useful outcomes (Scheerder et al. 2017, p. 2). However, coming nearly 20 years since the emergence of the term this formulation still carries many of the issues levelled at this metaphor of divide.

Locating itself within emergent scholarship examining Internet coloniality, this paper seeks to open a conversation about a decolonial approach to Internet access, emphasising the Internet as technosocial, encompassing material and discursive aspects. To paraphrase Ali, if access is considered only as 'capacity to connect' then we elide consideration of the possibility that subalternised groups are being connected by a hegemonic other (2018, p. 143). Beyond personal consumption capacity for creativity, autonomy and local collective benefit is sought (Ávila Pinto, 2018, p. 18).

3. Methodology

3.1. Spaces of Internet governance dialogue and exchange

Spaces of Internet governance dialogue and exchange allow some social relations of the sociotechnical Internet to become tangible, as attendees have gathered in physical space[6]. These relations are not easily made visible (Ali 2018, p. 132),

[6] During 2020/2021 the covid-19 pandemic halted physical gatherings, but the point remains that these meetings have historically been held 'in-person'. That said, virtual participation has been a key feature of the IGF and the only option for many groups, including those from 'remote' regions (further from the hubs where meetings have been held, or in places where transport connections are lacking),

hidden from view by corporate black-boxing propped up by intellectual property frameworks; the foregrounding of automated practices; and technical standards and policymaking which are not made accessible for most people. In this light meetings such as the research sites, and others like them (of which there are many), are important fields of study, particularly for critical researchers allowing observation of "body-politics" (who is speaking) and "geo-politics" (from where) exposing unequal power relations (Ali, 2014, p. 28) allowing for critique and envisioning of alternatives (Mignolo, 2007, p. 463).

Participants attend as individuals, carrying their own embodied experiences of access situated in their socioeconomic and sociocultural position. At the same time attendees hold various affiliations, be those to governments, civil society, or businesses, representing the interests of a constituency of some kind. In this way observation of these sites allows a method which addresses the challenge of scale connecting the micro-level of individual experience with macro-level geopolitics, an area of scholarship that requires more attention (Franklin, 2013, p. 10).

Conferences, summits and other gatherings have played a key role in the field of Internet governance. Some researchers have criticised the focus amongst scholars on these spaces, suggesting that this can perhaps be attributed to the close connection that the academic field holds to them, for example the ongoing relationship of the GigaNet Symposium with the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) (Mueller and Badiei in DeNardis et al., 2020, p. 74). DeNardis finds that "open systems" of Internet governance in practice have been "overstudied" as they have been relatively easy for participant observation, whereas more insular systems subject to "proprietary enclosure" have been under-studied (2020, p. 23). However, these "open systems" can provide insight on less visible aspects. Discussing his research on IGF transcripts, Cogburn notes that a review of open resources may

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those with limited access to funding, women and gender minorities that are less able to travel freely, and persons with disabilities.

miss workshops, side events, and informal discussion as well as nuance, sarcasm, euphemism. He characterises his findings as “front-stage” behaviour and suggests that “back stage” behaviour is missed with text mining methods (in DeNardis et al., 2020, pp. 189–20).

This paper contributes to the field by exploring ideas and experiences with youth activists that are “front-stage,” “back-stage” and “off-stage” conversations after the event. Multi-sited ethnography enables the use of varied and flexible techniques to observe complex, multiscalar phenomena in a state of constant flux (Marcus, 1995, p. 106). The concept of access is the anchor and it is connections between varied approaches, understandings and experiences of this theme that guide the work through the various sites. A brief introduction to each event follows.

The Internet Governance Forum’s (IGF) creation was recommended as a part of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, an outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process in 2005. It has since had its mandate reviewed and extended working in a close relationship with the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The global IGF is a year-long, annual process, which includes ‘Intersessional’ activities taking place between annual meetings that are issue and region-focused.

Mozfest (also called Mozilla Festival) is organised by US ‘nonprofit’ Mozilla Foundation which was founded in 2003 to lead the opensource Mozilla project. Since 2011 Mozfest, has taken place annually during October at Ravensbourne University located in Greenwich, South East London. It was cancelled in 2020 and re-emerged in 2021 in a new location Amsterdam, Netherlands and online.

RightsCon is a conference organised by California-headquartered ‘nonprofit’, Access Now. First taking place in 2011 as the Silicon Valley Human Rights Conference, the event started off alternating between San Francisco and another

city, however, since 2017 the meeting has been held in different cities annually[7]. The 2020 meeting had been scheduled to take place in San José, Costa Rica, however due to the pandemic it has now moved fully online.

There are many other events that take place claiming a global scope and covering similar topics of Internet governance which could have been included in the research. The three selected were chosen as they provide different perspectives to the research including expected territory for Internet governance, whilst also challenging the boundaries of definition and allowing the opportunity to follow activists and the theme of Internet access. In locating Internet governance more broadly the work shows what a more narrow definition can exclude, contributing new knowledge to ongoing scholarly contestations over the definition of Internet governance.

The conferences observed are held as open public forums (with ticketing), and all of them make sessions available online either live or afterwards. Further, speakers' names and attributions are widely circulated as part of marketing materials available before, during and after the meetings. Therefore it is considered safe and permissible to quote and name billed speakers in most instances. Where speakers work on volatile issues or in situations where their work is considered particularly controversial or high-risk they have been contacted and permission has been obtained for them to be quoted in the work. When it comes to audience members and people who spoke from audiences within sessions the situation is much less clear. Whilst they were speaking openly these people may not be comfortable or safe being quoted, and as such they are only attributed as audience members.

[7] RightCon was hosted in Silicon Valley, USA in 2011, 2014 and 2016. Other previous locations are: Rio De Janeiro, Brazil (2012); Manila, Philippines (2015); Brussels, Belgium (2017); Toronto, Canada (2018); Tunis, Tunisia (2019), Online (2020).

3.2. Youth Activists

Activist collaborators allow the research to engage with what Mignolo calls “border thinking” and Tuhiwai-Smith “choosing the margins” (2013, p. 209) to expose power asymmetries. This methodological approach seeks to work towards “delinking” from modern rationality to imagine other possible internets (2007, p. 497). Inequities of access are explored in the “lived experience, thinking, places and locations of those communities that have suffered from colonialism” (Álvarez and Coolsaet, 2020, pp. 2–4) or the “peripheralized” (Ali 2018, pp. 125–126). Explorations of the “glitches”of which these groups are at the sharp end of acts as a beacon to illuminate the issues of the whole (Benjamin, 2019, p. 77).

This paper focuses on selected independent activists who I have encountered during in-person and online participation in the research sites from 2017 until 2021, as well as the organisation, Digital Grassroots. All of the people involved identify as youth (18-35 years old) who advocate for youth inclusion online and in Internet governance, locating themselves in the Global South.

In precarious working positions, and sometimes sharing sensitive information, all of the individual activists have been anonymised in the paper with pseudonyms. Sam and Pat, who are interviewed with regards to their experiences with Mozilla are young people of colour looking to build careers in tech policy. They are both highly educated holding masters degrees from elite European universities. I connected with them each by following their work online, and meeting them in person at events. I carried out extended informal interviews remotely via video calling with each of them individually after they completed work on Mozfest 2020.

I connected with a number of individual youth activist collaborators at the 2019 IGF in Berlin. There are eight activists in total who have been observed as they organise together, and relate with one another on topics of Internet governance. This work has been primarily carried out through a Whatsapp group chat, of which I am a

member, and over group video calls. Given the informality of this space it has been important that my position as a researcher be re-stated regularly amongst the collaborators. The group is made up of six men, two of which, Art and Ade are from Kampala, Uganda; Kay from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Tony from Praia, Cape Verde; Hesus from Port-au-Prince, Haiti; and Jack from Abuja, Nigeria, as well as two women, Ria from eastern Brazil and Li from Accra, Ghana. All members are highly-educated holding undergraduate and masters degrees in technical fields.

Finally, the organisation observed at RightsCon is Digital Grassroots run by: artist and activist Esther Mwema, based in Lusaka, Zambia; developer and activist Uffa Modey from Nigeria and residing in the UK; and tech and climate organiser Rachad Sanoussi, based in Atlantique, Benin. I encountered Digital Grassroots at RightsCon Tunis in 2019 when attending their session titled 'Digital Rights Monopoly'. After this I sought permission to continue following the organisation, observing their ongoing activism in the area of youth inclusion in Internet governance taking place at conferences and independently.

Being a part of these communities since 2019 has allowed the collaborators to share perspectives and experiences that have taken place over many different occasions, as well as through the pandemic. Methods of relation have been given priority, with the understanding that the individuals and groups involved are fully empowered to change their minds, 'talk back' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013, p. 8). In practice this has required the sharing of open and clear communication through the research process with a sensitivity to the positionalities of those involved. This method seeks to subvert a colonial approach of discovery, collection and classification in which any contribution of the 'research subject' is ridiculous (Ibid 2013, p. 77). The youth activists involved are all engaged in a number of projects, and as such it has been important to recognise this working consciously to avoid times when they have heavy workloads.

In multi-sited research identity is not fixed but shifting, demanding a constant negotiation and renegotiation of positioning as I move between sites, situating myself within each landscape (Marcus, 1995, p. 112). As Marcus notes this method requires a type of activism devoted to the way of doing research as there is no space between the professional-researcher persona and the person negotiating each new set of relations. Working in different ways with different activist groups, collaborating with them in their projects on-the-ground and observing them from varied vantage points requires a dedication to feeling and preserving what changes for the researcher (Ibid 1995, p. 113) allowing for a valuable situated objectivity (Haraway, 1988; Marcus, 1995, p. 112).

3.3. Research question

The paper asks how activists' multilayered and complex conceptualisations and experiences of access manifest in spaces of Internet governance dialogue and exchange. In doing so it also seeks to shed some light on the ways in which the events that make up the research sites shape access experiences and discourses. Whilst alternative visions for access will be alluded to it is beyond the scope of the paper to explore these ideas in full, however they will be addressed in future work.

4. Findings

Each of the three cases explores a different set of activists navigating that setting in distinct situations. First, Sam and Pat share experiences of being part of the organising team at Mozfest in interviews conducted after the event. Second, a group of activists are observed as they collaborate to apply to host sessions at the IGF. Third, Digital Grassroots are observed as they present their sessions at RightsCon.

4.1. The organisation process behind Mozfest 2021

Programming Mozfest

Mozilla claims to provide a "basic structure" for the festival with the majority of the work being undertaken by volunteers called "Wranglers" ("The Wrangler Role," n.d.) who are located in different parts of the world, overseen by a US-based staff team. 'Wranglers' are said to be recruited to provide a wide range of perspectives from different fields and locations globally, working together remotely from about six months prior to the festival. The recruitment and selection process for Wranglers is marketed as an open call, although selection criteria and processes are not made openly available. Looking through previous participants listed on the website indicates that a number already have a connection to Mozilla, either as current or past employees. Interviews carried out with two collaborators who took on Wrangler roles for the 2021 online Mozfest inform the insights below which speak to their experiences of inequities of access as a part of this process.

A lot of work, 'a great opportunity'

Interviewees describe a very heavy workload involved with being a Wrangler, over and above what they were informed of. Both note that due to being all online they had to fit in the responsibilities around other tasks (at home and work), rather than needing to disengage from other activities to travel elsewhere. This was true for the onboarding[8] and during the festival itself which ran over a period of two weeks in 2021[9]. What had drawn both interviewees into the role however, had been what they saw as a great community to connect with likeminded people and promote their own projects. They saw Mozfest as a unique space where they could support their communities to gain better understanding of tech issues, and further make useful connections to pursue their own interests and careers.

Sam and Pat described a tension between wanting to take advantage of the opportunity and at times feeling overwhelmed by having to balance Mozfest

[8] An online gathering and training period for Wranglers.
[9] Rather than taking place over a weekend as is the case for the physical gathering.

responsibilities with others. Both interviewees are reliant on project-based incomes and thus there was a pressing need to maintain earnings alongside delivering the Mozfest work. Meeting other Wranglers and reviewing their professional profiles which are held on the Mozfest website indicates that these issues are likely to affect some Wranglers more than others, with some being able to carry out the work as a part of other paid employment.

As described already, the Wrangler role is voluntary, with an honorarium of 1200 USD (less the transfer banking fee applied to make transfers out of the US). “I did not think [the honorarium] was proportional,” stated Sam when describing the fee and the workload. Pat adds that “a lot of us earn differently, in different parts of the world” with reference to what they saw as inequity of earnings between Wranglers and the US-based Mozilla staff. Further, Pat reflected that “the staff are really nice people and it feels like adding to their burden to bring that up” as a reason why they did not feel comfortable raising what they saw as undervaluing Wrangler labour.

“We had to write a blog and publish weekly on social media and this is not paid and done in our own time,” says Pat who thought that this work should have been taken on by the staff. Sam felt that “the Wrangling process should have ended once we selected the sessions and the staff could have gone further with the organisation,” referring to the scheduling duties they had to take on. When it became clear that there were expectations with regards to these additional duties Pat described thinking about the possibility of stopping the project, but they felt that they could not, “we had a contract, you can’t pull out.”

Sam adds “It was a lot of work, they always tried to make it a soft landing but I don't think it was. I was overwhelmed and I realised I could not participate in the festival.” Given the Wrangler responsibilities Sam was unable to attend the other sessions that they wanted to during the festival because they were either working as a Wrangler or struggling to catch up on other paid work.

Mozilla and Mozfest's reputation, and its position as conduit for working in this space furnishes it with a great deal of authority. The interviewees describe putting in a lot of effort looking to gain connections, work and build their profiles in the industry, and saw this networking as integral, as Pat describes "without it you really can't get into this space."

Diversity and inclusion

Mozilla, and thus Mozfest has become increasingly invested in broadening representation to include groups that might have been historically excluded ("The Mozilla Manifesto," 2021). Sam felt that the Wrangler structure of the festival was to enable inclusion of issues that might be missed by staff, "organisers of Mozilla Festival understood they could not understand that region so they brought in people from those places to share." Acting as the intermediary between target communities and the Mozilla staff left Sam feeling confused about what their responsibilities were.

> *"At the start it was confusing. The community was usually Northern American and European and it wasn't clear which of your opinions would be welcomed. You have to be true to yourself and think about reflecting your community. It was largely up to me [to bring up my communities] but if not then it was not addressed."*

This indicates worries about how hard they felt they could push the conversation, dominated as it was by "Northern American and European" voices, although Sam notes that when they did speak up they were "mostly met with support" by Wranglers from these regions. Despite this they still felt it was "triggering" when they had to defend or represent their region, which was frequently due to the lack of representation.

Pat felt uncomfortable bringing others from their community to Mozfest as session facilitators and attendees, as was expected for a Wrangler, knowing the challenges

people might face. There was also a concern that if they invited a prominent figure from their region for a session that person may not be known by the audience, resulting in low session attendance. Whilst this was fine according to the Mozilla ethos (emphasising informality and carrying on regardless if the session has few attendees or many), Pat did not feel comfortable asking busy individuals to volunteer their time only for the festival staff not to have sufficiently promoted events in which they featured.

> *"The people who came from our region were mostly people I know, this was good but also bad. I felt like it was up to me to bring my community to this space, I felt a bit of pressure to bring people into the space. Having someone who is already doing a lot have to stay for one session for only a small number of attendees, maybe because it was not promoted enough by staff made me think whose responsibility was it? We were told it did not matter how many people turn up."*

When it came to inviting participants, given that the event was solely online, Pat felt that much more consideration needed to be given before seeking to invite people for whom Internet access is more limited. They advocated for a 'connectivity fund' to make attending affordable, a sentiment echoed by Sam who went further:

> *"Even in organising people they were thinking about all these new platforms but no one considered people from underrepresented regions. This was not thought through, I needed to think about connectivity on mobile for people from my region. Everyone in the organising community already had good connectivity. In my work I want to bring more diverse people online - those who would not ordinarily be. I would think would the average Global South person be able to do this?"*

Acting as intermediaries, called on by Mozilla to bring in their networks, left the interviewees in a difficult position bringing people who they know into a space that

may not be inclusive of them. As such the interviewees were further pushed to try and improve the space to be more inclusive of the needs of their own communities but this felt like a difficult task given the low representation from their region, as well as being more responsibility than was required of European and North American Wranglers and staff.

The session selection process

The session selection process was the responsibility of the Wrangler teams for each thematic area, which were made up of two to three people. For Sam the selection process seemed to benefit some applicants.

> *"When selecting sessions we had to think about how people scored. People who submitted got given a score on their idea; that's not equal, that's not fair. People from US and Europe will of course submit 'better ' ideas. If we take the best 25 or 50 that will not be inclusive of Global South regions. We need to consider regions, I said to make it more inclusive. I don't think that has happened. Selections at least in my space were still based on 'quality' submissions. The staff tried not to control it but the Wrangler still has to check with the core team."*

In this sense, much like the lack of consideration about connectivity described above, the scoring system does not consider how its cultural situatedness will disadvantage some groups. Formalised application processes may benefit applicants familiar with these types of systems.

Additionally, Sam felt that the issues prioritised by Northern Wranglers and the core staff team did not match with the interests of their community and region. Topics such as digital skills, infrastructure, and inclusion issues, which are important in Sam's regional context were treated as if they had "already been dealt with", instead Artificial Intelligence was the dominant area. Sam felt that whilst they encouraged

them and others to bring issues relevant to their regions core staff did not wish to engage with and take those issues forward.

4.2. Applying to take part in IGF 2020 and 2021

This section looks at the process of compiling applications to hold workshops at the global Internet Governance Forum (IGF), as well as submission and refusal. It briefly covers the session selection processes using documentation shared by the IGF on its websites before looking at how a group of independent, Global South-identifying youth activists put together applications to run workshops at both IGF 2020 and 2021. The two cases give insight into how the group worked on the applications, the way in which chosen topics were framed and the challenges they faced.

Programming the annual IGF meeting

The IGF's programming cycle involves a number of calls to the community, these include: Call for Inputs (on the previous IGF); Call for Thematic Issues; Call for Workshops and Village Booths; and the Call for Remote Hubs (where people can gather to remotely access the global sessions). The Call for Thematic Issues was added in 2018, when a thematic approach to programming was implemented by the MAG for "more concrete, focused and cohesive discussions during the IGF annual meeting, trying to avoid duplicate sessions and reducing the number of parallel sessions" (United Nations, 2018). The move towards less duplication of session topics, and a more fixed thematic programme is significant, with these processes perhaps leading to more centralised discussions, rather than facilitating them taking place in smaller pockets which may not interact.

The IGF Secretariat facilitates the MAG by carrying out the administrative work that underpins their selection processes. The process of Workshop selection remained largely the same between 2018 and 2020, with an initial screening by the Secretariat removing incomplete applications and subsequent MAG selection based on fixed criteria. Outcomes could include approval unchanged, approval with a revision to length or merging of proposals.

Are youth voices for the youth section?

The activists engaged in this application had kept in touch since IGF 2019 in Berlin, communicating since then primarily through a Whatsapp group chat, of which I am also a member. All members of the group are highly-educated with undergraduate or masters degrees, the majority of which are technical. Additionally, all had received support for them to travel to Berlin for IGF via various fellowships and schemes by UN agencies, governments, Internet Society and the IGF Youth inclusion scheme. Despite being brought to the event through these avenues, the group bonded over the challenges that they faced in Berlin. In particular, Kay, a Computer Science graduate from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, felt that “youth voices” were confined to the “youth section” and grew frustrated that insights on other topics were not listened to -- even though he was a vocal participant in the main conference. Ria, a journalist and activist from eastern Brazil, noted that although she had been invited into the space, when it came to connecting with people and talking with people it was extremely difficult to reach more senior attendees who were busy “looking for funding or networking with other people like them.”

Discussions about the application began in March of 2020 a few weeks before the deadline for proposals was due to close, and during a period when many parts of the world were in lockdown due to the covid-19 pandemic. The application itself was written and completed days before the deadline. Finding times to work together online involved coordination of participants' study, jobs and professional projects alongside timezones and diverse access challenges.

The idea formulated, titled “She Net: Women’s participation/leadership for a united Internet for all” was conceived of as a roundtable session of 90 minutes, which would see young women from different regions and across academia, civil society and the private sector in conversation. A multistakeholder focus is required by the IGF, therefore this part of the proposal was mandatory to requirements, rather than being a design choice. Discussions showed a strong consciousness with regards to

framing issues in ways that would be appealing to the IGF staff, and this informed the use of specific terminology with a hope of increasing the chances of being selected.

The roundtable format was selected because it allows experts and those less familiar to the field to engage in "direct dialogue." The moderators would be focused on asking the speakers to share their "experiences from the different backgrounds and speak to the issues from where it affects them the most." This format shows an interest in bringing together those with different levels of experience into an equitable exchange, with the view that both have something to offer.

The writers of She Net hoped to look at the "persistent hurdles women face in full participation and leadership of tech companies and global institutions of Internet governance." The focus on creating women leaders across business and institutions of Internet governance is significant, for the proposal writers leadership positions of many kinds could be supportive of change. They defined Internet governance broadly, writing:

> *"We define internet governance to include all of the decisions made on how the internet is run by the varied stakeholders involved- from telecoms and tech companies to technical bodies, to governments and international organizations. For adequate multi-stakeholder governance, meaningful inclusion is required in every sector and this is the issue we are addressing."*

The proposal asserts that for "adequate multi-stakeholder governance" there needs to be "meaningful inclusion" of women in all of the above-described diverse areas of decision-making.

In particular, the selected panel were to be asked about Internet access:

> *“Our speakers are going to dialogue on the multi landscapes of access to the Internet in each region, acknowledging meaningful connectivity and strategies against digital hiatus”*

This line gives an insight into the group’s conceptualisation of Internet access as having “multi landscapes,” differing by region. Further, it shows a commitment to prevent “digital hiatus” and a continuing expansion of connectivity for more people. The proposal offers speakers that will acknowledge “meaningful connectivity,[10]” here referring to connectivity which allows people making use of it to achieve their aims for its use without impediment.

SePatI weeks after the submission the group was disappointed to learn that IGF 2020 in Poland had been cancelled, and was now to take place online. She Net did not appear on either the list of accepted or merged sessions, the latter referring to sessions that the MAG chooses to combine. The group were not contacted with any feedback on their proposal, and did not receive email contact to let them know the outcome. In this sense the outcomes from this application were reflective of the comments that the collaborators had shared about IGF 2019 and youth participation, and perhaps had they looked to be included in the youth programme rather than the main programme the activists may have found more success.

Opportunism and “possibility of change”

The session proposed in 2021 looked to consider the implications of events such as the IGF moving online in the wake of the pandemic. The activists noted that these discussions were much needed because:

> *“It's not enough to assume that online events will be more inclusive, they need to be designed with inclusion in mind.”*

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[10] In May 2020 “meaningful connectivity” was a term being adopted by Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) an organisation which advocates for policies to reduce the cost of connectivity. In their usage meaningful connectivity is comprised of: using the internet every day with an appropriate device which has enough data and a fast connection (Thakur and Woodhouse, 2020).

Whilst they recognised that online events may open up participation for those unable to travel to the location due to a lack of funding, difficulty getting visas, cultural and familial commitments -- significant for many of the activists themselves -- it was considered important not to take this as a given in all instances.

In video calls the discussion touched on how some groups, specifically women and certain ethnic groups facing persecution, are unable to speak as freely if joining as remote participants at home. Similarly, it was raised that it was easier to share ideas in-person with greater confidence that the discussion would not be recorded and distributed.

Our Internet Voices was designed to take place in a 'blended' format catering to audiences attending the physical gathering in Katowice, Poland, as well as those only able to join remotely.

> *"Online and on-site participants will each have a moderator supporting them through the session. Given the topic we will be able to hear from each group about their experiences of the session to enrich the discussion in a very concrete way."*

This was proposed as a way to demonstrate the benefits and challenges for each side, allowing a very practical discussion.

A multistakeholder panel was proposed to address a series of questions relating to the topic. The group wished to ask "who is included and who is excluded when events are held online?" As well as considering how the exclusions can be countered to enable "meaningful participation." Going beyond this, the questions pointed towards a more measured approach to the adoption of the software and tools being used to hold online events, which it was perceived were selected in a time of emergency without the opportunity to fully consider the implications in terms

of protecting participants, safeguarding their data, and managing environmental impacts.

Through the discussions the group hopped to initiate:

> *"effective models and prototypes of solutions that can be further developed as resources to tackle the challenge of achieving ubiquity in meaningful inclusion."*

In this way the activists hoped to generate new knowledge in a time where these practices are "still new and evolving, and with possibility of change." There was a feeling of dynamism and optimism around this fresh topic after the previous year's application was not accepted

However, this session too was not to be accepted or merged for the IGF in 2021. No feedback was received by the group regarding this application. Li, a tech policy analyst based in Accra, Ghana and Kay had both submitted different applications with other groups which they informed the group had been accepted. This highlights the amount of work the collaborators need to put into having one proposal selected, 'hedging their bets' for a positive outcome.

4.3. Digital Grassroots at RightsCon 2020 and 2021

This section draws on observation of two sessions which took place online during RightsCon 2020 and 2021 with the involvement of youth activist organisation, Digital Grassroots. The way in which Access Now curates the RightsCon programme is examined, after which the two sessions are explored in detail.

Programming RightsCon

Access Now does not commit to a set programming process, but claims to make changes year-to-year following both issues and the community. This section includes information provided by RightsCon on the 2021 process.

The programme is developed from responses to a call for proposals which is shared on social networks, through blog posts and through email lists. This includes some guidance indicating an oPatrching theme and sub-topics that the Access Now team wishes to address. A set of categories are set in the call, some adapted from previous events, some unchanged and some new, in 2021 these numbered twenty "Tracks" (Harper, 2021). Proposed sessions are also required to include a diverse range of perspectives and marginalised voices in their line-up; examples given of underrepresented groups in application guidance relate with groups that are racialised and marginalised in the United States.

Sessions are required to pick from a list of five formats, and if selected will receive some support to improve what RightsCon calls "session excellence," which involves development work with the facilitators and creators to align the session further with the RightsCon brand and style. Each session application also needs to include details of individuals that will fulfil set roles that RightsCon requires from each session. The RightsCon Call thus presents a huge amount of requirements, and further a great deal of steering and direction before the application is started.

As well as the Access Now team, the "RightsCon Programme Committee", an "international group of experts" are involved in selection of the successful sessions in a closed process.

Bringing together Internet universality and governance

The session billed "On Internet Universality and Governance, Sharing Perspectives From Underrepresented Communities" was a part of the RightsCon online programme in 2020 assigned to the "Internet Access and Shutdowns" programme theme. This took place as a "Community Lab," a format which RightsCon suggests for testing out ideas and getting feedback on projects amongst a closed audience. The event was at capacity with 35 participants taking part on Zoom, and it was not recorded.

Five speakers held the session as activists engaged with what they described as youth and underrepresented communities in diverse Global South locations. They all saw their role in this space to be acting as representatives for those who could not be present, relaying underrepresented communities' concerns and sharing their aspirations for Internet universality and governance. In this sense the session positions inclusion in Internet governance and policy discussions as a part of "Internet universality[11]."

The audience members for this session were for the most part also engaged in the work of trying to have communities who are underrepresented heard in Internet governance, in particular young people. They noted that the current systems in place for inclusion are selective, competitive, contingent and individualistic. They referred to fellowships, scholarships, leadership programmes and other short-term, high-visibility initiatives. These tend to bring in one person for a short time, often seeing the individuals continuing from one scheme to another and placing them in a position of precarity for an extended period. Being few, and with high requirements for entry, these opportunities are still fairly exclusive and therefore largely benefit highly-educated, urban Global South youth such as those in attendance who in turn here raise concerns about those in their purview that don't make the cut.

Digital Grassroots, the organisation founded by Mwema is well aware of this problem, providing a 'bridging' experience through their youth programmes that have enabled Global South youth participants to get on the first rung towards other programmes such as Internet Society fellowships. Drawing on research conducted with youth cohorts who they have supported, Mwema advocates for bottom-up approaches, emphasising that spaces need to be created that allow those who are

[11] The concept of "internet universality" was developed by UNESCO, defined as the growth and development of the Internet in ways that are conducive to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2015, p. 2).

on the margins to contribute meaningfully, with access to information and autonomy in decision-making.

Holding the position of negotiating as and for "underrepresented" communities in global Internet governance spaces session participants felt conflicted about how best to use their position. Audience members raised the question of whether inclusion should be sought in existing multistakeholder processes, or they should be:

> *"Supporting the creation of new norms or spaces that are more reflective of what we need for a global internet, as opposed to the norms we currently have, which were really developed through American and European structures and norms."*

The speakers landed on different perspectives in this regard, with some discussing how UNESCO's R.O.A.M.X. indicators[12] for Internet universality could provide an institutional backdrop for this conversation and others advocating for independent, high-impact ideas that make use of free resources.

Discussions reflect the variety of contexts and experiences amongst attendees even if they shared aims and the position of youth. One audience member raised "the trade-off between supporting local community standards when those local communities may aggressively marginalize certain populations," asking "which community norms should be most protected and which should be challenged?" This offers insights into the complex multi-level negotiations with which activists are engaged.

[12] These are 303 "indicators" to assess "Internet" development across: "human rights, openness, accessibility, "multistakeholder participation, and cross-cutting issues" developed through multistakeholder consultation.

Access and online gender-based violence

Taking place in June of 2021 as part of RightsCon online the session titled “The unexplored dichotomy of internet access and online hate” was assigned to the conference themes “Access, Inclusion and Education,” “Gender Justice,” and “Youth and Childrens’ Rights”. Billed as a ‘lightning talk,’ the nine-minute video includes segments featuring Esther Mwema and lawyer Catherine Muya, pre-recorded made available throughout and after the online event.

Muya began the video by telling the story of Brenda Ivy Cherotich, a Kenyan woman widely thought to be the country’s first covid-19 patient. After sharing her experience of the illness on her social media accounts Cherotich suffered online abuse and harassment on social media.

Following this introduction Mwema described how the pandemic has proven that the Internet is a “public utility necessary for daily life,” adding that this has led to renewed efforts globally to “bring connectivity to those still without access.” However, she raises the issue that many people who are newly connected and making use of digital platforms are becoming targets for “hate speech, harassment and violent extremism” with a large proportion of this directed towards women and girls, like Cherotich. For Mwema, the concern is that many of these newly online populations may be forced to halt their participation online, or to choose to be offline to protect themselves.

The two speakers drew on their work in southern and eastern Africa where they are involved in projects that support women and youth from underrepresented communities online, sharing a series of strategies that they have found useful to “protect and empower” these groups. These are ways to manage the current imperfect situation even as both Muya and Mwema look to change the structures which limit women’s access in this way.

Muya suggested that when using social networking tools and seeing someone behave violently or offensively, it is important to “be an active bystander.” This involves reporting the post, liking comments that indicate this is wrong, deflecting from the abuse, writing a respectful comment indicating that you think this is wrong, or tagging supportive others.

Muya’s research found that victims of online violence did not know what to do after they had experienced it. She provides ideas for what victims could do: reporting on the platform using the tools provided or pursuing legal action. The lawyer highlights that online abuse can have significant impacts for mental health and suggests that victims pursue emotional and psychological support. Whilst she urges that designers of online tools must consider protecting these groups, for Muya it is essential that everyone, especially women “practice cyber hygiene” with regards to the personal data shared online to prevent hacking and cyber attacks.

Mwema states that “we need to ensure that the Internet is a safe space that we can bring new communities online.” This highlights that for the youth activist there is a responsibility involved in connecting new groups to ensure that they are protected. Calling for a “bottom-up approach for an open, feminist Internet,” Mwema described how Digital Grassroots carried out a project involving young people from 21 countries who worked together to produce the “Youth Resolutions for Internet Governance.” This document provides contextually located insights into a process that could be used for design which applies “indigenous wisdom, without exploitation.” Instead of Big Tech’s “move fast, break things” for Mwema “community-centred approach” is required for slower, safer design emphasising different ways of relation to the status quo.

Mwema also described her work as a Youth Leader for the UN’s Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality. With her collaborators in this project she has identified four areas for change: digital access and competency; feminist

technology design; seeking accountability of tech platforms; and finding ways to deal with online gender-based violence.

As practitioners that work across levels, both directly with underrepresented communities, and also advocating for change in policy and commercial practice, Muya and Mwema are able to communicate in both directions. This session at RightsCon shows them doing so, sharing support to help women negotiate their access whilst also looking to create a novel discursive space that poses questions of whether access to unsafe platforms is any access at all.

5. Conclusions

The three sites, and the activists observed and engaged with the research from each, shed light on different configurations of front-stage, back-stage and off-stage relations shaping discourses of inequity and access. In doing so the work suggests that a broader view of Internet governance is required even *within* spaces such as IGF which are established to be a part of the field. Here broader refers to the consideration of organisational and administrative processes as shaping agendas and activisms, and the personal experiences of attendees.

Beyond the IGF the work shows that adjacent spaces of dialogue and exchange, such as RightsCon and Mozfest play an important role in framing topics and selectively sharing resources with individuals and communities. Their material and discursive role requires further investigation examining the circulation of individuals and the work of organisations that reappear consistently in the landscape. The paper has explored youth activist collaborators working across these spaces subject to material exploitation and restriction, as they work for very little and balance the constant need to find new work and pay, as well as discursive shaping as they try to appeal to programming processes.

Significantly, it has shown restricted and restrictive access being practiced, alongside the rhetoric of openness and universality. At the individual level this has seen research collaborators feeling confused and disappointed as they try to navigate contradictions, which for them have serious implications. They look to bring their communities into spaces of Internet governance but run the risk of them having to deal with the same issues they face. At the same time they look to bring their communities online but then question whether they're doing the right thing when design of online spaces does not prioritise safety and protection.

Despite these challenges, and the complex negotiations demanded of them, the youth activists studied here are doing important work that challenges determinist, androcentric notions of Internet access that centre wealthier societies and urban communities. Their work is multi-sited, fast-paced, independent and operates with little resource whilst mobilising solidarities creatively making it a significant area for further research.

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