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Title:

YOUthDIG participation on regional and global level: The dynamics of meaningful youth participation

Keywords: Internet Governance, Internet Governance Forum, European Dialogue on Internet Governance, youth participation, Arnstein's Ladder, participation

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author was a YOUthDIG participant in 2018 and since 2019 to date has been involved with the YOUthDIG Organising Team facilitating the Youth Messages. Since 2021 to date, the author has been the YOUthDIG Coordinator. As participant, facilitator and coordinator, the author received travel, accommodation, meal grants and an honorarium for their participation at YOUthDIG and EuroDIG.

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Abstract

The United Nations (UN) Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is one of the main spaces where institutional-backed forms of multistakeholder participation is performed. What makes this forum a particularly relevant space to study is the emergence of youth, national and regional IGF initiatives (Pavan, 2013; Epstein and Nonnecke, 2016). This article will attempt to understand the dynamics of meaningful youth participation by conducting desk research and interviews to map activities that YOUthDIG participants engaged in and exploring the purpose of their participation at entry, national and global level by answering the question: "How can we assess meaningful participation of youth in dynamic processes within the Internet Governance Forum ecosystem?". This study aims to fill a gap in research on meaningful youth participation in Internet governance by identifying and deconstructing activities and analysing their purpose following the Pyramid of Participation framework outlined in this paper which was built on Arnstein's ladder. Therefore the paper will reflect on the purpose of participants to participate - in essence, how they enter the Pyramid, their activities while participating on entry level at YOUthDIG, on regional level at EuroDIG, and on the global level at the IGF, and why they stop participating.

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Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is one of the main spaces where institutional-backed forms of multistakeholder participation is performed. What makes this forum a particularly relevant space to study is the emergence of youth, national and regional IGF initiatives (Pavan, 2013; Epstein and Nonnecke, 2016). The IGF sees these initiatives as valuable contributions in conducting an inclusive and open multistakeholder discussion on issues pertaining to the Internet. Collaboration between different IGF initiatives significantly helps participants at the global IGF to understand the substance of the issues from different viewpoints. The development of youth IGFs has served as a platform for voicing new perspectives to national, regional, and international Internet governance debates and processes. In the context of the recent vision presented by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on the future of global cooperation, the so-called 'Our Common Agenda' report, aims to enhance youth engagement and to take future generations into account in policy decisions (United Nations, 2021). Additionally, the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have made youth central to their engagement agenda by both declaring 2022 as the year of youth (ASEAN, 2022; European Commission, 2022). The IGF is uniquely positioned to support youth to learn about and participate in discussions on Internet governance, whilst developing their capacity to participate in the processes that lead to decision making. Efforts are being made to achieve long-term sustainable mechanisms for capacity building for youth about Internet governance through integration of youth into annual IGF events and fostering an active culture of youth participation (Internet Governance Forum, 2022).

This article will attempt to understand the dynamics of meaningful youth participation by conducting desk research and interviews to map activities that former YOUthDIG participants engaged in and exploring the purpose of their participation at entry, national and global level. Through this research, this article elaborates on meaningful participation as conditions under which participation works and doesn't work, by answering the question: "How can we assess meaningful participation of youth in dynamic processes within the Internet Governance Forum ecosystem?"

2. Arnstein's ladder and its reframing towards meaningful youth participation

Most literature on the participation of stakeholders within Internet governance focuses on representation or interest (Chakravartty, 2006; Faulkner, 2009; Antonova, 2011; Belli, 2015). However, this paper examines the processes or activities of participation and, therefore, this article will use an adapted definition for meaningful participation from Malcolm (2015), which the author defined as "aiming to capture the extent to which the processes in question are effectively designed to incorporate the viewpoints of [youth participants] into the development of [Internet governance] policies in a balanced way, this being the essential feature from which this subset of multistakeholder processes can claim democratic legitimacy. Youth participation in Internet governance has not specifically been addressed in academic literature; however, scholars writing about the 2003-2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process, which created the IGF, reflected on the mostly inadequate civil society participation processes in multilateral discussions (Afonso, 2005; Cammaerts, 2005; Servaes and Carpentier, 2006; Haristya, 2020).

Youth participation can bring benefits for individual youth development and societies (Hart, 1992, 2008; Frank, 2006; Checkoway, 2011; Checkoway and Gutierrez, 2012; Dickson-Hoyle *et al.*, 2018; Botchwey *et al.*, 2019; Bárta and Lavizzari, 2021). Yet, to understand the democratic participation of youth, and the manner in which they are participating, it is imperative to understand the motivation (Hart, 2008) and reason (Bárta and Lavizzari, 2021) why youth engage in decision-making processes. This will be a criteria that will be used in Table 2 and Table 3.

This paper will look at meaningful participation by reflecting on the purpose of youth participating in activities that are part of IGF processes. Through this reflection, this article seeks to address the conditions under which participation works (meaningful participation) and does not work (tokenism). This is done by looking at YOUthDIG participants' participation at YOUthDIG, EuroDIG and the global IGF through an adapted version of Arnstein's ladder. This framework was chosen to reflect on participation within an institution, and contextualised to look at one stakeholder group navigating themselves in the processes. Furthermore, the framework reflects the dynamic nature of participation, where an activity can have several purposes for participation depending on the contribution of the participant. Therefore, this article will propose an adapted framework, which aims to acknowledge that there is an ecosystem of participation, rather than a ladder, that promotes meaningful participation.

2.1 Arnstein's ladder

Arnstein's ladder (Arnstein, 1969) identifies levels of citizen participation by creating a visual image of a ladder upon which these levels are mapped. This visual ladder of participation has influenced many fields such as but not limited to water resource governance (Bruns, 2003), online political engagement (Cantijoch, Cutts and Gibson, 2016), user involvement in health (Tritter and McCallum, 2006), urban planning processes (Maier, 2001), and city collaborative planning (Kotus, 2013) to reflect on how citizens are participating in these spaces.

In Arnstein's framework, she categorises participation in rungs: informing, consultation, and placation are degrees of tokenism; and partnership, delegated power, and citizen control are degrees of citizen power. This typology has been at the core of describing and evaluating participatory activities for practitioners and academics (Botchwey *et al.*, 2019). However in Arnstein's work, the examples provided are individual project programmes assigned to a rung (Choguill, 1996; Hurlbert and Gupta, 2015; Tippett and How, 2020). To clarify, for each rung a different example is provided to showcase the meaning of the rung of the ladder, rather than providing an understanding of levels of progress of a programme. According to Arnstein, the highest rung "citizen power" is the "redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future," which "can induce significant social reform." This suggests that participation depends on power - specifically that citizens can only have power when authorities give it to them. Yet, Collins and Ison, (2009) critiqued that Arnstein implies a linear relationship (Hart, 2008; Collins and Ison, 2009), thereby indicating that "the policy problem remains constant, only the approach of the actors varying from level to level...this is at odds with the uniqueness of many policy problems, which require different levels and types of participation." These steps do not reflect on the process or interaction between the different rungs of the ladder, or opportunities for growth in itself (Tritter and McCallum, 2006; Collins and Ison, 2009), and therefore should not be interpreted as meaningful participation (Connor, 1988; Hart, 2008). They only acknowledge the presence of participants on the ladder and ignore the complexity of different roles and responsibilities within participation activities (Collins and Ison, 2009; Carpentier, 2016), as well as different perspectives and interests (Carpentier, 2016). Thus, this paper will suggest that participation is a process in which there are varying activities that provide different degrees of purpose for meaningful participation.

Participation needs to be contextualised to be able to understand the “situated use” of the ladder, but also to understand what the output or goals are of their participation (Collins and Ison, 2009; Botchwey *et al.*, 2019; Tippett and How, 2020). This has led to the expansion of literature based on Arnstein’s ladder, which has inspired other scholars to build their own framework for specific purposes and audiences, including Hart’s ladder of youth participation (Hart, 1992), who designed a ladder that focused on youth programming. While Arnstein and Hart had similarities in regards to the ordering of power and classifying rungs to indicate nonparticipation and participation, there were differences in regards to tokenism and dividing partnership between adult-initiated and child-initiated. In 2008, Hart reflected on his own framework

2.2 Reframing Arnstein’s Ladder to reflect dynamic meaningful participation in Internet Governance

Arnstein’s paper attributes particular activities on rungs of the ladder, where the bottom rungs reflect upon powerlessness and the top on empowerment. The bottom of the ladder indicates very negative or harmful activities (manipulation, placation), and the top of the ladder indicates supportive activities (citizen power, delegated power), where the top of the ladder is superior over the other rungs, which are considered equal steps (Connor, 1988; Hart, 2008). However, this paper seeks to modify Arnstein’s ladder to reflect the dynamics of participation within the Internet Governance Forum ecosystem based on the different activities participants engage in.

The Pyramid of Participation is divided in three sections (Figure 1). The foundation of the Pyramid focuses on activities that allow for integration, notably informing and consulting. When entering the pyramid of participation, a participant starts with being informed of the activity, learning and becoming familiarised with the structure and content of that activity (informing). Once there is familiarity and understanding, or are invited to provide particular expertise, the participants can choose to provide input into the activity (consulting). This section aims to acknowledge that activities that focus on the exchange of information, whether that is listening or providing, is also important to be able to contribute to the ecosystem, and is not a “lower rung” but an entry way into understanding the processes and standards of the ecosystem. The middle section of the Pyramid focuses on participants taking on leadership activities. In discussion with management, participants share decision-making power (partnership) or have dominant or autonomous decision-making power (delegated power). This indicates that participants contribute by advising management and plan activities for the community. At the top of the Pyramid is meta-participation (Tjahja and Potjomkina, forthcoming), in which participants decide to create new spaces for participation when they feel that the existing processes are not sufficient to manage the needs of the community. This citizen power indicates the ability of citizens having the autonomy to create change. However, for the purpose of this paper, meta-participation is outside the scope because this paper will focus on acknowledging existing established processes and the navigation of youth through these processes. The arrows in this Pyramid indicate that integrating and taking on leadership responsibilities is a continuous dynamic process. There is growth for participants to move into leadership positions, but also into further integration in other processes. They are also able to have multiple purposes to participate at the same time, such as organising one session, yet being informed at another session.

Figure 1. Pyramid of Participation: a revision of Arnstein’s Ladder, *source: concept by Nadia Tjahja and Jamal Shahin, visual design by Cyril Tjahja*

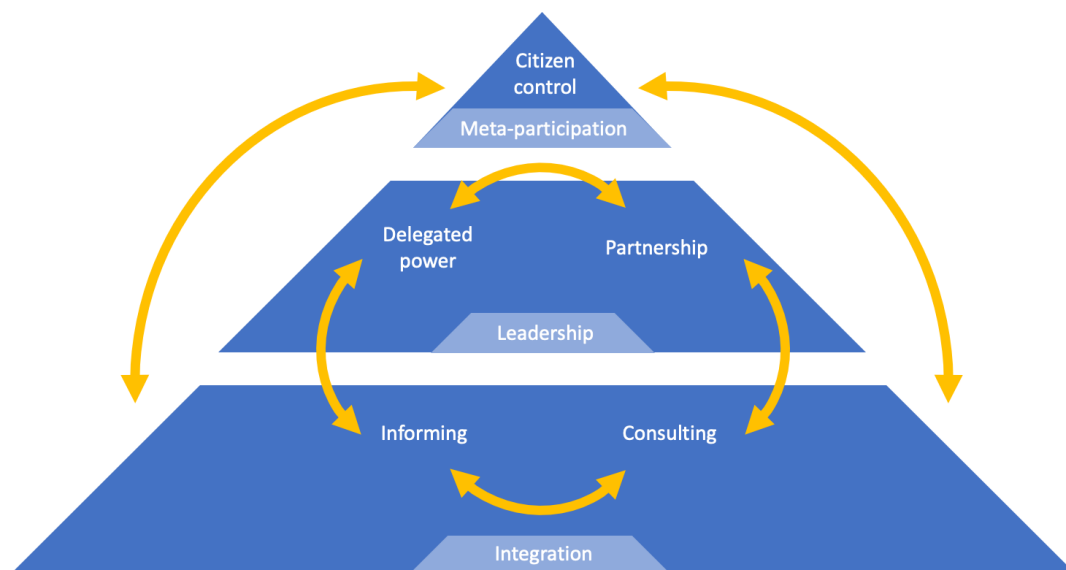


Table 1¹: Meaningful and tokenised purpose of participation

Activity	PURPOSE			
	Integration		Leadership	
Purpose (meaningful)	Informing	Consultation	Partnership	Delegated Power
Purpose (Tokenised)	Co-optation	Presence	Placation	Manipulation

What is important to note is that in the Pyramid, the negative features or the “lower rungs” of Arnstein’s ladder are not included. The Pyramid focuses on meaningful participation and therefore, includes activities that are designed to “incorporate the viewpoints of [youth participants] into the development of [Internet governance] policies in a balanced way” (Malcolm, 2015). The negative tokenised attributes are seen as counterparts or the failing of meaningful participation as is outlined in Table 1.

This paper will not reflect on the individual components of tokenised participation. Instead, when meaningful participation has failed in the process, as identified by participants who do not, can not or do not feel like they are participating in the IGF ecosystem, this is then analysed through the lens of why and how they are not able to meaningfully participate.

3. Methodology

This case study will look at the YOUth Dialogue on Internet Governance (YOUthDIG), the pre-event programme for youth participants from the pan-European region to participate in the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG), and explores their purpose and participation at YOUthDIG, EuroDIG and the IGF. The methodology used in this article is quantitative, qualitative and multi-staged in an effort to investigate the views and practice of different youth participation activities at entry level (YOUthDIG), regional (EuroDIG) and global (IGF).

¹ This table does not include meta-participation as it is outside the scope of this paper.

Drawing on the YOUthDIG, EuroDIG and IGF participation lists from 2017-2022, this article analysed attendance and re-attendance of YOUthDIG participants at EuroDIG and the IGF, identifying youth who returned to participate further in IGF activities. This list was used to identify participants for an interview following one of the four criteria:

1. Attended EuroDIG 3 or more times, which would allow us to assess how YOUthDIG participants integrated into EuroDIG and through which activities,
2. Attended EuroDIG and an IGF, which would allow us to understand how YOUthDIG navigate the regional and global IGF,
3. Did not return to EuroDIG after their YOUthDIG) year, which would allow us to understand why they didn't return
4. Did not attend the IGF, which would allow us to understand why they did not engage on a global level.

From the 150 YOUthDIG participants between 2017-2021², 40 people were identified for semi-structured interviews, of which 19 people responded. Interviews were conducted with all 20 available respondents taking geographical and stakeholder diversity into account.

The interviews, combined with desk research and participant observation were used to create tables (Table 2 and 3) in which participant activities were mapped against the Pyramid of Participation with the aim to understand the purpose and motivation of participation or lack of participation. The table is highlighted in green when activities were engaged with or observed by the respondents. This table was then used for analysis to reflect on youth participation processes at YOUthDIG, EuroDIG and the IGF.

The limitation of the qualitative approach is that we cannot generalise to all young people on their perception of the youth participation process, but we can aim to understand elements of how successful and unsuccessful participation were established by talking to these key stakeholders. Other limitations that need to be considered is that the indicated timespan included the COVID-19 pandemic period, which resulted in 2 virtual YOUthDIG events. These participants did not attend any in-person sessions and therefore did not experience the event as the three previous years. While they did have the same access to the quality of speakers and activities, they did not have social activities, bonding moments and peer support that are at the essence of EuroDIG.

Another point to consider is that EuroDIG and the IGF ask in their registration forms whether participants want to be publicly listed; thus the data may not accurately reflect how many YOUthDIG participants returned or participated because they may not be listed publicly in the data.

This case study comes from an European perspective, and therefore Arnstein's Ladder was chosen as a starting point. According to Hart (2008), the ladder is built with the idea that individual agency in participating in decision-making spaces is important to establish good programmes; however this may not be a good reflection of understanding participation in countries with a non-Western background (Maier, 2001) or to standardise different communities of participants (Connor, 1988).

² 18 YOUthDIG participants from 2022 were excluded from the data at this time as they would not yet have the opportunity to participate in further EuroDIG and IGF events

4. Evolving dynamics of meaningful youth participation

This section will explore the dynamics of meaningful youth participation in the IGF ecosystem by reflecting on the activities in which YOUthDIG participants engaged with at YOUthDIG, EuroDIG and the IGF through interviews conducted with former YOUthDIG participants.

The first two examples focus on YOUthDIG participation at the European regional events YOUthDIG and EuroDIG (Table 1): In the first example (4.1), this paper will reflect on the purpose YOUthDIG participants perceive when being informed and consulting at YOUthDIG and EuroDIG. The second example (4.2) will look at how and whether YOUthDIGers contribute to the agenda-setting process and the Org team consultations. The last two examples will look at the same two examples at the global IGF (Table 2). In the third example (4.3), YOUthDIG participants reflect on their perception when being informed and consulting at the IGF. The last example examines how and whether YOUthDIGers contribute to the agenda-setting process and the Org team consultations.

Table 2: Purpose of YOUthDIG Participation at EuroDIG

SPACE	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE			
		Integration		Leadership	
		Informing	Consultation	Partnership	Delegated Power
YOU th DIG	Participant	Selected participants join designed sessions	Providing content input for discussions		
	YOU th DIG speaker		Invited by the YOU th DIG Org team as an acknowledged expert		
	YOU th DIG Org Team	YOU th DIG Org Team members are informed about the processes and protocols of YOU th DIG	YOU th DIG Org Team members are encouraged and empowered to present to share expertise or facilitate discussions		YOU th DIG Org Team members design the YOU th DIG programme and all related decision making
EuroDIG	Participant	Anybody can participate in EuroDIG and join sessions designed by the EuroDIG community	Providing content input for discussions		
	Speaker/Panellist		Invited by the Org Team as acknowledged experts to provide insight		
	Moderator		Invited by the Org Team to give shape to the discussion following the outline by the Org Team	Experienced moderator that works with the EuroDIG Secretariat to design the moderation workflow	
	Remote moderator	Remote moderator in training that is familiarising with processes related to event and tech management, navigating online and on site spaces and connecting with speakers		Trained remote moderator that actively engages with the EuroDIG Secretariat on the protocol of connecting the on site audience with the online audience	
	Session Rapporteur	Minuting the session	Experienced rapporteur who in addition to reporting the session engages in preparatory work by providing contextual background materials, drafts conclusions or action points, and presents and publishes outcomes	Experienced rapporteurs, who volunteer and may be remunerated, who discuss with the EuroDIG Secretariat the structure and workflow of the messages	

	EuroDIG issue submitter		Any person can submit up to 3 issues that they would like to see on the EuroDIG agenda		
	Day 0 Session Proposer or Organiser		Organisations or groups can submit an issue, but the EuroDIG Secretariat decides on the session. The session does not have to meet the session principles. This can be followed up if the session is allocated, otherwise the consultation ends here.	Collaborates with EuroDIG Secretariat to organise the session but mostly works independently to set up the session.	
	EuroDIG member of Org Team	Any person that is on the session Org Team mailing list	Org Team members contribute ideas on direction, outline and potential speakers		
	EuroDIG Focal Point			Appointed by the EuroDIG secretariat to coordinate on how to shape sessions and manages the discussions of the Org Team	
	EuroDIG Subject Matter Expert		Provides background information and contextual input to Org Team discussions	Appointed by the EuroDIG secretariat to collaborate on how to shape sessions and support the Focal Point	

4.1 Participants informing and consulting at YOUthDIG and EuroDIG

According to Arnstein, the “informing” rung of the ladder seeks to provide citizens with information about their rights, responsibilities and options, thus allowing for a better understanding of their participation within the community. This is easily identified at YOUthDIG, which as an educational pre-event aims to provide information and knowledge to participants. At YOUthDIG, sessions are organised with guest speakers who provide contextualised insights to current topics that are being discussed by stakeholders at EuroDIG. YOUthDIG participants felt that this was an opportunity to learn about Internet governance (Balciunaite, 2023, Monnet, 2023, Passaro, 2023, Piccolo, 2023, Redeker, 2023, Scandol, 2023 Schauer mann, 2023, Stefan, 2023), specifically participants attended because of the themes and topics (Kyritsis, 2023, Passaro, 2023, Scandol, 2023, Vrbanic, 2023). The participants also indicated that the structure of the YOUthDIG programme itself was a big motivator to participate. YOUthDIG as a programme is educationally formative, where participants are allowed to explore the topics and have an informed point of view and possible recommendations to contextualise the upcoming discussions. (Stefan, 2023), It is the one place where governance is discussed, not necessarily the specific policies, but the principles of governance (Stefan, 2023). Compared to other conferences, EuroDIG is more accessible (Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023) and because YOUthDIG happens before EuroDIG, participants have the opportunity to learn by experience, being taught by experts, elaborating on the documents and participating in the process, so it is a practical approach to learning about the Internet governance ecosystem (Monnet, 2023, Nanni, 2023), and preparing to attend EuroDIG (Monnet, 2023). Additionally, due to the composition of the group which has always been diverse, participants can network with peers from different countries (Balciunaite, 2023) and learn about different perspectives beyond their national or sectoral backgrounds (Ivanets, 2023), yet are like-minded in having an interest to explore topics (Martins, 2023).

The programme also empowers youth by providing opportunities to engage in dialogue with speakers and present on their topics of interest. On Arnstein’s ladder, the “consultation” rung invites citizens to provide opinions and input into the processes. This is visible at YOUthDIG where participants contribute in session, and also collaboratively design the YOUthDIG messages. However, this empowerment cannot stand on its own - in essence, providing access and opportunity is not enough for youth to meaningfully participate. Through the structure provided by YOUthDIG, an element of confidence-building takes place through being part of the group and having a basic understanding of the topics, to bring to bring their voice in the debate (Balciunaite, 2023, Monnet, 2023, Scandol, 2023). Through the social programme, the participants felt that they were community building and supporting each other during YOUthDIG, EuroDIG and afterwards (Redeker, 2023), which motivated them to push to add new topics to the agenda and engage in interventions (Barletta, 2023). The programme also provides access to time with interesting stakeholders such as the European Commission and other international institutions (Anonymous b, 2023, Balciunaite, 2023, Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023, Piccolo, 2023, Stefan, 2023), and through the exposure of these conversations about EU policies within the EU institutions and understanding the bigger context (Anonymous b, 2023, Stefan, 2023), participants felt that they could be part of the discussion at regional level (Monnet, 2023, Piccolo, 2023).

This entry-level participation opportunity provides them direct access to EuroDIG as YOUthDIG is held in the days leading up to EuroDIG. Participants participate primarily to learn about the European Internet governance issues (Anonymous b, 2023, Redeker, 2023), digital policies on a regional level (Anonymous b, 2023, Monnet, 2023, Vrbanic, 2023), and an opportunity to be more involved on an European level (Anonymous B, 2023, Aladashvilli, 2023, Martins, 2023, Vrbanic, 2023) where citizens can actively engage and express their opinions at the same time alongside public sector or private sector stakeholders (Balciunaite, 2023, Vrbanic, 2023). This is especially the case when youth are asked to participate such as a EuroDIG session organiser or speaker (Balciunaite, 2023, Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023, Ivanets, 2023, Monnet, 2023), as participants then want to stay in the community and continue developing their skills and apply for different opportunities (Ivanets, 2023).

EuroDIG as an event, is on-site first, and remote second; therefore to take active participation in the discussions, it is necessary to be in the room since the exchanges that happen after the sessions are the most interesting (Martins, 2023) and is where connections are being formed. YOUthDIG participants are generally more easily integrated in the structure when they are able to network and build relations in person. This component - how youth feel about their interaction with members of the community is an important component to encourage people to return. Participants are likely to return because they feel included in the environment and their interventions are acknowledged (Aladashvili, 2023, Martins, 2023). However, this may be, in part, due to being associated with a particular affiliation (Redeker, 2023). Therefore participants stay involved because they created connections that maintain the interest in this area (Balciunaite, 2023, Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023, Oghia, 2023). Particular notable relationships are mentorship (Anonymous b, 2023, Martins, 2023, Oghia, 2023, Piccolo, 2023, Schaueremann, 2023) or becoming part of the EuroDIG community (Anonymous b, 2023, Berting, 2023, Balciunaite, 2023, Martins, 2023, Nanni, 2023, Oghia, 2023, Piccolo, 2023, Redeker, 2023). Participants were supported by members of the EuroDIG Community who reached out and encouraged them to take on responsibilities at EuroDIG (Balciunaite, 2023, Barletta, 2023, Ivanets, 2023, Oghia, 2023, Schaueremann, 2023). This encouragement is fostered during the individual's first EuroDIG event where mentors take the time to explain how everything works and give feedback on the processes or points of thoughts (Balciunaite, 2023), and also encourage youth to speak up at events by reaching out to support their participation (Nanni, 2023, Redeker, 2023). This personal approach re-engages youth (Ivanets, 2023, Oghia, 2023), and provides a contact point with whom they can confer. It is about having the right push from the right people (Aladashvili, 2023, Nanni, 2023).

However, there are some who become unmotivated or uninterested at some point, and mostly this is for personal reasons (Balciunaite, 2023). They would be present on site but not participating or engaging with the content or topics (Schaueremann, 2023). They discontinue their participation when they realise that there is no clear direct benefit for participation, which results in a loss of commitment (Barletta, 2023). Meanwhile, there are others who embark on this journey and realise that they do not fit within this space, are overwhelmed and were not able to keep up the pace (Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023), or are not ready to truly engage in this space because they did not expect the event to be this way (Ivanets, 2023). As a consequence of this, participants do not want to take space and instead give the opportunity to others (Berting, 2023). However, there are also instances of tokenised participation when speakers self-promote themselves rather than focus on the initiatives that they are involved with (Martins, 2023). This makes participants feel that they are interacting with narrow-minded people who do not want to learn from the process (Martins, 2023).

There are also structural reasons how people disengage or lose their purpose for participating. Participants get lost in the process (Balciunaite, 2023, Ivanets, 2023, Kyritsis, 2023), in the ecosystem (Ivanets, 2023), the technical language (Aladashvili, 2023, Oghia, 2023) or acronyms (Kyritsis, 2023). Participants are also easily overwhelmed with the available information such as choosing sessions and having parallel sessions (Kyritsis, 2023, Martins, 2023, Monnet, 2023, Stefan, 2023), yet there is a lack of documentation to help navigate (Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023, Ivanets, 2023, Schaueremann, 2023).

In sum, this example looked at the foundation of the Pyramid and reflected on the purpose of YOUthDIG participants whilst participating in activities that aim to inform or consult thereby integrating into the IGF ecosystem. However, at the same time that YOUthDIG participants are being informed and consulted, there are former YOUthDIG participants (i.e. YOUthDIG alumni) who take on roles at YOUthDIG and EuroDIG to continue their participation in Internet governance. The next example will explore how YOUthDIG participants are contributing to agenda-setting at EuroDIG through submitting issues, and joining Org Teams to contribute to the processes.

4.2 YOUthDIG participants submitting an issue to EuroDIG

Each year, EuroDIG consults its community by opening a public call for issues in which they invite European stakeholders to propose issues that are important and relevant to discuss. There are no restrictions in regards to session structure, status, experience or any other traditional requirements for submitting proposals, except for a quantitative limitation of 3 submissions per person. The issues are collected, grouped together, and allocated to a session, and the authors of the issues are invited to join the Org Team, where participants become members of the Org Team and partner with an appointed subject matter expert and focal point from the EuroDIG Secretariat. Arnstein indicated in her “partnership” rung that participants share planning and decision-making responsibilities in a predetermined structure, which can be evidenced here.

EuroDIG as an event has elements in the process of participation that encourages youth to return to participate. Proposing issues for the agenda is easily accessible because they can contribute ideas (Redeker, 2023, Nanni, 2023) rather than having to contribute a session like in national IGFs and the global IGF (Nanni, 2023), and YOUthDIG participants can join the Org Team without contributing a full outline, background, or speakers for a session (Nanni, 2023). This makes the event more accessible to participate in, especially when Org Team members are welcoming youth participants to contribute new ideas (Ivanets, 2023). Participation at EuroDIG is also more accessible because the call for applications and issues will open around the same time every year, which allows participants to plan to participate (Schauermann, 2023). If during the previous EuroDIG, participants understood how to navigate the event and the community, either because there were programmes or introductions that explain how to continue their involvement or know who to email to gain access or gain information, then they are likely to continue their participation (Nanni, 2023). However, as this is a volunteer-led process, not everybody will commit the time for its duration and the partnership may fall apart where the EuroDIG Secretariat then steps in and tries to reinvigorate by appointing people to foster partnerships.

The process is slightly different for Day 0 (pre-conference) sessions where organisations can submit pre-designed sessions from which the EuroDIG Secretariat decides whether that session is allocated or not. In this case, the community is consulted and proposals are submitted, and if allocated as a session there is continued meaningful participation. However, the consultation ends there if it is not allocated a session as there is no further engagement on the submitted topic.

Some YOUthDIG participants are not ready to take up leadership positions when it is offered (Ivanets, 2023). Participants feel they lack the knowledge or expertise to continue their participation (Berting, 2023, Sula, 2023), especially technical topics scare people away (Aladashvili, 2023), or their topic of interest or expertise is not of relevance in that specific year (Monnet, 2023), but once they are ready or graduated, they may return (Berting, 2023, Sula, 2023). However, it can also be the complete opposite where participants are burnt out from responsibilities from EuroDIG or the IGF (Oghia, 2023), that they do not feel that they represent youth as a constituency (Monnet, 2023) or because of their own age (Oghia, 2023), and thus do not return to participate in discussions.

Although participating is a step forward in whatever educational or professional path YOUthDIG participants have, it does not readily inspire the feeling that participants can influence real actions (Stefan, 2023) and some question their personal impact or purpose for being there (Schauermann, 2023). Participants also stop participating when they realise there is no further mentorship or community building, in fact the opposite. Because EuroDIG is a community-based environment, there is a significant amount of informal knowledge, and thus a participant needs to know who to speak to about what to be able to integrate (Schauermann, 2023). From another perspective, there is the intergenerational

disconnect, when discussions are happening between digital natives and non-digital natives and the topics and ideas do not align (Oghia, 2023), participants then do not feel that they are talking to peers or where they are being understood.

Some participants choose to submit issues and join Org Teams. However, when Org Teams don't feel serious or committed due to poor communication or follow up, then youth drop out (Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023). The multistakeholder approach gives a lot of opportunity to shape the event; however, this also could lead to Org Team members not feeling that the process is concrete and, therefore, do not understand how to participate or are frustrated with the manner of participation (Redeker, 2023). This includes when decision making is done over the session mailing list (Nanni, 2023).

What is notable in this example is the lack of commentary on the EuroDIG Secretariat regarding the process, who designs and facilitates the structure of the activities. The focus of commentary about consulting and partnering is in relation to other stakeholder participants who volunteer to engage in these activities. But more importantly, this example showed the dynamic interaction of how YOUthDIG participants moved from the bottom of the Pyramid where they are integrating in the process, to engaging on a leadership level, allowing for opportunities to engage further in the process and be acknowledged as a contributor to the process.

The next example will look at how the YOUthDIG Org Team design the YOUthDIG programme.

4.3 YOUthDIG Org Team designing the YOUthDIG programme

One activity that plays a significant role in returning participants is the invitation to join the YOUthDIG Org Team (Balciunaite, 2023, Beauregard, 2023, Oghia, 2023, Schauer mann, 2023, Sula, 2023). When YOUthDIG became institutionalised in 2017, it was co-organised by senior members of the EuroDIG community and youth. In 2018, the structure was further developed to introduce a YOUthDIG Coordinator who led the programme's design. The coordination then moved to YOUthDIG alumni who became increasingly engaged in the process and started taking over duties. By 2019, this resulted in a completely YOUthDIG-alumni lead event with an embedded YOUthDIG Coordinator in the EuroDIG Secretariat. Each year, the YOUthDIG Coordinator invites YOUthDIG alumni to join the YOUthDIG Org Team. Arnstein's Ladder defines this power structure as "delegated power" where the YOUthDIG Org Team have the dominant decision-making authority over the YOUthDIG programme. This role is seen by YOUthDIG participants as a good way to assist the programme and give back to the community (Anonymous b, 2023, Barletta, 2023, Martins, 2023, Oghia, 2023).

The YOUthDIG Org Team's engagement is multifaceted. In the Pyramid's "informing" level, the YOUthDIG Org Team integrates into the EuroDIG processes by familiarising themselves with the structure of how YOUthDIG is organised and what activities they are required to address. Using this information, the YOUthDIG Org Team use their delegated power to design the programme themselves (Balciunaite, 2023, Ivanets, 2023, Nanni, 2023). They are informed by a range of different processes in the structure. First from the YOUthDIG application form, where applicants indicate the topics and interest they have to learn at EuroDIG. Second, they reflect on the submitted topics by the EuroDIG community through the call for issues (see section 4.1). Lastly, they use their personal experience from the year they participated in YOUthDIG to create a programme that is modern, reflective of topics that are being raised in the EuroDIG community, and addresses the needs and interests of the participants in a manner in which the YOUthDIG Org Team wanted to change from their year of participation. While they are designing the programme, they have the opportunity to consult the new cohort as the YOUthDIG Org Team are encouraged to present in sessions to share their own expertise or facilitate discussions, which is a good opportunity for them to evolve their own skill set (Ivanets, 2023).

This example further elaborated on the Pyramid to showcase that within the YOUthDIG space, there are several different purposes of meaningful participation rather than a project being attributed to one rung in the case of Arnstein. Here we reflect on the multifaceted role of the YOUthDIG Org Team in terms of their personal growth from integrating as a participant, to taking on a leadership role. Within such leadership roles, there are also opportunities where they are being informed and they are consulting, contributing to a richer experience for themselves and for the community they are participating in.

In the following examples, we look at how YOUthDIG participants are participating in the global IGF.

Table 3: Purpose of YOUthDIG Participation at IGF

SPACE	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE			
		General Audience		Management	
		Informing	Consultation	Partnership	Delegated Power
IGF Event	Participant	Anybody can participate in EuroDIG and join sessions designed by the EuroDIG community	Providing content input for discussions		
	Speaker/Panellist		Invited by the session organiser as acknowledged expert to provide insight		
	Moderator		Invited by the session organiser to give shape to the discussion following the outline by the session organiser		
	Remote moderator	Remote moderator (in training) that is familiarising with processes related to event and tech management, navigating online and on site spaces and connecting with speakers		Member of staff Pre-COVID this was placation, no actual real power to interact with the discussion. However, since COVID this role has changed by having a member of staff managing remote moderation	
	Session Rapporteur	Minuting the session, may include reporting following the IGF template	Experienced rapporteur who in addition to reporting the session engages in preparatory work by providing contextual background materials, drafts conclusions or action points, and presents and publishes outcomes		
	Session proposer			Any person can submit a session outline to the IGF Secretariat for consideration to adopt in the programme	
	Session organiser			Follow up from session proposer if selected according to IGF guidelines	
	Flash session organiser and speaker		Providing content input for discussions		

Youth Programmes	ISOC Ambassador Programme	Selected participants join designed sessions	Providing content input for discussions		
	Private Sector Fellowships	Selected participants join designed sessions	Providing content input for discussions		
Youth Track	Participant	Anybody can participate and join sessions designed by the IGF Youth Track multistakeholder working group	Providing content input for discussions		
	Speaker		Invited speaker to provide insight, or IGF Youth Track members are encouraged and empowered to present to share expertise or facilitate discussions		
	Member of the multistakeholder working group for the IGF Youth Track	Any person that is on the IGF Youth Track mailing list	IGF Youth Track members contribute ideas on direction, outline and potential speakers	Collaborates with IGF Secretariat to organise the session but mostly works independently to set up the session.	
Youth Summit	Participant	Selected participants join designed sessions	Providing content input for discussions		
	Facilitator / Trainer		Invited to facilitate		
	Speaker		Invited as decision maker or subject matter expert		
EuroDIG stall	Participant	Anybody can visit the EuroDIG stand information and meeting people			
	Representative			Providing information about general Internet Governance questions in Europe, giving advice on sessions to attend, hosting lotteries and giving out freebies	

4.4 Participants informing and consulting at the global IGF

Going to the global IGF is generally positioned as the next step after EuroDIG to witness how the IGF is different from regional and national, as well as having the ability to experience an international and UN-facilitated Internet governance event (Anonymous b, Ivanets, 2023, Martins, 2023, Redeker, 2023, Stefan, 2023, Vrbanic, 2023). The transition from being in YOUthDIG and going to the global IGF can be daunting, but through the connections made at EuroDIG, youth participants are able to come together as a group that works towards sessions for the year after (Monnet, 2023). Moreover the call for sessions is often met with enthusiasm as it allows to have some form of ownership of the process (Monnet, 2023). Youth are also invited to volunteer in session roles (Aladashvili, 2023, Martins, 2023), and to contribute to IGF intersessional work (Oghia, 2023). These are all rewarding manners of participation as participants feel that their voice and opinions are heard by peers and other stakeholders whether they are institutions or others taking part in the process, which lead to specific outputs within institutions or within multistakeholder processes (Martins, 2023).

A concern raised from the event is that there is a lack of meaningful interaction (Monnet, 2023), where the IGF is perceived as a show (Barletta, 2023), often with only white men speaking (Barletta, 2023), and includes not being acknowledged by the right name or title (Anonymous a, 2023) or, on the other hand, only being selected because of one's "type" such as being LGBTQ+, black, or a woman (Barletta, 2023). Notably due to the structure of the sessions, which are often a series of panels without dialogue (Piccolo, 2023, Stefan, 2023). Then after the session, speakers are unapproachable, also because there aren't spaces to network (Stefan, 2023).

Youth participants often feel as though they are encouraged to be 'token' actors in these multistakeholder processes, and this leads to disengagement (Anonymous b, Barletta, 2023, Martins, 2023, Nanni, 2023, Oghia, 2023, Schauermaun, 2023, Stefan, 2023, Vrbanic, 2023) and stereotyping (Berting, 2023). Specifically, the lack of interaction or the disingenuous interaction between youth and senior policymakers (Anonymous b, 2023, Balciunaite, 2023, Barletta, 2023, Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023, Berting, 2023, Ivanets, 2023, Martins, 2023, Nanni, 2023, Piccolo, 2023, Schauermaun, 2023, Scandol, 2023, Stefan, 2023). Notably, a lack of genuine feedback (Anonymous b, 2023, Berting, 2023, Martins, 2023, Nanni, 2023, Schauermaun, 2023, Vrbanic, 2023). In essence, when policymakers dismiss youth (Balciunaite, 2023, Ivanets, 2023, Monnet, 2023) because they believe youth participants lack experience or knowledge (Anonymous b, 2023, Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023, Nanni, 2023, Schauermaun, 2023, Scandol, 2023, Sula, 2023). Many interviewees expressed that it often feels that senior policymakers try to manipulate young people to get them to support their positions or think the way they wanted them to think (Oghia, 2023). These policymakers share their thoughts but generally do not seriously consider youth input, which is often based on months of hard work (Barletta, 2023, Piccolo, 2023, Schauermaun, 2023). Activities that aim to have engagement between senior policymakers and youth are often seen as consulting with young people for the sake of saying that they consulted with young people (Barletta, 2023, Martins, 2023, Piccolo, 2023, Stefan, 2023). In essence, youth are used as advertisements to convey how good they are in involving youth and how they care for the future generation and their viewpoints (Piccolo, 2023). Others indicated that organisations are creating opportunities for youth participation, but not focusing or dedicating reasonable effort to make them connect with actual stakeholders that are part of the process (Martins, 2023, Piccolo, 2023). This is a clear indication that established professionals are not always ready to welcome youth participation, which may be a cultural or hierarchical element (Nanni, 2023). In this case, established professionals are seen as closed-minded people who don't see the need to change anything, which makes attaining goals difficult to achieve (Anonymous b, 2023).

Currently, there is obscurity regarding youth spaces. On the one hand there are activities or sessions dedicated specifically for youth, while on the other hand there is youth integration in sessions. A concern raised multiple times was that youth voices remain in youth spaces and are not being acknowledged (Martins, 2023, Oghia, 2023, Piccolo, 2023). In essence, youth have their own side event and have no

possibility to interact with all the participants but the event is used to say that there is youth participation and they are in that dedicated corner (Nanni, 2023). Within the sessions that aim to integrate youth, there is overlap where young professionals overshadow younger people, so it is difficult to be acknowledged. Thus it is important to continue having specific spaces for young people (Stefan, 2023). However, in some countries there are no spaces for youth, so there is a gap between the regional European and national and other regional Internet governance fora (Stefan, 2023, Oghia, 2023). At the global IGF, there was one particular event which was specifically focused on youth - the Youth Summit 2022. However, critics exclaimed that the outcomes are questionable (Ivanets, 2023, Martins, 2023, Piccolo, 2023). In addition, the interaction between young and senior leaders did not work well due to a lack of active listening and engagement (Martins, 2023), and it was difficult to keep participants involved in the process (Ivanets, 2023).

This example highlights the transition between the regional event and the global IGF. Due to the experiences and networks the YOUthDIG participants gained, they were open to participate on the global level. However, YOUthDIG alumni were clear in indicating the failure of meaningful participation through tokenisation. This prevents YOUthDIG participants from engaging meaningfully, who then fall outside the scope of the Pyramid. Unlike EuroDIG, there was an emphasis on the structure of participation due to the session outline and spaces in which these sessions are being held which allow stakeholders to separate or alienate YOUthDIG participants from integrating into the wider IGF community.

In the following example, this paper will look at how YOUthDIG participants can contribute to the agenda setting processes of the IGF.

4.5 YOUthDIG participants submitting an issue to the IGF

For the global IGF, a call for workshops is shared among the IGF community. Unlike EuroDIG which aims to bring together issues from the community to co-collaborate on, in a bottom-up manner, in order to submit a session at the IGF, youth participants are required to have background knowledge to outline a specific session proposal and a global network to indicate confirmed speakers. This sets limits to the accessibility of session submissions (Anonymous b, 2023, Martins, 2023), it is clear that it requires specific skills to participate beyond subject matter knowledge, and that it is not a process truly open and accessible to everyone (Beauregard-Lacroix, 2023), despite the IGF's stated principles and rhetoric declaring otherwise. While some participants have been successful in submitting proposals due to the support they receive from mentors and their network (Redeker, 2023) others have not been able to contribute to issues. The threshold for consultation is set at a higher bar at the IGF, which is exacerbated by the timing of the call for sessions that is held prior to YOUthDIG and EuroDIG (Anonymous b, 2023). Therefore continued participation in a leadership role after EuroDIG is postponed to one-and-a-half year later, which can stem motivation to continue active participation.

This example shows that there is a high threshold for youth to enter the ecosystem in a consultation or partnership capacity, because at any stage it requires a high level of knowledge and a large network to be able to contribute. However, Table 3 outlines that there are spaces where youth are able to contribute outside this particular process, however YOUthDIG participants were not aware of these, or do not consider their flash session as part of the main event.

Conclusion

With the emphasis of youth participation in policymaking, it has become imperative to not only understand the *presence* of youth in these processes, but also their *purpose* in these processes. This

acknowledgement of their motivation allows decision makers to have a better understanding on how to foster meaningful participation processes that empower youth to navigate through the relevant ecosystems. The Pyramid of Participation outlined in this paper provides a visual framework for decision makers to reflect on where participants enter the process, where and how they engage with the process and how can we foster their continued meaningful participation on a regional and a global level. This self-reflexive exercise allows decision-makers to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and answer the call from the UNSG to foster meaningful participation to encourage youth to elaborate on the needs for their futures and the solutions they may have. This Pyramid of Participation also acknowledges that when there is no meaningful participation, that participants will choose to discontinue their participation and this motivation requires reflection on where we can enhance processes and change attitudes to ensure a better informed group of stakeholders and empowered actors. However, Arnstein's ladder of participation has been a useful reflexive exercise and serves as a building block from which adjustments can be made to be applicable to different spaces. This article serves to add to the literature on participation research by identifying activities in which youth are participating within the Internet Governance Forum ecosystem and how they move between these activities; this article also was looking at the purpose and lived-experiences of youth participating in these processes from entry to the international or national stages, and reflecting on meaningful participation as a process with the possibility for long term sustainability.

There is a wealth of further research that could be built from this work. This article examined youth as a case study; however, future research could expand to reflect on youth participation in the other regional Internet governance events, using a participation mechanism from that regional's cultural experience, noting specifically the differences between individualist and collectivist society. The research could also narrow down on the different realities of participation of youth, such as a study of youth in extremely difficult situations such as those affected by the Russia-Ukraine war which impacts participation of both Ukrainian and Russian participants. The Pyramid of Participation can be scaled to look at each stakeholder group to look how their participation shapes the Internet governance ecosystem, or even adapted to other multistakeholder policy communities to compare across industries and sectors. Future research could explore comments on tokenisation or difficulties engaging with attitudes and dialogue with speakers to better understand why this happens and generate meaningful solutions and recommendations. Lastly, research could also examine narratives used in Internet governance events to understand the type of dialogue between youth and decision-makers.

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