

# The Evolution of Internet Governance

This research project explores the evolution of Internet Governance through a multi-faceted examination of standards bodies from 1969 to the 1990ies at the intersection of Digital History and History of Technology. By examining the standards issued by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), I explain the process by which the logical layer of the Internet is governed. The period studied includes the beginnings of computer networks, the emergence of the World Wide Web, and the rise of Web 2.0. I use two main research strategies: (1) a quantitative analysis of standards and specifications and (2) a case study on core communication standards – namely e-mail. Many documents from standards bodies, including meeting minutes, are publicly available and can be analyzed using computational methods (NLP and Topic Modelling). This research project challenges the argument that Internet Governance is the result of a purposeful and intentional process and seeks to extend the analysis of Internet Governance beyond the social and content layer to the logical layer. Some see nation-states or tech companies as the drivers of Internet Governance of the logical layer, but usually these groups were responding to the influence exerted by the complicated interplay of standards bodies, the standards themselves, and the community that uses those standards. On the one hand, the standards bodies have constantly changed their structures in recent decades in order to mediate this process and – to a certain extent – to resist outside influences. On the other hand, many standards have outlived not only their successors, but also the standards bodies that issued them in the first place, and have since become agents in their own right. Internet Governance is a non-linear process that follows its own logic. The goal of this research project is to elucidate this process.

## Keywords

- Internet Governance
- Logical layer
- IETF
- W3C
- Digital History
- History of Technology
- Computational methods
- NLP
- Topic Modelling