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Inside outsiders: report for the internship at the world summit on the  
information society forum 2019 at the International Telecommunications  
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## INSIDE OUTSIDERS:

# Report for the Internship at the World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2019 at the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva, Switzerland.

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Premise and context**

Our relationship to Information and communication technologies (ICT) and how these rapidly changing technologies can alter our practices and values are a fascinating, albeit immense, topic of consideration - be it in classrooms, among friends or in public policy circles. One of the most significant international opinion-forming spaces that deals with the possibilities of ICTs for development is the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), which takes place each year at the ITU Headquarters in Geneva.

Between January and April 2019, we have undertaken an intense, fruitful and, at times, disconcerting, internship at WSIS, with the aim of proposing innovative and high quality events to a broad and attentive audience. We have operated within the newly established partnership between Geneva Tsinghua Initiative (GTI) and ITU, with an aim to fuse GTI's network, the ITU management's desire to upgrade the WSIS process, and our own fresh outlook on SDGs and ICTs into a new event track at WSIS Forum 2019.

## **1.2. Activities and scope of the sponsoring institutions**

The GTI is a novel academic enterprise concerned with furthering international cooperation between the University of Geneva, Geneva-based innovation hubs, and Chinese academic and private partners. GTI was instrumental in organizing our novel Double Master's program on Innovation, Human Development and Sustainability (MIHDS). On the other hand, the ITU is the UN agency dealing with ensuring a broader access and harmonization of ICTs networks throughout the world. The organization was first founded as the International Telegraph Union in 1865, making it one of the oldest international organizations still in existence (Pickard 2007). With its 700 employees, the international organization plays an essential role in maintaining telecommunications systems interconnections by producing and updating ICT standards and managing radio frequencies' allotments. Beyond technical duties, the ITU also hosts international events to provide a platform for the discussion of ICT-related matters of public interest – the WSIS Forum being the broader one in scope. The WSIS first gathered in 2003 in Geneva as the broad summit in the UN system to discuss global communications policy topics. Following the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the WSIS Forum has endeavoured to interweave its foundational topics of interest (defined as the WSIS Action Lines) with the SDGs.



### 1.3. Correlation between the SDGs and our internship

The Sustainable Development Goals framework is indubitably the main common denominator between GTI and ITU's interests and activities, particularly concerning the role of technology innovation in advancing SDGs. After studying the correlations between GTI and ITU processes, we defined five focal SDGs guiding our further efforts. Throughout our internship, however, the importance of some SDGs faded, to be replaced by others in light of new considerations and developments. As a result of the organizational process, for instance, the speakers we were able to secure for our panel, we have tailored the list of SDGs that we found relevant to our work. We made the links between the content of the discussions with the SDGs explicit in the Outcomes Documents we had to write, following the events. Further consideration on how the SDGs impacted our work can be found in chapters 3.1.5. and 3.2.6. Here we describe how being mindful of the SDGs shaped some of our thought process.

**SDG 4 Quality Education:** Education was a main theme during our internship. Our planned event track was entitled "ICTs for SDGs: Scaling Awareness and Education", and quality education was a topic of concern during the events we organized. For example, during the panel discussion, the panellists discussed how ensuring ethical uses of VR and AR technologies is a concern which must be tackled in classrooms. Furthermore, being university students as well as WSIS interns, we were tasked with student outreach for the Youth Track. Within our Youth Café (see below), participants, most of whom were students, were encouraged to identify skills gaps and deliberate about the democratization of education, based on their own experience and understanding of today's context.

**SDG 5 Gender Equality:** Gender imbalance is considered a key issue in ICT sectors and in international conferences, such as the WSIS Forum. Moreover, gender equality has been a guiding principle of the UN's activities and workplace practices. As we have experienced, efforts to include more women is a concern explicitly addressed in WSIS Forum (2019a) guidelines, one that we were strongly encouraged to keep in mind when planning our events. The WSIS Team's efforts to attain a gender balance among participants were notable, and events including high-level panels and thematic workshops addressed questions of gender parity and women's empowerment in ICTs. We couldn't help but notice, however, that high-level figures at the intersection of ICTs, public service and entrepreneurship were for the most part men. In this regard, we had the impression that our organizational efforts and practical application of the UN's guiding principles were limited and insufficient in the face of structural inequities within the ICT sector and the limitations of international organizations.



**SDG 13 Climate Action:** The role of ICTs in climate action was a central issue during our inception phase, as we acquainted ourselves with David Rudrauf's concept for the *Inflection: VR Climate Action* project and further questioned the potential of Virtual and Augmented Reality technologies in advancing this concern. Due to the split our group went through in relation to the Inflection project (further explained in part 4), climate action stopped being a focal point in our activities, permeating, however, the broader lines of questioning that shaped our panel discussion and Youth Café themes. Most prominently, this fed our interrogations on the tradeoffs presented by ICT policies in the domain of energy consumption, which informed our notion of VR for Sustainable Spaces and were consequently addressed by our panellists.

**SDG 10 Reduce Inequalities:** Concerning structural imbalances in ICTs sectors, the matter of closing the so-called digital divide (i.e. unequal access to ICTs worldwide), has been on the WSIS agenda since its inception (Pyati 2005) and is a matter of ongoing preoccupation at the Forum. More specifically, relating to our work in organizing the Hypertext Café, due to the fact that we could not provide travel and accommodation funds, the participants mainly came from the surrounding areas. We received feedback concerning this point, proposing that, as with the Internet Governance Youth Ambassadors Program<sup>1</sup>, some financial help could be devoted to inviting students from outside of Switzerland – – a worthwhile endeavour, which could possibly be done in conjunction with the WSIS Hackathon, taking place before the Forum's week.

**SDG 17 Partnerships:** Our panel discussion and Hypertext Café were events which relied on the notion of cross-sectoral and cross-generational discussions. In this sense, they showcase the importance of SDG 17 (Partnerships) for the achievement of the Global Goals. It must be noted, however, that SDG 17's targets and indicators—on which the progress of backfall of the goal is measured globally—gives attention to ensuring resources for capacity-building. Our internship was not primarily focused on this issue, rather it was about proposing a platform for knowledge sharing (targets 17.14 and 17.16).

As the SDGs are constructed as a holistic framework to guide sustainable development, all goals are interrelated. In this sense, we have outlined above five significant SDGs related to our internship, but all of the SDGs are relevant to our work, even if only tangentially. For example, SDG 7 is concerned with clean and affordable energy, a topic which was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.internetsociety.org/fellowship/igf-youth-ambassadors-program/>



discussed during the panel discussion we organized (chapter 3). Additionally, as we will outline further in chapter 4.4., the Forum is an opportunity to get the audience better acquainted with the SDGs logos and overall intention, more so than as a space to discuss specific measuring and monitoring indicators. As with our internship, the pertinence of specific target goals were not at the center of our concerns, rather we were more preoccupied with matters of event management.

#### **1.4. Shaping and contributing factors**

In the beginning of our internship, our intention was to design and manage a special Track within the WSIS Forum, concerned with “ICTs for SDGs: Scaling Awareness and Education”. More specifically, we came to be fascinated by the possible uses of Virtual Reality with issues of peace-building and climate change awareness raising. Our interest with this new technology arose from a workshop project we had developed in the Fall Semester of 2018. We thus took the GTI/WSIS internship as an opportunity to further this topic.

Over the course of our internship, two of our original group members refocused their attention on other projects. Following this shift in group dynamics and our adaptation to the WSIS process, our scope of interest was simultaneously broadened and refined in consideration of logistical and organizational limitations. Our goal became to promote innovative ways of thinking about the potential of specific ICTs, such as VR, in reshaping our understanding of concepts such as sustainability, equality, and expertise.

The scope of our target participants also evolved overtime. At first, we were considering the possibility of remotely inviting students from Tsinghua University to the discussion, either for the HTTP Café or in another context. Due to logistical difficulties we came to abandon the idea, which constituted one of our major disappointments. The practice of remote participation is indeed significant, not only as an effective example of intelligently leveraging ICTs for inclusion, but also for the legitimacy of the Forum, in that an event organized in Geneva, Switzerland is necessarily prohibitive for certain actors in terms of accommodation and travel expenses.

A further challenge of our internship was the outreach process. We spent a great deal of time and attention in explaining the importance of the Forum and the contribution we were hoping for as well as making sure that the logistical details were clear for the participants. For this purpose, a considerable amount of effort and time was put into understanding and defining the WSIS context for ourselves, which was not as intuitive as we could initially hope.



This dimension of our internship was arguably one of the most useful for us in terms of learning how to tailor our communication to our interlocutors. Further expansion of the WSIS Forum's audience was part of our overall internship's objectives.

### **1.5. Objectives of the internship**

In preparation for the internship, we identified the following learning objectives:

1. To study benefits and specific challenges of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
2. To broaden our reflection around ICTs and international cooperation and partnerships;
3. To develop event management, teamwork, technical and organisational troubleshooting, and communication skills; and
4. To explore and network with different sectors and communities among the participants and organisers of the WSIS Forum.

As we will endeavour to demonstrate in this report, we met these learning objectives during our internship, notably through research on VR/AR technologies and serious games, as well as through identifying the potential participants of interest (1.; 2.), coordinating our events (3.), or harnessing the many networking opportunities given during the WSIS Forum week (4.).

In the present report, we will begin by describing our chosen approach for the achievement of these objectives. In particular we will propose an extensive consideration of the reasons, challenges and lessons which have animated our internship experience. In order to present a comprehensive overview of our work, we will endeavour to succinctly introduce the institutions we have operated in, namely the ITU and the WSIS. In the central segment of the report, we will examine the two main events which have constituted our output at the WSIS Forum, the panel discussion on Harnessing the Potential of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality for Sustainable Spaces, and the Youth Track's Hypertext Café, a serious game we devised. In the third part of this chapter, we will propose an overview of our efforts in coordinating and maintaining our allotment of the Exhibition Space. Subsequently, we will propose a detailed reflection on our experience, focusing on a critical review of our group dynamics among GTI/WSIS interns and WSIS team members, as well as the general frameworks of the WSIS institution and the SDGs. In the concluding segment, we will each



propose three personal statements, parsing the individual significance of the WSIS Forum internship.

## 2. Internship Overview

### 2.1.1. Work and scope of the International Telecommunication Union

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the UN agency concerned with information and communication technologies (ICTs) since 1947. The international organization was first founded in 1865 as the International Telegraph Union, an institutional entity which was, as the name indicates, developed to regulate the global telegraph usage, an area of focus which over time expanded to include all ICTs. A number of maps of telegraph networks decorating the Geneva headquarters' corridors remind passersby of this past. To carry ITU's current mandate, 700 employees work at the ITU (UN DPI 2017) in coordination with 534 sector members, including public and private telecommunications companies, scientific bodies, academic institutions, etc. (ITU List of Sector Members 2019<sup>2</sup>). Comprising ITU's Member States representatives, the governing body of the ITU is the Plenipotentiary Conference, which gathers annually to elect the institution's high level officials, first among them the ITU Secretary-General. In 2016, the ITU budget was of 175 million CHF, originating mainly from Member States contribution (ITU News 2018).

The work of the ITU is three-fold. Firstly, the radio communication sector is in charge of managing satellite orbits and the allocation of radio frequencies, which a number of devices use to work (television, mobile phones, microwaves, etc.). The second sector of ITU is standardization. Convening stakeholders in study groups, standards (or "Recommendations" in ITU terminology) are developed in order to ensure the interconnectedness of global communication networks, such as the Internet. (Every year, ITU study groups write or edit more than 150 standards (ITU 2019))<sup>3</sup>. Finally, the third area of ITU's interest is development. ITU elaborates projects and seminars to ensure the broader access to ICTs worldwide (ITU n.d.). Aside from member-only events and discussions, the ITU also hosts workshops and conferences for a larger audience. The two main ones are currently the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Process, first proposed in 1998, and the AI For Good Summit - created in 2017; both are held in Geneva. The stated reason for WSIS was and remains "to achieve a common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-

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<sup>2</sup> The List of sector members can be found here: <https://www.itu.int/online/mm/scripts/gensel11> [Last accessed 6 June 2019].

<sup>3</sup> For example, the JPEG formats are standards for digital compression developed by a committee convened by ITU in collaboration with two other IOs (JPEG n.d.).



centric, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information” (WSIS 2003b: 1). The convening of WSIS was also a way for ITU’s proponents to center the institution in global communications policy discussions and give it a new relevance (Pyati 2005; Pickard 2007). Historically, WSIS took place in two phases, the first one was held in Geneva in 2003 and the second act occurred in Tunis in 2005. Our internship was hosted by the WSIS Forum, which constitutes the follow-up stage of the international Summit. The Forum is meant to provide an annual “platform” to further the discussion around “ICTs for Development” in alignment with the direction line set out in the two foundational documents agreed upon in phase I—*Declaration of Principles* (WSIS 2003a) and *Geneva Action Plan* (WSIS 2003b)—which are the result of debates structured by political and economic alignments and interests (Ó Siochrú 2004).

### 2.1.2. A brief genealogy of the “Information Society” concept

As Klein (2004) has appraised, the major contribution of UN summits may well be in the dissemination and definition of terms of discourse. In this sense, it is here useful to propose a brief genealogy of the term “Information Society” in order to understand the ideological context in which WSIS was born out of. The usage of the term has evolved overtime depending on the actor (and its social position and interests) referencing it. The concept of “Information Society” was first developed by academic scholars in the 1970s to account for the growing importance of information services and technologies in the economy, rather than based on manufacturing products alone (this is also sometimes referred to as the “post-industrial society”) (Ó Siochrú 2004). At first, the focus was on how the changing social realities were influenced (but not determined) by new technologies and what this interconnection would mean for future social organizations. For Ó Siochrú (2004), because ICTs were thought to be fundamentally public utilities, their political potential was considered to be about favouring decentralized and de-centralizing information-gathering and communication practices. These underlying assumptions about new technologies and their role in society first colored the scholarly reflection around the “information society”, which then changed as it was used by policy-makers in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1994 the report on “Europe and the global information society” (CEC 1994) was published at the request of the European Commission. The recommendations to the EU member states were to reduce or eliminate regulations on the telecommunications private sector. The European Commission thus aligned its proposals with the growing global neoliberal paradigm, which consists of measures of “privatization, deregulation, liberalization, and globalization of markets” (Pickard 2007: 12). In this pro-corporate Information Society



doctrine<sup>4</sup>, technology innovation was viewed as the panacea to solve social problems and the role of governments and regulating international bodies, such as ITU, was thus to help corporations further privatize and liberalize the telecommunication sector worldwide. Furthermore, great emphasis was and still is put on access to ICTs more so than participation in communication processes, a preeminence also found in the *WSIS Declaration of Principles* (2003a). Even though in policy debates on the Information Society the two are often thought of as synonymous, communication scholar Pasquali (2003) argues that they are not mutually reinforcing phenomena, in that participation is understood to be a democratic creative exercise, whereas access<sup>5</sup> predominantly relies on infrastructure and regulation, and does not entail reciprocity between the ones producing the messages and those receiving it.

In other words, the concept of “Information Society” has changed meaning since its first employment in academic circles in the 1970s. We proposed this brief and non-exhaustive unpacking of the ideological undertones in order to briefly historize the event. As we interrogated the purpose of WSIS, we found that, in comparison with other UN-sponsored conferences such as NWICO (New World Information and Communication Order), WSIS was not intended as a radical political space to challenge the neoliberal telecommunications paradigm, proposed by pro-market institutions, which were private and state-led (e.g. the European Commission). This overarching initial vision of the first segment of the WSIS was crucial in delineating the direction and limits for the Summit’s follow-up.

According to scholar and activist Ó Siochrú (2004), during the preparatory meetings for WSIS phase I, the stakeholders present—which were on unequal footing, putting at the disadvantage civil society actors, in terms of human resources, coordination efforts, etc. —favoured technical solutions to social and political challenges discussed<sup>6</sup>, such as the “digital

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<sup>4</sup> It is worthy of note that “Information Society” is at times spoken to as, on the one hand, an “utopian” objective, not yet fully formed, that could be broadly defined as a society in which there is free flow of information (in policy discussions, the question then is how can this be attained?) and on the other hand describing phenomena already in motion (the challenge then being how should they be regulated?). According to Pyati (2005), this paradoxical characteristic is also found in the *WSIS Declaration* (2003a), in which the temporality of the concept pendulates depending on the passage.

<sup>5</sup> Pasquali (2003 : 214) proposes the definition of access as « exercised capacity to receive (decode, come to know, discover, investigate, demand, recover, or place in the public domain) messages of any kind. » Whereas participation is «exercised capacity to produce and transmit (generate, code, provide a vehicle for, disseminate, publish or transmit) messages of any kind. »

<sup>6</sup> Technical and political and social solutions are present on a continuum. The question is, however, the importance given to public policy questions and structural power imbalances, which in the case of WSIS discussion was particularly striking for the Internet Governance debate, in which a fundamental reconstitution of the Internet structure was not accomplished, leaving the US Department of Commerce-backed Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) still in charge of managing the Internet’s domains and protocol addresses assignments. ICANN has tended to favour Western corporate interests in their work. For more on this debate see Pickard (2007).



divide” and the Internet governance. This focus on the positive role of ICTs in the “Information Society” had for effect of proposing less radical, political solutions than other UN-sponsored global communications policy venues, such as the late New World Information and Communication Order, which took place during the 1970s and 1980s (Pickard 2007). Indeed, terminology is not neutral. Words and concepts carry with them unspoken or veiled connotations, influencing the perception of social phenomena and thus ongoing and future political action. Considering the language employed in the two foundational texts, some scholars and activists have contended that the terms and framing put forward tend to favor the status quo, in favor of corporate, Western interests (Girard and Ó Siochrú 2003; Pickard 2007). In contrast, they have argued that the “communication” dimension of ICTs—and, for that matter, the “communication rights”<sup>7</sup> related to them—should have been prioritized as well as the question of the regulation of trans-border data flows (Pickard 2007). Certainly the outcomes of the discussion held in Geneva and Tunis have deeply influenced the post-2005 WSIS process, by notably establishing the WSIS Action Lines (WSIS Stocktaking 2019), which consist of 11 themes serving as a broad-ranging agenda for the subsequent iterations of the international summit.

### 2.1.3. WSIS Forum Today

Following phase II in Tunis, the discussion was furthered during annual events, which were formalized in 2009 as the WSIS Forum in Geneva. Over the years, the scope, references and participation methods have evolved. It is interesting to note that since the beginning, participation could be either in situ or remote. An annual increase in events and participants contributed to the need for a review of the Forum’s activities and outcomes, which was undertaken at the WSIS +10 High-Level Event in 2014 and concluded in December 2015 at the WSIS +10 High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly in New York. Throughout the same year, the UN General Assembly had reviewed the WSIS process (A/70/125 2015), supporting its continuation and encouraging a closer linkage with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>8</sup>. This has then become a main feature of the WSIS Forum’s outcomes documents and session presentations. One of the characteristics that differentiates the WSIS Forum from other UN conferences is arguably the way in which the agenda is decided – namely through the Open Consultation Process (OCP). It is a process in which stakeholders, starting in July and ending in February, can suggest—either online or

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<sup>7</sup> Communication rights defined by Pickard (2007:119) as “equal access to and participation in communications infrastructure, which requires redistributed resources and other remedies inconsistent with fundamental market imperatives.”

<sup>8</sup> One can find on the ITU website a « WSIS - SDG Matrix», associating WSIS Action Lines to SDGs to make this more comprehensible: <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/> [Last accessed on 6 June 2019].



in physical meetings—themes, workshops proposals, speakers, etc. for the next WSIS Forum edition. In this sense, a level of outside participation is attained through the OCP, even though the language employed in the online form—and indeed the importance of the OCP itself—is not always easy to grasp, thus necessitating some previous know-how. We may say that the WSIS Forum is not a decision-making event, rather it is one intended to foster discussions (and networking) among actors from different professional fields (academia, private companies, ...) and to offer *opportunities* for public advocacy (Klein 2004). The Forum is hosted and predominantly coordinated by ITU, with the help of other UN agencies, such as UNESCO, UNCTAD and UNDP. The WSIS Forum is considered an “extra-budgetary” event for the ITU, meaning that the funds used to organize it do not come from the ITU budget, rather from specific contributions<sup>9</sup> from governments, private companies, academic entities, etc.

The latest iteration of the WSIS Forum took place from 8 to 12 April 2019 and was composed of four main segments. In chronological order, there was first the WSIS Hackathon happening at the ITU headquarters during the weekend prior to the forum, this year’s edition was on “#Hacking Solutions for Lifelong Learnings and Livelihoods”. The second was the Exhibition Space, taking place all week long in the underground of the ITU buildings, which showcased a number of booths held by NGOs, IOs, private companies, etc. publicizing their work. Thirdly, there were the thematic workshops—usually in the form of panel discussions—, which took place Monday, Thursday and Friday, organized either by the WSIS Team or by outside organizers, making use of the Open Consultation Process (OCP). These 300 workshops could be regrouped thematically in Tracks, for example, this year there was a novel one focused on accessibility (WSIS Forum 2019). Finally, the main segment of WSIS Forum was the High-Level Track, Tuesday and Wednesday, consisting of High-Level Panels, convening high-ranking government officials, such as telecommunication ministers, senior staff NGO representatives, university professors, etc. This track is the one given most prominence, notably by being hosted not in the ITU headquarters buildings but in the nearby, more spacious conference center<sup>10</sup>. There, the award ceremony for the WSIS photo contest also took place. Based on conversations with recurrent participants, it appears that the challenge for the continuation of the WSIS Forum lays in the wider inclusion of participants, through enhanced remote participation, for example, but also through the invitation of previously overlooked audiences. Arguably, the GTI-WSIS internship agreement was part of this broader outreach effort.

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<sup>9</sup> The monetary amount invested impacts the visibility of the actors at WSIS Forum, by, for example, ensuring access to the « High Level gala dinner » (WSIS Forum, n.d.). For a more detailed account see Annex 1.

<sup>10</sup> The Center has two large rooms with a capacity of up to 2’200 places (Cicg.ch 2019), whereas the thematic workshop rooms in the ITU had space for no more than 60 persons.



## 2.2. Students at WSIS

### 2.2.1. Tasks performed

The agreement between the ITU and the GTI mentioned the key tasks that constituted the internship positions extended to a number of MIHDS students.

These duties included the following:

- Create and organise the exclusive track **“ICTs for SDGs: Scaling Awareness and Education”** (see Concept note in Annex 2), under which the GTI students involved were divided into two branched. We were in the branch dedicated to the influence of VR/AR of the SDGs. The point was to promote the collaboration of the ITU and international organizations (IOs) realm with the GTI community.
- Under this special track, design and manage avenues of events such as panel discussions, workshops on Virtual Reality, Climate Change, Peacebuilding.
- Organizing events at WSIS Forum mean that students will be in charge of looking for, contacting and inviting panellists and other participants for the session, as well as assist other WSIS Forum events on an ad hoc basis depending on specific interests and skills.
- Showcase innovative projects from GTI and the Confucius Institute on SDGs. This part included the promotion of the SDG Solution Space, the GTI and our Master's program. It also aimed to inform about the development sphere of innovation active in Geneva.
- Brainstorm and act on promotional tools and outreach methods.
- Report the project status to ITU-WSIS team and co-ordinations tasks with other group members.
- Employ innovative methods to tackle the specific themes. It has been specified that the objective was to contribute to achieving SDGs 4 (Quality Education) 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

### 2.2.2. Timeline

We propose below a brief timeline of our internship's development, including the main marking dates, which we will make reference to throughout this report.

**3 January 2019: First meeting with Vladimir Stankovic (ITU) at the ITU.**



Our supervisor encouraged us to get acquainted with the WSIS process through the official website. Mr. Stankovic gave us the preliminary guidelines for integrating into the WSIS team. Overall, he encouraged us to reach beyond limits in presenting topics for implementation, practically giving us free reign in the conceptual development of our internship tasks.

**21 January 2019: Geneva Trialogue.**

The event partly organised by the GTI exhibited among other activities, a VR workshop that was used as an inspiration to brainstorm for the panel discussion on VR/AR. It was an opportunity for us to network in the GTI, which helped us map the actors for the actual implementation of the different events we were in charge of at the WSIS Forum.

**22 January 2019: First ITU meeting with the WSIS process 2019 team (ITU).**

We were informed that the deadline for the Open Consultation Process (OCP) was 10 February. Due to communication issues, we mistook this for the registration deadline. This miscommunication resulted in frantic attempts to secure participants and speakers, with all of the GTI interns rushing through their concept development and outreach strategies. The issue was resolved at an anterior meeting but in some ways, shaped the direction we took conceptually, due to the communication we had already initiated with potential participants.

**4 February 2019: Start of ITU weekly meeting on Mondays at 10am with the GTI-ITU interns followed by meeting with WSIS 2019 team at ITU at 11am.**

As the GTI-WSIS team, we talked about ideas on how to translate Geneva Trialogue to WSIS and we brainstormed our own Track Structure idea. Subsequently, we met with Gitanjali Shah at ITU headquarters, where she informed us about the actual process of the WSIS event, by explaining to us the concept of the Open Consultation Process (OCP). She also requested that we organise the Youth Track for university students and introduced us to the Cloud Café, a previous edition of the Youth Track. Gitanjali exhorted us to create something new and innovative, promising support for a variety of ideas, including controversial ones. She asked us to suggest a concept note with proposals of this session as soon as possible.

**10 February 2019: Deadline to submit an entry in the Open Consultation Process (OCP).**

The OCP gives the opportunity to non-WSIS Forum team members to propose themes, panellists and High Level Facilitators to include in the event. In addition, a spot in the Exhibition Space can be requested. Following the 10 February deadline, the results of the



OCP are processed and quantified and are made available for open access through the WSIS website.

### **23 February 2019: Meeting with François Grey (GTI).**

It was suggested that we could ask Armelle Choplin to present her mapping initiative. Other people to contact were mentioned: Open Fiesta, Eye Center, Unleash, SDG Goalkeepers, etc. At this point of the internship we were looking at organizing more than two events, with strong linkages with GTI's Chinese innovation hubs. Weekly meetings with Mr. Grey were an important staple of our internship's development, especially in the beginning, in that they gave us concrete organizational support and possible contacts.

### **18 March 2019: Weekly meeting & First visit of the Exhibition Space (ITU).**

Leading up to the Forum, we had the chance to acquaint ourselves with the area in the ITU Headquarters that would make up the Exhibition Space. The space is a point of passage among a number of large conference rooms, that were allocated to WSIS events during the week. We dedicated our Sunday to setting up the GTI booth. The Exhibition Space is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.3.

### **22-24 March 2019: IAM Barcelona.**

We spent the weekend in Barcelona, for a conference organised by an alternative think-tank, consultancy and community, called IAM. An element explored during the conference with a bearing on our concept development was the horizontal, non-discriminative, multilateral interactivity of the workshops we attended. This factor along with the conference's "future thinking" model inspired us for the Youth Café that our ITU management requested us to organize. As such, we now consider this experience as a crucial source of inspiration for our endeavours within the internship. This event's importance will be discussed further in chapter 3.2.

### **31 March - 7 April 2019: Preparation for WSIS Forum 2019 at ITU, SDG Solution Space, and other campuses.**

We concretely prepared the Hypertext café, designed and printed the cards and the table tags, and promoted it among our coursemates, recruiting active participants to take on the roles of moderators, note-takers and discussion leaders. We visited the campuses of the University of Geneva, University of Lausanne, EPFL and HEAD to put up the posters we designed for the VR Panel and the Hypertext Café. Throughout the week, we prepared the events with Stephanie Chuah and Alex Mackey, students in our master's program and the moderators of respectively the HTTP Café and the panel discussion.



### **8-12 April 2019: WSIS Forum week at the ITU headquarters.**

The panel discussion we organized took place on Monday, 8 April 2019 and the Hypertext Café ensued at the end of the week on Friday, 12 April, over lunch. Throughout the week, we helped manage the GTI Exhibition Space, interacting with curious visitors and promoting our events among other participants. At the end of the week, we prepared official outcome documents for each of our events and debriefed with our management and the rest of the WSIS team.

## **3. Events organisation**

Being part of the WSIS event organising team, our role was to design and organise events. The following part of the report will describe and analyse our performance as a team from the design, and the organisation to the actual implementation of those events. We came to coordinate three segments at WSIS Forum 2019, firstly, a panel discussion on the potential of VR/AR, which took place on Monday, 8 April. Secondly, we planned, as part of the Youth Track, the Hypertext Café aimed at providing a space for university students interested in the social and political dimension of ICTs. Thirdly, we managed a part of the Exhibition Space all week long, in collaboration with our fellow GTI/WSIS interns, striving to give the opportunity to showcase the work of IHDS master students and of our panels' invitees.

### **3.1. VR/AR Panel Discussion**

#### **3.1.1. Stated Interest and Research Done Beforehand**

We became acquainted with Virtual Reality technology during the Fall semester 2018 when we developed the VR art exhibit prototype “Once Upon A Grain” for the Workshop Measuring and Monitoring Sustainable Development. The overarching theme of the course was to design an innovative project related to solving the current global sand crisis (UNEP 2019). Following a lengthy iterative process, we decided to compose a digital exhibit—comprising 12 artworks that were either designed by our group or taken from open source digital libraries—using free-to-use software to create artworks in order to raise awareness about the urgency of moving away from sand-intensive materials. This experience made us realize first-hand how new open source software are used and the relative ease with which one can develop an original VR world, with the condition of having access to VR headsets, which are still prohibitive in price. Indeed we would not have been able to complete such a project without the help of the FabLab's resources and know-how. The FabLabs are participatory spaces in which individuals are invited to model and build their own design



ideas for free using tools such as 3D printers and laser cutter as well as with knives and scissors. Many FabLabs exist throughout the world with different target audiences and resources<sup>11</sup>. One of which is present in the Solution Space at the Biotech building complex in Geneva, in which, for the most part, our master's program classes take place. This proximity allows for a continuous exchange of ideas between students and FabLab's administrators.

For the purpose of the aforementioned workshop project, we conducted preliminary research about the pertinence of using VR in sustainable development. There are a number of ongoing awareness-raising projects that use this technology, such as the ARLOOPA app, developed in partnership with WWF, to sensitize the user to the risk of disappearance of the Persian Leopard in Armenia (Smith 2017). However, VR technology is not used only for awareness-raising campaigns but also in the medical, educational and peace-building fields. Scholarly work on VR has shown the potential of using it to aid, for instance, spatial learning for children with mobility issues (Stanton et al. 2004) and for memory loss (Gouff et al. 2007), as well as learning about the impact of climate change for high school students (Markowitz et al. 2018). We were fascinated by the number, breadth and scope of the projects that were using VR. It was one of the main reasons we decided to investigate the application possibilities of VR in development issues, with an initial focus on peace-building, given that it is one of the three pillars of UN action (the other two being sustainable development and human rights).

We understand VR as being a computer-generated and computer-maintained environment (Taylor 1997: 173), in which the immersed user performs cognitive and sensorimotor activities (Fuchs 2018). The artificial environment varies greatly in content; it may be completely or partially imaginary and/or incorporating simulations of real-life landscapes and persons, e.g. using images taken with 360° cameras<sup>12</sup> (2018). VR is separate from Augmented Reality (AR) and Mixed Reality (MR), in which a virtual layer is added on the real-world view with the help of a digital interface (commonly a smartphone). The distinction between AR and MR has evolved through time and the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. As Fuchs (2018) has noted, from the standpoint of the user there is no continuum between VR and AR/MR because, in the first instance, they are immersed in an artificial environment, whereas in the other two cases, they are still able to perceive the non-digital world around them.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.fablabs.io> [Last accessed on 29 July 2019].

<sup>12</sup> A notable example of such an effort is the « 360° Syria by Amnesty International » (<http://www.360syria.com/intro>) [Last accessed on 28 July 2019].



VR technology was first researched for flight simulation and was further developed for wider commercial reach by the late 1980s (Chesher 1994). Early considerations of what VR could be and what it entailed for users have been found in science-fiction novels, first among them was « Neuromancer » by William Gibson (2016 [1984]), in which the protagonist was able to « jack in » (or immerse himself in) cyberspace, a neologism to indicate a « graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system » (2016 [1984]: 59). VR has since captivated the imagination of many and spurred on a plurality of discourses comprising technical, academic and journalistic writings, various art forms—chief among them science-fiction—and VR application projects (Taylor 1997). These discourses have influenced economic conjectures of the VR field. Indeed the prediction of the upcoming « VR revolution » (which has yet to occur) is still being relayed in many media outlets (Klepek 2017; Rogers 2019; Pheby 2018). A major factor impeding the wider commerciability of VR are the prices of the headsets—which have over time diminished with increasing firms investing in the technology—and the limited amount of content, may it be films, video games, etc., one can experience in VR (Klepek 2017).

As Chesher (1994) has discussed, the wide promotion of VR as a paradigm shift-inducing technology is not solely due to the quality of the immersion provided by the hardware and software employed. Proponents of VR have tapped into existing myths and cultural tropes to introduce this at-first marginal technology into the mainstream. « What unites [discourses of VR] is an expansionist tendency : the wish to find, to occupy, to produce, and to utilize new spaces », considered Taylor (1997: 189). A tendency that can be found, according to him, in a wide range of practices. For example, in literature and other artistic endeavours, such as the preservation of at-risk cultural artefacts by virtualizing them, but also concerning the military, which seeks to control spaces and their resources through the management of new virtualities, e.g. the VR battle simulation program, the “Dismounted Soldier Training System” (US Army 2012). However, Taylor (1997) warns us that due to the diversity of VR applications not one overarching theme can be found in the narratives employed. Indeed, discussions about VR have a strong cultural dimension to them that go beyond technical considerations only. In the last years, the wider range of diffusion of this technology has brought to the forefront an increasing interest in the potential of VR experiences to generate empathy<sup>13</sup> in the viewer to a greater extent than more traditional media, such as 2D films.

The consequences of experiencing VR for changing behaviours has been subject to debate since its inception (Chesher 1994) and is still a matter of ongoing controversy. During our

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<sup>13</sup> “Empathy” defined as « the ability to view the world from another person’s perspective combined with an emotional reaction to that perspective, including feelings of concern for others » (Schutte and Stilinović 2015).



research, we were at first interested in understanding in what ways and to what extent VR can be leveraged by governments, civil society organizations and international actors to reduce conflict and prevent the outbreak of violence. A number of scholars have advocated for using VR as a tool for training empathic skills (Bertrand et al. 2018), building upon peer-reviewed research demonstrating that in controlled environments, an audience shown a documentary in VR will be comparatively more engaged and empathic for the protagonist of the film than the control group, who watched it on a two-dimensional screen (Schutte and Stilinović 2015; Hasler et al. 2014). VR could be a way to, in the words of VR film director Chris Milk, “create the ultimate empathy machine” (2015), by allowing the viewers to, as the saying goes, “walk in the other person's shoes”. This argument has not, however, gone unchallenged. Psychology professor and Atlantic contributor, Paul Bloom noted that (2017) what can be experienced in VR is limited by time, the physical environment the participant is immersed in (grasped primarily through sight and sound) and the willing involvement in it. Furthermore, he questioned whether empathy was the most useful vector for change considering how social dispositions influence whom we feel charitable to. This reflection on empathy was fundamental to our work as we did not wish to use sensationalistic phrasing to advertise our panel discussion in order to adequately frame the scope of the discussion.

The WSIS Forum has already looked at discussing potential applications of VR technology in development. In particular, a track on « Virtual Reality for SDGs » was organized during the 2017 and 2018 WSIS Forums with the support of WSIS Partner World VR Forum, an international non profit organization producing immersive films and hosting an annual VR industry festival. The Track was mainly comprised of demonstrations and visualization of VR documentaries. Questions of peace-building and climate change mitigation were, however, not at the forefront of these events. Perhaps these issues are too politicized to be tackled comprehensively by an organization such as the World VR Forum, whose main goal is for VR to break into the commercial art world, with a focus on international festivals and markets. Alternatively, there may be a lack of accomplished projects approaching these themes. The World VR Forum's closest link to sustainability resides in their interest for cultural preservation. For this year's WSIS Forum, World VR Forum curated a panel entitled “Virtual Reality : enhancing, developing and protecting culture”, with one of the speakers, Lena Herzog, presenting a three-part VR installation meant to raise awareness about the rapid extinction of linguistic diversity. We can imagine that once projects such as *Inflection: VR for Climate Action* are past their inception phase, the World VR Forum will be more active in fusing these dimensions of awareness raising into their areas of focus.



### 3.1.2. Process of reaching out to potential panellists

The panel discussion was intended as an event in which actors who do not belong to the same social and professional circles could discuss and exchange thoughts and insights on VR as a storytelling medium, the technical implications of its usage and the potential for growth in its applications. For this reason, we were intent on inviting people with different approaches to VR technology, including actors who would not necessarily be accustomed to these kinds of venues and UN-related gatherings. In early February, we regrouped a list of 97 potential participants, stating their institution affiliation, their relevance as it related to VR, our potential point of contact, and email address found either through public online access or through prior correspondence. The email template we wrote for these invitations can be found in Annex 3.

The list of potential participants was composed of 37 academic staff and university students 28 private actors, 14 independent artists or museum-affiliated individuals, eight International Organizations representatives, nine employees of NGOs and social start-ups and one politician. In terms of geographical location of the potential discussants, a vast majority were based in Switzerland (40), mainly from Geneva and Lausanne<sup>14</sup>. This was a partially conscious choice on our side, given that we could not reimburse their travel and accommodation fees. Overall, the first round of email invitations was quite unsuccessful. As posteriorly discussed with one of the participants, as well as François Grey, this could have been due to us contacting, for the most part, people outside of our network. We surmise that since our prospective activities were not yet clearly defined, the emails were not informative enough to spark a genuine interest in the readers. In the end, out of the 97 people on our initial list, only two professionals attended our panel at WSIS (Touradj Ebrahimi and Marc Lee); two panellists were part of the *Inflection: VR Climate Action* Project (Jennah Kriebel and Yvain Tisserand) and were thus aware of the internship's framework and two other discussants were recommended to us either by another discussant (Stephanie Mermet) or our supervisor (Salar Shahna, CEO of World VR Forum). Three out of six participants had already attended the WSIS Forum in the past years.

We formatted the standard invitation email provided to us by our supervisors to make it shorter and thus more forthright. The information within it presented the WSIS Forum, a brief description of the Track « ICTs for SDGs » and partnership with UNIGE, in the context of the GTI-WSIS Team agreement and a link to fill out the Open Consultation Process (OCP). We

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<sup>14</sup> Other locations included France (15), United States (14), China (4), Great Britain (4), Georgia (2), Holland (2), Germany (2), Cyprus (1), Iran (1). For some their places of residence was not stated on their online profiles.



made sure to add a line tailored to the potential invitees work. Beginning of February we believed that the OCP deadline (10 February) was the closing date for the panellists invitations as well. Given our confusion, we thus sent almost all the invitations before 10 February (see invitation to contribute to the OCP in Annex 4), having believed that it would not be possible to invite active participants past this time limit. This misunderstanding unnecessarily rushed our efforts and showcased our lack of knowledge of the WSIS process that could have been remedied by closer contact with the ITU staff. We sent all our emails with our student UNIGE address (@etu.unige.ch), including an electronic signature provided by our supervisors. It is reasonable to believe that some potential panellists may have disregarded our invitation because they received it through a university-affiliated email address and not by one from the ITU (@itu.org), especially for those who did not have prior contact with the WSIS process and may have thus looked for clues authenticating the institution affiliation of the sender.

Social media was another medium through which we attempted to invite people as panellists. Namely, as our research at first was centered around the linkages between peacebuilding and Virtual Reality, we came across several very interested profiles all of which we contacted. When their email addresses were not accessible, we tried to find them on other networks. This is where LinkedIn served most. For instance, we contacted a specialists of engaging community for peacebuilding and working actively with emerging technologies to do so in at risk areas of the world. We contacted him on his LinkedIn profile, when then started a conversation leading to a phone call, where he expressed his interest in our work and in the event itself. The endeavor finally diverged when we decided to step out of the peacebuilding-focused mindset, and take a broader turn.

Our research did not limit itself to only online resources. In parallel to sending the invitations, we went to Basel to assist to the vernissage of the multimedia exhibition « Give and Take »<sup>15</sup> presented by the Critical Media Lab, which incorporated a VR installation centered around making the participant aware and emotionally invested in the dangers of climate change. The installation consisted of two segments: first, a VR experience in which the viewer was immersed in a garden, their breath visualized with bubbles, while instrumental music played through headphones. The second part was comprised of multiple video projections of urban sites, meant to invoke, through the comparison with the VR piece, different perceptions of scale and relations to the environment. Even though we did not invite them to showcase their projects to the WSIS Forum, as it was more intended as a prototype-like project, we appreciated that, as it came to VR, there is a creative coalescing of artistic work with

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ixdm.ch/give-and-take/> [Last accessed on 16 August 2019].



awareness-raising endeavours about perilous social phenomena, such as climate change and we left convinced that VR lends itself well to experimentation and to multidisciplinary ways of thinking. The possibility for VR's audiences to perceive, in a short amount of time, multiple spaces, widely contrasting in scale, influenced our understanding of the novelty of this technology in relation to our imagined panel discussion's outcomes.

### 3.1.3. Choice of the panel format

The task we were further imparted with was to research potential suitable panellists to invite to the WSIS Forum, and to craft the format of the discussion. Pierre Bourdieu (1996) has proposed an analysis of the social logics at play in producing and moderating television shows and the ways in which debates and critical reflection are constrained by the rules of the game. One such mechanism may be when the moderator points out that the time is running out in order to expedite an invitee's argument. Considering television debates in particular, he notes that the work of inviting potential discussants is a determining factor in making the show. The social conditions of producing a TV program are rendered impalpable by the existence of the show itself. Said differently, when we tune in a TV show we rarely think of whom else could have been invited to be present and to talk.

To a certain extent then we may say that the organization of our WSIS Forum panel discussion can be compared with debates taking place on television sets, especially when it comes to the invisible labour of invitation and choosing the format of the panel. Our internship allowed us to acquaint ourselves with the intricacies of this work done behind the scenes, especially in how who accepted or not our invitation influenced the direction of the panel itself. For example, given that we had already two university professors, by the end of February, we were trying to secure representatives of the commercial and non profit sectors. A substantial amount of our work went into curating a platform that would be balanced in its representation of the various actors in the VR/AR landscape and thus conducive to a cross-sectoral dialogue.

Given one of our team member's involvement with the *Inflection: VR Climate Action* project we decided to expand the scope of our initial focus to include the topic of climate action and the ways in which VR may help to make the threat of « climate apartheid » (OHCHR 2019: 14) comprehensible to the audience viewing the original VR game set in Geneva. Pending the advancement of the game's development, we considered the possibility of showcasing it during the panel or in parallel of discussion. In this sense, the Exhibition Space was an extension of the panel discussion as it was part of the Track we were organizing at WSIS.



Our teammate was intent on relaying at first the advancement of our panel's organization and to invite David Rudrauf to participate, as he was in charge of the project and could speak from experience about the topic. Furthermore, in view of the fact that the participants that had agreed to our invitation by the beginning of March (Touradj Ebrahimi and Marc Lee) were not directly involved with VR as it related to conflict resolution specifically, the peace-building focus was gradually lessened. We gravitated toward the question of the continuum of virtual and real spaces, and more precisely how can a virtual, computer-generated space have an impact on physical spaces? For example, the above discussed question of empathy training relates to the issue of long-lasting effects of VR in changing social interactions. The significance of space in VR project development was one of the recurring themes of our research and a common topic of the discussants' work. After some deliberations, we decided to entitle our panel : « Harnessing VR/AR's Potential for Sustainable Spaces ».

A week before the panel, World VR Forum CEO agreed to participate in the discussion. Soon later in the day, David Rudrauf informed us that he could not attend, having a class at that time, but proposing to invite another researcher knowledgeable about the VR Climate Action project. These two unexpected developments made us ponder the gender balance of our event. In an email sent prior to the forum, the WSIS Team had encouraged the workshops' organizers «to strive for 50:50 gender balance for the panellists and ensure that both women and men are represented in the panellists » (WSIS Forum a 2019: 2). We decided that since there already was one person involved with the *Inflection: VR Climate Action* project, namely Jennah Kriebel, not to extend the invitation to the suggested researcher meant to replace David Rudrauf. We contacted the latter by phone to explain our conundrum and the outcome of our discussion. After further consideration, we decided to allow for a 10-minute presentation of the project to take place at the beginning of the event. The panel discussion would follow for approximately 50 minutes and would be followed by 30 minutes allotted to the audience to ask questions and offer comments.

It is clear that the question of gender balance among discussants influenced the structure of our panel. In retrospect, we should have sought to make this one of the main concerns when considering who to invite, knowing that women are underrepresented in ICT studies and fields (Vitores and Gil-Juárez 2015). In addition, we could have built a closer rapport with some of the panel discussants in order to make sure they would feel involved and would understand not only the practical aspects of the panel (date, time, etc.) but also the scope and context of the event. Here, our working knowledge of the VR and AR/MR field in Switzerland and beyond could have mitigated the gender imbalance of our panel. Furthermore, research shows that the gender component of organizers has a direct impact



on the presence of women as panellists at scientific and design conferences, in that the probability of having all-men panels decreases significantly if women are organizing the conference (Casadevall and Handelsman 2014; AIGA Eye on Design 2019). More insight is needed concerning the WSIS Forum to best understand the overall gender balance of the panellists and the audience as well as the time women speak during the discussions, which has been shown to be significantly less than men in design conferences, for example (AIGA Eye on Design 2019).

We were aware that a skilled moderator was required in order to mediate the different speaking styles of the panellists and to synthesise their outputs. However, we were also intent on engaging fellow students, partly in order to fall in line with our chosen philosophy of horizontal interaction, partly in order to challenge and mitigate the power dynamics that our line-up might present. As we explored potential candidates for this role, we settled on our fellow MIHDS student Alexandra Mackey, whose eloquence, quick synthetic spirit, extensive experience with initiatives such as the Model United Nations and diplomatic manners all designated her as a valuable addition to our panel. Thankfully, she was willing to take a day off her main internship to assist us after some extensive preparation on the topics broached and the backgrounds of our chosen speakers.

#### 3.1.4. Panel Discussion Questions

Following the advice of our fellow GTI/WSIS interns, we decided to structure the discussion with five open-ended queries to which all the discussants could give their input, with approximately 10 minutes reserved for each inquiry. The questions were crafted according to, firstly, the possibility of all to answer and, secondly, that they would make sense one after the other (see the questions and structure of the panel in Annex 5). The list of questions was shared with the panellists ahead of the panel in order for them to prepare and to think about how they would conceptualize “sustainable spaces” as it related to their practices with AR and VR, as we wanted to allow for a comparison between the two technologies. It ought to be mentioned that the exchanges were structured not only by the institutional venue and the questions but also by the linguistic skills of the panellists.

During the panel we were faced with unforeseen complications, which put at our test our improvisational skills. As the discussion progressed, we noticed that the panellists were answering the questions more succinctly than anticipated, which led us to alter our course of action. We decided to send the moderator live questions through the messaging app



*Whatsapp* in order to keep the conversation going, given that she had her laptop open in front of her and could inconspicuously read our suggestions. This did, however, lead to instances of miscommunication, as with the broken telephone game. For example, one of us suggested to the moderator the question: “how can we make VR be more *wisely* developed?”, but due to haste, as we were worrying about the absence of content to discuss, the message read with an erratum as “how can we make VR be more *widely* developed?”, thus encouraging the speakers to answer a question that had effectively been discussed previously. The originally intended question was nonetheless addressed at the end of the discussion, but we realized that designing questions on the spot requires unwavering concentration. As we have outlined in the introduction (1.5.), one of our internship’s objectives was to enhance our organisation troubleshooting capacities. Faced with a shortage of questions mid-panel, we were able to solve the problem in a discreet manner, exercising our capability to find innovative solutions to maintain the steady progression of the discussion. However, as is common in crisis management, we were walking a fine line over a fiasco which our typo incident alerted us of, and which we narrowly avoided.

The linguistic capacities (being able to speak in English, using proper grammar and vocabulary, proposing wider considerations about one’s work, etc.) and social ease of the various panellists were uneven. This can be explained by their cultural backgrounds, social positions (education, professional background, gender, economic and cultural capital, etc.) and also to their familiarity with these kinds of conferences, which attract a specialized audience, who may not have necessarily a technical grasp of VR and AR and consequently require an ability to make remarks understandable by the general public<sup>16</sup>. In view of the format of the session, the panellists were at least partly selected on the basis of their presumed ability to debate in public, express complex ideas in layman’s terms and, essentially, be the *image* (representative) of their respective fields of activity. Resuming our analogy with television debates, we may say that there were the professional talkers and television sets adepts (« professionnels de la parole et du plateau »), and the amateurs (Bourdieu 1996: 36), not to mean that the former category has more interesting things to say but rather that they know how to formulate their arguments according to the expectations of the moderator. We agree with Bourdieu (1996)’s consideration that, faced with an imbalance of linguistic skills among panellists, the person leading the discussion ought to be there to help non-professional talkers speak, in order to ensure that the conditions are auspicious to having the actors with less rhetorical skills say what they would like to express.

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<sup>16</sup> A more in-depth sociological understanding of the audience’s profile at the WSIS Forum 2019 should be conducted, but it is outside of the scope of this report.



In this sense, we should have taken more time with the moderator to go over the follow-up questions and possibly also organized a prior meet-and-greet for the panellists to be better acquainted in order for them to have a sense of the various discussants' topic of interests, personalities, etc.

### 3.1.5. Outcomes of the Panel and Relation with the SDGs

We were instructed from the first meeting with our supervisors to be mindful of the connection between our events, the SDGs and the WSIS Action Lines. Indeed, it was the key reason for setting up the “Harnessing VR/AR's Potential for Sustainable Spaces” panel discussion. Following the panel, we wrote an Outcomes document summarizing the discussion and highlighting the latent and explicit links to the SDGs and WSIS Action Lines - a document that had to be filled out by all workshop organizers. We were in part positively surprised by the information provided by the participants, further expanding, in our opinion, the range of possible applications of VR technology, especially in seemingly unusual settings such as emergency childcare (cf. Annex 5). Overall, we may argue that as the SDGs are conceptualized as a holistic framework for international cooperation on sustainable development, and as stipulated by SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), there is a need for cross-disciplinary debate about the challenges and pitfalls of emerging technologies for sustainable development. Our panel was an example of such an endeavour, even though it did have limited range in terms of diffusion and audience. Interestingly, by having cross-sectoral discussions, taken-for-granted definitions may be made explicit and possibly be challenged – this is precisely what is currently happening with the polysemic term of “sustainability”.

The discussion raised several links present and future with the SDGs. Firstly, the *Inflection: VR Climate Action* provided a compelling example of VR project focused on the ways in which the urgency of climate action may be made palatable to the users (SDG 13). Other dimensions of emerging technologies were also discussed. The conversation developed around three main axes, which were: what qualifies a space as sustainable? How can we ensure an ethical and democratic use of VR / AR technologies (as it relates to WSIS Action Line 10 in particular) and the energy consumption entailed by these technology, especially considering VR. Firstly, we were surprised about how the polysemy of the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable” was particularly fruitful in engaging a conversation among actors with differing professional backgrounds and cultural references. Meaning that the discussion may have been less technical than anticipated but it did give a number of openings into the many connotations an adjective such as « sustainable » brings with it. For



example, the CEO of World VR Forum, Salar Shahna understood it to be more about the duration of a particular space, in this case the VR industry, when another panellist, the artist Marc Lee considered it to be more about the capacity of being renewed, regenerated (“technology is never sustainable” he declared (WSIS Forum 2019b: 1h02)), whereas Touradj Ebrahimi, the EPFL professor questioned the pertinence of the expression altogether, proposing the alternative of “immersive experience” (WSIS Forum 2019b: 1h02) when it came to discussing AR and VR.

The second important topic of debate was the ethical uses of these emerging technologies (SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production). Mermet noted that her work is done in an institutional context, that of the hospital, and she is subject to existing ethical guidelines, a safeguard (“garde-fou”) against harmful uses of technology (WSIS Forum 2019b: 0h47). Other industries which have developed VR products are, however, not as transparent in their instructions, specifically private technology companies and the military (SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). In this sense, a panellist noted, education and ICT literacy is a principal manner to ensure responsible development and diffusion of emerging ICTs (SDG 4: Quality Education). Finally, the energy usage of VR and AR was interrogated (SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy). Basing herself on her project, Mermet indicated that the assessment of VR energy cost has to also take into account the products this technology may replace, indicating that the pilot project she is conducting uses VR to focus the attention of hospitalized children to diminish their distress, thus avoiding pain-lessening pharmaceuticals (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being). The panel discussion, in this regard, was a circumstance that disseminated more information about VR and AR than we had anticipated through our research as it related to framings of sustainability, ethical uses of VR and energy consumption of new technologies.

In addition, one of the main novel dimensions of VR considered was its visualization potential of abstract concepts (of social networks, for example, in the case of the artwork « 10'000 Cities: Same but Different»<sup>17</sup>) or hard-to-fathom ongoing perilous socio-environmental phenomena, such as climate change (e.g. *Inflection: VR Climate Action*). As Touradj Ebrahimi explained, VR and AR participate of a growing trend in imaging—which regroups technologies such as holography, light field, etc.—concerned with increased immersion and virtualization, in which non-digital objects are replaced or simulated with the use of bits, rather than atoms (WSIS Forum 2019b). In this sense, further investigation of virtualization as it concerns SDGs-related questions, such as energy consumption,

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<sup>17</sup> <http://marclee.io/en/10-000-moving-cities-same-but-different/> [Last accessed on 16 August 2019].



deepening the digital divide, etc. is to be encouraged as well as the ways in which a system of measuring and monitoring these changes can be effectively implemented – post-2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The discussion we organized provided informative outcomes, which we summarized in the outcomes document and shared with our supervisors, which can be found in Annex 6. The expert remarks of the panellists expanded our understanding of the new technologies at hand in relation to the challenges in developing less profit-based VR and AR content as well as grasping the extent of future trend in immersive ICTs. The Panel Discussion consisted in one of our two major internship's outputs, the other one being the Hypertext Café, which took place at the end of the WSIS Forum. Even though the two events had distinctive formats and different outcomes in terms of relations made with the SDGs, we did find similarities in the organization process. The main one being the attention to the pace of the discussions, which was achieved in both instances by careful selection of the moderators and by attention to the questions. In comparison with the panel discussion, we approached the HTTP Café as more of an experimental task, given that we tested a serious game prototype. An explanation of our efforts in organizing the Friday event is hereafter proposed.



View from the audience of the panel discussion we organized at WSIS Forum 2019. Photo credits: Hanaé Taxis.



### 3.2. HTTP Café

The WSIS Team is intent on involving a maximum of young people around the topics of ICTs and development and it has devoted a specific track, the Youth Track, to concentrate its efforts of outreach to this demographic. Last year's edition of the WSIS Forum featured the newly created Youth Café event, branded as the "Cloud Café", in which young people were invited to have roundtable discussions with UN professionals.

During a meeting about our role in the WSIS Forum with our supervisor Gitanjali Shah on 14 April, she requested that we imagine, based on the previous year's Cloud Café, a way to involve university students to discuss topics around ICTs and development. Gitanjali strongly believed that the Café could be a lively platform for forthright debate. In effect, we would continue the newly created tradition of the WSIS Cloud Café. The concept was that of a meetup between youth, students and professionals in the realm of the United Nations, meant to give a space for participants to voice their opinions, concerns and interrogations about any topic that might be related to their future in the job market in regard to the development of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs).

With this vision of the Café in mind, we were able to build something new on its existing foundation and produce a successful, invigorating event. Discussions about the social and political implications of technological advances cut to the heart of the matter and the frank way in which they unfolded indicated a propitious environment for horizontal exchange. We believe that the HTTP Café is our most successful endeavour at WSIS, a fruit of the significant amount of effort we put into this event's ideation, design, and outreach.

#### 3.2.1. Process and Research

Our first priority was to focus on learning from the experience of the Cloud Café. We discussed it with the staff who were involved in it the previous year, and perused the outcome document of the event available online<sup>18</sup> - in order to get a better understanding of the scope and organizational challenges of the Café.

The format of the Cloud Café 2018 served to foster discussion and an exchange of viewpoints about the UN agencies. We found out that last year, an area of focus was the issue of the job market within the sector of the UN, and the event was open to students wanting to pursue their career within this system. Essentially, the Cloud Café relied on

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<sup>18</sup>[https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2018/Files/documents/outcomes/WSISForum2018\\_ForumTrackOutcomes.pdf](https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2018/Files/documents/outcomes/WSISForum2018_ForumTrackOutcomes.pdf) [Last accessed on 17 August 2019].



mostly ITU resources and experts. As we noticed the evolution of the WSIS 2019, compared to the previous edition, towards a more multi-stakeholder vision and approach to ICTs for development, we wished the new edition of the Youth Café to incorporate as many innovative standpoints as possible to have a broader perspective towards the achievement of the SDGs. For this reason, we decided against proposing a UN-centric debate.

Our supervisors had urged us to use our own topics of interest as a basis for the Youth Café. We sought the common denominator of our interests by brainstorming and informally surveying our fellow coursemates, proceeding to define our problematic as the Digital Age's impact on young students and professionals. The goal now was to find a creative way to engage young university students from different profiles in discussing their individual perceptions of the challenges and opportunities posed by the Digital Age. This was also proposed as an opportunity for university students to voice their viewpoints about their concerns for their future on the job market.

We wanted to align this event with, arguably, the primary focus of our whole internship, which was the theme of "Education for achieving the SDGs". In terms of innovative, sustainability-focused education, the best common framework of reference we had at hand was, of course, the MIHDS program. So we searched for a pedagogical approach towards organizing the Cloud Café, basing ourselves on our master's courses, which have accustomed us to horizontally-led group work and hands-on learning.

Another interrogation was raised when thinking about the Youth. Who is the youth? Gitanjali Shah requested us to focus on university students, considering our status at the University of Geneva, but we still debated on the actual significance of Youth as a target group. This question will be further discussed in chapters 3.2.4 and 4.2.

A decisive circumstance that greatly helped us shape what became the Hypertext (HTTP) Café was the IAM Barcelona conference we attended in March. This year's research theme was "The Quantumness of Archipelagos: A proposal to design & imagine alternative tomorrows using the internet(s)", based on the exploration of "internet cultures and the influence of digital technologies in the futures of citizens and the Planet"<sup>19</sup>. We were very attracted by the concept and the underlying idea of the quest for independence, democratization and alternative practices within ICT usage. It was rewarding in terms of connections we made there, and it very much participated in the development of what we wanted to implement at the WSIS Forum. We participated in a series of workshops and

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.internetagemedia.com/> [Last accessed on 10 July 2019].



conferences on the future of the internet society. For instance, the workshop “Hacking Europe” organised by the consultancy FFWD<sup>20</sup>, pushed participants to anticipate future scenarios, “what might happen, uncharted territories that explore disrupting business as usual”<sup>21</sup>. This set the course for the Hypertext Café as a collaborative exploration of the Digital Age. With all of these notions in mind, we set out to design a concrete product.

### 3.2.2. Concept and Fil rouge

First, we attempted to find a general theme that would be the “fil rouge” of the whole session. How could university students relate the most to the topic of the Digital Age and their individual careers? We not only wanted to find attractive imagery, like the “Cloud Café” did, but also wanted it to meet the trends and interests of the generation. Knowing that the Internet celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday just a month before the WSIS Forum 2019, we thought it would be the opportunity to pay homage to the World Wide Web by incorporating some of its terminology in our game. We also wanted the fil rouge to encompass the idea that the session is free and flexible with regards to the topics at hand. As a result, we decided to reference the “Hypertext”, which we thought creatively aligned with the concept of the event.



Hypertext Café poster, which we designed.

The Hypertext Transfer Protocol (also known as HTTP) is “an application protocol for distributed, collaborative, hypermedia information systems”<sup>22</sup>. It standardizes requests and messages between computers and servers. It was created at CERN in 1989. As the basis of data communication for the Internet, hypertext documents contain hyperlinks that allow the use to easily access other resources. In that way, the hypertext protocol facilitates and enables the linkages between different resources, for a better user experience. In so doing, it also develops new relations between the sources, vector of creation itself. Thus, the choice of the event’s name was a reference to the infrastructure of the Internet, structured through domains and protocols (HTTP being one of them).

<sup>20</sup> <https://ffwd.is/> [Last accessed on 10 July 2019].

<sup>21</sup> <https://ffwd.is/futures-thinking/> [Last accessed on 10 July 2019].

<sup>22</sup> <https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc2616> [Last accessed on 17 August 2019].



Being that the Internet governance constitutes one of the topics of the WSIS process, we believed the name would echo meaningfully with our host institution's sphere of interest.

Furthermore, while discussing between ourselves, we found that the hypertext concept was an interesting image for the session we wanted to create. Creating linkages between topics and ideas and unraveling the complexities and interrelatedness of every single topic of the Digital Age, was, for us, key to the understanding of our future as young students today.

The aim of the Hypertext Café is to brainstorm about different viewpoints, without any specific objective to it, apart from potentially coming up with ideas that could find a certain reality. By signing up on our concept of Hypertext Café, we then created communication materials ourselves. This branding then was applied to the communication means we chose – namely posters, flyers, social media etc.

Of course, the Cloud Café served as a basis to construct our format. As mentioned, our WSIS supervisor asked of us that the session remains a “café” at lunchtime, designed eventually as an informal meetup or gathering rather than a formal talk. Last year, the Cloud Café constituted of different tables, with six to eight people per table<sup>23</sup>, where students were able to meet and discuss mainly with ITU experts.

On our side, our aim here was to shift from this expert-to-student learning experience towards a more peer-to-peer sharing and learning experience. For us, this did not mean to undermine the presence of invited professionals we invite at all, on the contrary. The purpose is to create a deepened associative learning, where the invited professionals would learn as much as the students themselves. In that context, we consider no one as an “expert” per se. In the world today, it is important to view the individuals with personal views and standpoints, that each attempt to uncover the complexities of the Digital Age. Hence, the objective of the professionals would be to give insights on their experiences and past learnings in the professional world. This is not only because the students need to be able to be informed about the world in order to choose the right career path, but it is more about giving them the tools for them to make decisions in their lives that would represent a dire change in perspective in the future.

The point was to let the students themselves decide on the topics of discussion during the Café, for it to be as inclusive as possible. Hence, we created a Google Form where we collected the different topics. The form was created in partnership with the other intern group on e-learning, which preceded the Café on the same day, and which was part of the Youth

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<sup>23</sup>[https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2018/Files/documents/outcomes/WSISForum2018\\_ForumTrackOutcomes.pdf](https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2018/Files/documents/outcomes/WSISForum2018_ForumTrackOutcomes.pdf) [Last Accessed on 11 August 2019].



Track that we represented as university students. We proposed some pre-designed topics, but we also let the students suggest their own ideas. This form was advertised within the communication material of the event.

### 3.2.3 Professional contacts

Considering interesting professionals that would meet the format of our Café, we tried to first look inside our own organisation, the Geneva Tsinghua Initiative (GTI), and the contacts that it may lead us to. François Grey, the director of GTI, put us in contact with professionals who had conducted workshops in the past and could thus offer useful insights into organizing such an exercise. We realized how much GTI's network facilitated the process as we looked into the people we had met since the beginning of our master's program. We started by inviting Thomas Maillart, invested in the MIHDS, a specialist in structure and dynamics for social interactions in virtual and physical worlds<sup>24</sup>. Further exploring our network, we met with Ahmed Riad, pursuing a Ph.D. in collaboration with GTI while working for the newly established AI for Good event, an ITU-hosted conference. We found his work experience very fitting for our Café, and he expressed his high interest in helping us build this new environment inside the WSIS.

On ITU's side of the partnership, Gitanjali Shah ensured to support us if we needed professionals to participate in our Hypertext Café. She passed along the contact details Jasmina Byrne, Chief of the UNICEF Policy Lab, and ICANN's Vera Major. In addition, thanks to our student network, we had the chance to get in contact with Janet Shaner, an expert in learning, networking and organisations, as well as a workshop facilitator. Meeting her was a great pleasure as she regarded our concept and format with real potential and offered valuable insights and efforts in going forward in the implementation. As we searched for amenable professionals to attend the HTTP Café, we were surprised at the disposition of IO's insiders to take part in our event and it made us consider, then, the lack of such youth-led contributions in international conferences.

We also tried to get in touch with the people we knew and had already invited to our Monday event on VR and sustainable spaces. Following our panel, we further discussed our involvement in WSIS with EPFL professor, Touradj Ebrahimi, one of our panel speakers and JPEG convener, who expressed an interest in attending the Hypertext Café as a participant.

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<sup>24</sup><https://www.unige.ch/gsem/fr/recherche/corps-professoral/tous/thomas-maillart/> [Last accessed on 12 July 2019].



During the Café, he was actively involved and offered an interesting perspective on the shaping of our perceptions in the Digital Age, as he gave an impromptu demonstration of how the JPEG Pleno format will ubiquitously transform digital imaging on screens. Interestingly, he showcased this new technology by taking a selfie on his smartphone, much to the delight of participating students.

#### 3.2.4. Event promotion to the “Youth”

From the beginning of the Café’s organization, our supervisor’s made clear their wish to have 70-100 students in attendance. For this reason, we knew that the outreach effort would be more consequential than for the panel discussion. However, we did question the prioritization of quantity over quality. A further step has been to promote the event itself to our target group. This was possibly the most challenging part of the organization process. Even though we would have wanted to have students from a variety of backgrounds and stories, our time constraints and outreach possibilities have caused us to mainly reach out to local university students, in Geneva. Conveniently, our fellow GTI/WSIS interns, organised a hackathon-styled event on the same day and in the same quarters as the Café. As our event immediately followed theirs and offered free lunch, it was surmised that many of the participants would hang around and participate in the Café.

Our outreach effort started with establishing an online presence. We composed a short text for social media (cf. Annex 7) introducing the event, indicating the time and location and containing the registration link. This was circulated on social media via our diverse contacts – in France (Paris and Lille), and elsewhere in Switzerland (French and German-speaking parts), as well as through the ITU social media accounts.

True to our mission of merging digital and concrete spaces, we tried to be as physically and actively involved in the promotion as possible. We designed an original poster, meant to demarcate itself from the habitual, oftentimes laconic visual branding of UN events. We printed out 30 copies and dispatched them around the campuses in Geneva and elsewhere. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, we went to the EPFL campus in Lausanne, where we displayed our posters on promotion boards for local events. We put them up all the different campuses of the University of Geneva, including Uni-Mail, Carl-Vogt. We also went to the Graduate Institute for International Affairs and Development where we thought students would be the most interested.



We printed out flyers, that we handed out and left in key on-campus points, such as cafeterias, libraries and common areas. At the University of Geneva, we selected a few classes that had a link with the Digital Age and emailed the professors, asking them to spread the announcement and the flyer of the event. The responses we got were mixed, with some of the professors even agreeing for us to make an announcement in person, though several also responded that they never promote external events to their students.

For all the efforts we put into advertising for our event, we deem that the promotion and communication campaign we held was not sufficient to attract the 70-100 people we were initially required to host by our supervisors. In our opinion, this could be due to our lack of experience in utilizing academic network for promotion, a lack of “brand recognition” of the WSIS, as well as the somewhat unorthodox format of the event and cryptic content of our flyers. Nevertheless, we hoped that these two features would actually serve to intrigue prospective participants who would have a more intuitive attraction to our activity. Arguably, even though we did not reach the objective of attendees, the smaller audience was perhaps better fitted for a prototype game such as the HTTP Café, given the time limitations for the event, as well as the unusual and nuanced set-up for the discussions.

### 3.2.5 Format and Program

Then, we had to come up with a proper format for the Café. After hours of brainstorming, we came up with the idea of a game-like session, where students would be disposed on 5 different roundtables, each linked to a broad theme. The topics were chosen on the basis of responses from other students to a survey we circulated, gauging the interest for this type of event, as well as insights of our own. We assigned each of the topics a hypertext status code, as a way of adding a semantic layer to the discussion without constraining it by defining its scope too narrowly. The status codes were chosen from the informational (1xx) or client error (4xx) categories, in order to playfully reflect the need for research or problem-shooting within the chosen topics. After much discussion, we settled on five many broad categories, with each their own HTTP trademark in consonance with the name of the event, these were as follows:

- **404 NOT FOUND** (Privacy, Security and Big Data, Freedom on the Internet);
- **403.9 TOO MANY USERS** (Social Networks, Connectivity);
- **103 EARLY HINTS** (Government 2.0 - Digital Rights & Democratisation);
- **426 UPDATE REQUIRED** (Capacity Building & Training);
- **429 TOO MANY REQUESTS** (The Future of work in the AI era).



Thus, the technical language of the status codes combined with fairly broad topics was meant to spark free-form association rooted in the participants' individual reading of the themes. For example, the 426 Update Required status refers to a software or program revision and we wanted to associate that with the debate around the skills gaps and training nowadays. Discussing the issue with ITU employee and AI for Good Summit representative, Mr. Riad provocatively asked if "soft skills [were] the new hard skills?" - a prospect, we were sure, which would resonate with many of the participants of the Café.

Later on, a few people contacted us to find time for some inspirational speakers to share their stories to the participants. We then had to arrange the programme in order to make them fit accordingly. Among those speakers were Jasmina Byrne from UNICEF; Stephenie Rodriguez, creator of WanderSafe; Nyree Oman, a student breaching the topic of digital skills for youth and mental health; and Ahmed Riad, of ITU and AI for Good.

We also had to choose a general moderator for the session. We first thought of one of us for this role, but we then decided that one of our classmates, Stephanie Chuah, known for her personability and ease in public speaking, would perfectly fit the environment we tried to convey.

The program of the session minute by minute was as follows:

1. Welcome; assigning participants to tables (10-15 min)
2. Inspiring introduction by general moderator (Stephanie Chuah) - presenting concept, topics, guidelines, structure (5-7 min)
3. First Brain warm-up → First project presentation (5 min, Jasmina Byrne)
4. 1st part: 30 minutes at one table (5-6 questions/issues addressed)
5. Group brief summary (5 min/ table)
6. 5 minutes for drafting learning outcomes, 5 minutes for table change
7. Second Brain warm-up → Second project presentation (5 min, Stephenie Rodriguez)
8. 2nd part: 30 minutes at other table (5-6 questions/issues addressed)
9. 5 minutes for drafting learning outcomes
10. Overall synthesis (Stephanie Chuah) + open discussion / Q&A (15-20 min)
11. Presentation of AI for Good (5 min, Ahmed Riad)
12. Conclusion and thanks (certificate distribution)

We defined specific roles to the participants beforehand.



- **1 Table moderator/facilitator per table (student):** makes sure everyone gets a chance to speak, keeps an eye on time and facilitates a dynamic flow for the conversation;
- **1 professional per table (as detailed above):** provides support for facilitator, insights, throws in ideas and answers questions/helps debate;
- **1 Note-taker per table (student):** takes notes, synthesises, writes down main ideas and questions, passes them on to technical coordinator;
- **1 General moderator/coordinator (Stephanie Chuah):** Opens and closes session, announces table changes and reminders (5 min left, etc), reads out synthesis;
- **1 General Technical coordinator:** synthesises main takeaways and thoughts from each table, projects them in a semantic cloud in real time
- **HTTP team members:** make sure everything runs smoothly, look out for requests and questions, participate in discussions if and when possible

We created 3 sets of cards - blue, red and green. The blue cards were phenomena related to the topic of the Digital Age and new technologies today - it could have been anything really, from Big data to the universal basic income. The red cards represent various stakeholders and actors related to those elements, like the governments, the private sector, hospitals or NGOs. Finally the green cards mark all the ICTs imaginable, like the Internet, AI or VR/AR. Those card titles can be found in the non-exhaustive list in Annex 8. We also set out the rules of the game, that we sent out to the professionals by email a week before the session (see Annex 8).

The rules were as follows:

The tables will have cards with various case studies according to the topic of the table. The point will be to interlink the keywords and link it to the personal experience of the individuals. The students will pick the case study that they want, and base their discussion on it. They can also link the keywords together and bring up issues from their own knowledge. The point of the activity is to direct the students towards the topic, but make them start a conversation on it. The professionals are instructed to offer insight when appropriate, with an eye to avoid monopolizing the conversation.

We signaled that the Menti app would be used for feedback throughout the discussions, enabling the students to do two things:

- during the discussions, anyone can send a live feed of what's happening; this can be a thought, a quote, etc. This will be shown on a screen that everyone can see.



- each team will synthesise the main takeaway from their discussion into a short statement. These statements will also be visible on the screen at the end of each session.

As part of the preparation of the Hypertext Café, we wrote a detailed script of the different steps and speeches that would shape the session. We did that to frame the general moderator, but also to give a general idea of how the session would go, including with the short speeches that were about to be given. This script can be found in Annex 10.

### 3.2.6 Outcome and relation with SDGs

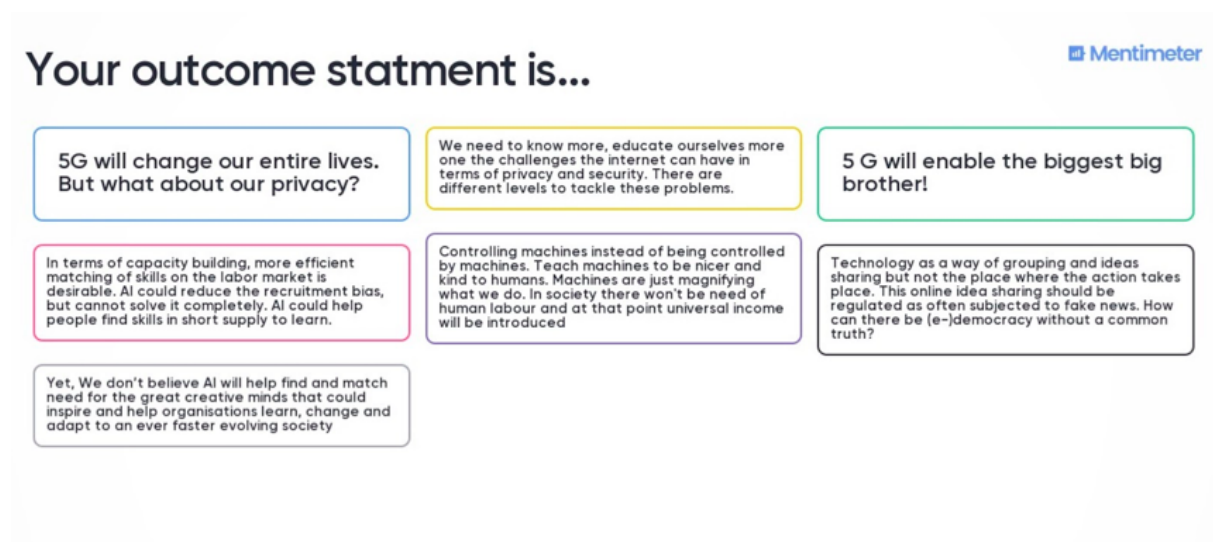
The outcome of the Hypertext Café went beyond our expectations in terms of participants' engagement and in the quality of the conversations. Interestingly, in a delightful echo to our panel discussion on VR/AR some participants considered the limitations of political action through digital arenas, compared to physical demonstrations in public spaces, especially considering the urgency of climate action (SDG 13). Several more linkages with the SDGs framework were made, specifically with SDG 8, 9, 16 and 17.

As the survey's results we had circulated beforehand demonstrated, great interest from participants was centered around what the future of work would entail in terms of skill sets and secure employment (SDG 8). Secondly, privacy of personal data and cyber-security was a concern widely shared and debated as it related to the interconnectedness and data sharing afforded by new technologies, specifically Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 5G. Here, the help of professionals was useful in gaining further insight into the scale of change these innovations could bring about. The need for stronger regulation and ICTs literacy by policy-makers was tackled in several discussions, even beyond the HTTP 404 Not Found table. A challenge that is of the domain of SDG 16, which calls for accountable and inclusive public institution. The depth of the issue, could not, however, be explored fully, due to time constraints. As some of our master's cohort participated in the event, the question of the sand crisis and the unsustainable use of natural resources in the production of new technologies and devices was raised (UNEP 2019).



It can be stated that the format of the event as a serious game participated in the achievement of SDG 9 as an innovative practice to engage the group discussions.

Our usage of the app/website Menti, to get live feedback and thoughts from the participants, enhanced engagement and innovative thoughts from them. Menti was also used to conclude the session with each of the groups submitting an outcome statement which summarized the crux of their discussion. These can be found below.



### Outcome statements from HTTP Café tables, submitted through the app Menti.

The prevalent concerns are noticeably that of privacy and the increasing importance of AI and 5G in both private and professional settings. The outcome statements demonstrate a robust understanding of some of the issues discussed, combined with a readiness to further explore these issues. This aligns with our educational aspirations for the Café, as the format presupposed not so much a quest for solutions to previously defined problems, rather a free-form examination of the possibilities generated in the Digital Age. We have here proposed only a condensed overview of the topics discussed, the range of which make us believe in the achievement of the event's objectives, such as engaging university students and promoting a horizontal space for constructive discussions, outside of the ex-cathedra teaching format.





The registration table of the Hypertext Café at WSIS Forum 2019. Photo credits: Hanaé Taxis.

### 3.2.7. Feedback and prospects

The feedback we received was more favorable than we would have expected at the beginning of our organizational efforts. Interestingly, the participants who were most outspoken about their satisfaction the event were professionals. One participant who had also taken part in the high-level track, claimed the HTTP Café was “the most enjoyable part” of her week at the Forum and that she “hope[d] it [would] become a tradition”. The non-hierarchical format and the playfulness surrounding the discussion of such serious topics seemed to resonate with participants as an antidote to a weariness accumulated after a week of more formal events.

Constructive feedback mainly pinpointed the confusing set-up of the game, namely the vagueness of the guidelines and an inadequate application of the different roles attributed to the participants, which could otherwise lend some lacking structure to the game process. Another professional called the HTTP theme “nerdy” and potentially perplexing for a larger audience. He nonetheless noted the possible appeal of such a gimmick, if complemented with an attractive design. Overall, this experience was an experiment with its own set of risks and advantages, and the feedback we received both invigorated us and allowed us to identify the steps to take in order to achieve success with an eventual HTTP Café 2.0.

With a more clearly defined set of rules and preparation for key participants, this process could, in our opinion, be suitable as a prelude to a hackathon, serving as a warm-up,



network-making exercise. Additionally, we envision this game as an engaging exercise to be deployed in educational and training settings in order to enhance lateral thinking skills and trend forecasting.

An outcome document detailing the course of the session can be found in Annex 11. In addition, Donata Dettwiler wrote a blog post for the ITU News (2019) website explaining the scope and format event, proposed an example of “youth” engagement in the WSIS process (Annex 12).

### **3.3. Exhibition Space**

#### **3.3.1. Preparation and organisation**

Aside from the preparation for the panel discussion and Hypertext Café, in collaboration with our fellow GTI/WSIS interns, we also managed a section of the Exhibition Space, which had for aim to exhibit good practices among the broadly defined “ICTs for development” community. As such, this year it presented over 40 exhibitors ranging from small initiatives to large organizations, whether state-mandated, non-governmental, commercial or academic, all of them operating in one or more dimension of the ICTs, sustainability and development intersection.

The purpose of our presence in the Exhibition Space was to showcase the Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative (GTI), and more specifically the MIHDS students at SDG Solution Space at Campus Biotech Innovation Park, of which we acted as representatives. Our stand presented a selection of emblematic objects that evoke the essence of the GTI - the AR sandbox, a food printer (running on chocolate paste), SDG cards, brochures and flyers. The AR sandbox was courteously lent and installed for us by Jean-Marie from the FabLab at the Solution Space. The chocolate printer, insistently requested by one of our supervisors, and the SDG cards were provided by Jan of Addict Lab, the brochures were gathered at the Solution Space and flyers for our events were designed and printed out by ourselves.

From the outset, our stand at the Exhibition Space was a result of a close collaboration with the other GTI/WSIS interns. We realized that the Exhibition Space could be an extension of the panels and an occasion to present more comprehensively the projects of our panellists. The other GTI interns conceded their space to the organizations represented by their panel speakers on two separate days. Of our panellists, only two expressed an interest in having a presence at the Exhibition Space. At first, we concentrated on allocating a space for the



*Inflection: VR for Climate Change* project, as well as showcasing the *Moving Cities - Same but Different* AR art project by Marc Lee. Reconciling the spatial needs for both projects was challenging, but the *Inflection* project gathered sufficient interest from the participants and management to be moved into the CICG building on the days dedicated to the High-Level tracks, thus liberating space for Marc Lee's setup.

In preparation for the event, we visited the space which would be devoted to the stands and booths, located in the lower floor of the ITU building, along with the WSIS team member in charge of logistics and procurement. It is an open plan space featuring some slightly secluded annexes. From what we gathered, the prime spots are allocated to ITU's most strategically valuable partners (see Annex 1), the rest of the space is shared more or less arbitrarily. We were first offered an area near a hallway and the restrooms. The latter did presuppose a steady flow of traffic, but overall the space did not seem desirable, partially due to the incommmodity of placing the sandbox in a passage area. Fellow GTI/WSIS intern, Ye Seong was able to harness her existing connections in the WSIS management team to secure a more sheltered space, neighboring with the World VR Forum's booth, which would likely bring in participants with at least a tangential interest in some of our research themes.

Our gadgets indeed attracted many of the passersby, who were eager to learn more about their functions. However, we found it difficult to explain the link between the chocolate printer and the principles of the GTI and MIHDS in a consequential manner. After a few hours of trial and error, a set of key statements characterizing our background and activities crystallized - ours was an interdisciplinary program, highlighting the most pressing contemporary global challenges and offering a horizontal space in which we could pursue, through hands-on learning, systemic and technological solutions to the issues of our day and age. To some we admitted that this is the idealized, aspirational narrative for our program, which is still young, somewhat experimental, and still in the process of shaping, which entails some limitations, but many opportunities. As examples of our research and presence at WSIS Forum, we used every opportunity to publicize our events. Especially considering the fact that securing an audience for thematic workshops at WSIS Forum was not a given, as we were sometimes dispatched to events rooms to fill up the room during the week.

Although these discussions allowed us to advertise for our subsequent events, the space did not prioritarily feature young people and we did not seem to bring in many participants to the Hypertext Café through our interactions in the Exhibition Space. Business cards were exchanged, sometimes mainly with people who were set on utilizing the opportunities the Exhibition Space offered for indiscriminate networking. Some of the networking attempts



seemed misguided and inefficient - we were interacting with people without the possibility of mutual enrichment.

Many of the people present were professionals who were generally interested in networking within their line of activity. Alternatively, it is common for people to walk around the different stands with the main goal of promoting their upcoming events within the WSIS process. Many of the stands were occupied by different organizations on different days, and seemed to have varying degrees of success. In this regard, it is important to note that we were offered our stand for the duration of the whole week, which could be indicative of a sign of courtesy towards the GTI and the strategic importance of the GTI-ITU partnership.

As we came to understand, the Exhibition Space benefited from the heaviest flow of attendees on Monday, when workshops took place in the building, whereas on days dedicated to the High-Level Track (Tuesday, Wednesday), activity and attendance of the Space die down substantially. In our opinion, this was a missed opportunity to fully harness the advertising potential of an international conference, in that the stands and booths could have been moved, even if only in a selective manner, to the more spacious conference center, where high level officials were partaking in the panels. In sum, we consider this chapter of our WSIS activities to be the least consequential, although important in its own right. Future GTI/WSIS interns could perhaps benefit from seizing more actively the interactive opportunities that the Exhibition Space provides, such as WSIS OpenSpace Podcasts. This was a live-broadcast podcast event, with various speakers interviewed by ITU's own interns, featuring additional seating for Exhibition Space visitors. A stronger involvement of students in these podcasts alongside professionals, particularly in a multi-party discussion format, could be a powerful driver for a fresher discourse.



## 4. Discussion - Group reflective position and feedback

### 4.1. Group dynamics

The internship idea at the ITU for WSIS 2019 started to come into place at the end of the first semester, around November 2018. At that time, the whole master's cohort had to attend a class on the sand crisis, where we had to come up with practical solutions to sand crisis in an innovative way. During that semester, a group of six people was formed to work on a solution involving the use of virtual reality to raise awareness about the unfolding environmental crisis. When the internship group project was proposed, some of the group members expressed their interest in continuing to focus on VR, forming a team based on a common interest and fruitful dynamics.

When we started discussing on the work that we would be doing for the ITU, the ambiguity from the WSIS team made us frustrated and confused us in going forward with our ideas. Each one of us expressed interesting options, which we explored, but we gathered information and guidelines from ITU sparingly. For instance, we discovered relatively late in the internship about the Open Consultation Process's (OCP) deadline, as it was explained to us extempore, as though we had to be informed earlier. A clearer outline of the deadlines would have been greatly beneficial for our organizational efforts. This oversight is probably due the WSIS Forum 2019 being the first year of implementation of the GTI/WSIS internship agreement, which lacked a blueprint to fall back on.

Given one of our initial group member's committed engagement with the prototypical *Inflection: VR Climate Action Project*, we organically looked at how to combine climate change mitigation and peacebuilding, as the two main topics to focus on. Our interest in integrating the Inflection project either in the panel discussion or the Exhibition Space was consistent throughout the internship. It did provide a valuable example at the crossroad between technology innovation, the MIHDS, and research of public interest. Even though we were conscious that our topics of interest were clearly very broad in scope, we hoped that by contacting people related to these fields would directly provide us with an answer to our bewilderment and a way forward to think about them in novel ways. With time, given the lack of clear intermediate objectives and overall scarcity of guidance as well as the emergence of other interesting internship opportunities in different institutions, the preparation for the panel discussion and the HTTP Café came to be shouldered by the three authors of this report.



In the end, as the three of us were set on doing this internship from the beginning together, our group dynamic remained smooth throughout the duration of our work. The progress division of the initial group did not impact the quality of our work in a significant manner. Actually, despite the administrative ambiguity associated with the internship, we managed to stay in the same mindset – that is, autonomous, hard-working and ambitious. We coped successfully with the miscommunications from the institution, as we stayed on track with our own objectives. Those values stayed with us the whole time until the end.

Our group dynamic was reinforced by certain events throughout the semester. In March 2019, all three of us attended a conference on alternative design called IAM in Barcelona. It matured our understanding of group work and our ambition to go forward in our own work for WSIS. In fact, this was our main source of inspiration for the Hypertext Café. The game-like participative concept of the café directly refers to the dynamics we delved into during our time in Barcelona. In the end the Hypertext Café gave us motivation and hope, which brought us even closer as a team. Each of us had implicit roles in the work that we did. In fact, those roles came up naturally accordingly to each one's insights and sensitivities.

## **4.2. Critical position about the internship**

### **4.2.1 Management**

Our team was under the direct supervision of two senior coordinators of the WSIS forum, with whom we interacted in person at weekly meetings featuring management, employees and ITU interns charged with the WSIS process. We were also included in Whatsapp group chats which theoretically allowed us to stay in touch with the team at all times. After introducing us to the concept of the WSIS process, our supervisors ascribed responsibilities to us, namely organizing the Youth Track and the Cloud Café, and running the GTI stand at the Exhibition Space. From the start, we were given substantial liberty in choosing the themes and format of our activities, provided that we formalized them with the relevant documentation, generally in the form of concept notes.

Along with the ensuing feedback and deliberation process, this initial freedom of expression quickly revealed an interesting dimension to our role and status in the organizational structure. Throughout our interaction with our supervisors, we found ourselves reconciling a certain dissonance between guidelines. On the one hand, we were given license to tap into the interests and concerns of a target group designated as “the youth”. We found it challenging to clearly define the common denominators for this demographic in a meaningful way, without resorting to age specifications which could be exclusive on either side of the



brackets. For practical reasons, we settled on a target group of university students with an existing interest in international organizations, development processes and interdisciplinary methods. On the other hand, the nuances of our deliberations with our peers were sometimes lost in translation when transcribed into the UN-specific discourse that was required of us. In these moments, persistent brainstorming on the commonalities between tools such as the SDG framework and the more spontaneous expression of our generation's concerns helped delineate the questions and issues which shaped the content of our events.

It was a unique position to be in, as we realized during the Open Consultation Process that the crowdsourcing of the agenda made us both the organizers and the target audience. Once our concept notes were approved by our management, we were free to manage and adapt the content and structure of our events as we deemed fit. This gave us both the drive and the possibility to attempt to innovate, for instance, by upgrading the Cloud Café into the HTTP Café. Our supervisors were ultimately receptive to innovative ideas and assisted us in securing useful contacts all the while entrusting us with practically all organizational aspects. It was a formative experience and one that allowed us to make use of networks and integrate dialogues that would not have been open to us in other circumstances. We realize as well that this arrangement was mutually beneficial for our supervisors, who would not be able to coordinate the WSIS Forum efficiently without delegating a substantial amount of the organizational tasks.

#### 4.2.2. Limits in the tasks of the internship

During the WSIS week, we were, naturally, faced with disjunctions between the expectations we might have had at the beginning of the internship and the realities of our organizational tasks. One interesting unforeseen circumstance was the responsibility assumed with regard to the invitees for both of the events we organised. When one of us succeeded in inviting one panellist or professional participant, she had to take charge of the person for the whole time of the event. For instance, Donata successfully convinced Mark Lee, one of our panellists, to join the panel on VR in Sustainable Spaces. His participation was a great input in the discussion, and we were proud of how the debate came about. This was not easy considering the outlier role the artist played within this line up. Our role as organizers was to coordinate the gaps that might arise from the variety of participants involved in the event. Considering the supposedly open space that international organisations' events are, these gaps are essential to manage. It seems obvious now, but our surprise at the effort it took to coordinate and, in a sense, accommodate our invitees is an indicator of inexperience in organizational matters.



The scope of the tasks performed was also quite far from the expectations we had at the beginning of the internship. In January, we were told that “the sky’s the limit” when it comes to our ambition for the WSIS event. However, we were quickly disappointed by the prevalence of organizational work and event management, compared to what had been exposed to us. In that sense, we were expecting more policy-making discussions rather than event organization. In the end, we acquired a lot of useful skills in that sphere, which we found very rewarding. But the outcome of the events we coordinated did not lead to any policy proposals or institutional implications. Our events were in turn very far from the actual internal work of the ITU, which made us feel like our work was not useful per se, but rather an artificial façade for the purpose of sustaining an international event. This feeling was further exacerbated by often faulty communication between the different elements of the WSIS Team, which in turn prevented us, in our opinion, from utilizing our time efficiently and abilities to their full extent.

Another limit to the tasks performed that is worth taking into account is the time constraints of the events organized. Considering the 2 hours we were assigned to design, organise and implement each of our events, the possibility to create a network between the participants was slim. More specifically, our hope was to build a network for the Hypertext Café, where the participants would have been able to stay in contact with the people they interacted with at their tables. However, the event was too short in time, and only gave limited possibilities for the participants to interact. Undoubtedly, this is the common denominator to much of the events of the Forum, given its limited duration, which encouraged condensed, to-the-point interactions.

Finally, it is important to note the limitations in accessibility of the events we organized. As stated previously, we were not able to ensure remote participation for potential attendees who could not cover travel fees. But more significantly, we ended up targeting the very demographic group we represent, which we only fully realized in retrospect. Perhaps this was useful in terms of a controlled environment for our HTTP Café prototype, but it certainly reduced the richness of inputs and interactions our events could have engendered had we exercised a clearer strategy of more inclusive outreach.

### **4.3. Critical position about the WSIS Forum**

The WSIS Forum is one of the only UN-sponsored events of this magnitude that centers issues of ICTs as it relates to sustainable development. It is also particularly interested in the



future implications of new technologies in global communications policy. However, due to geographical, economic and mandate-related constraints, it also perpetuates structural inequalities among participants, organizers and WSIS Team members. It is apparent that by having the WSIS Forum take place year after year in Geneva, Switzerland—routinely on the list of most expensive cities in the world (Hardingham-Gill 2019)—excludes actors who are unable to attend the event because of limited amount of resources. This significantly impedes on the quality and diversity of the participants attending and of the projects showcased and discussed. To try and amend this issue, remote participation has been available since the beginning of the Forum in 2009, with the option of asking questions through the online service. One employee would be present at every thematic workshop to relay remote inquiries to the panel, as was the case with the discussion we organized on VR/AR. Further efforts should be put into making events more multimedia and remote participant-friendly. Because of its decentralized format and target audience, the HTTP Café is, in our opinion, one of the events with the most potential to have this successfully implemented. Indeed, innovation in content and format often came from thematic workshops rather than from the High-Level Track events, which at times, in their length and lack of interaction between panellists, sidelined the experience of the audience. For example, providing a spontaneous public appraisal of the Forum, the ITU Secretary-General admitted that the Opening Ceremony was a bit too long (WSIS Forum 2019c).

The difference in venues accorded to the High Level Track, occurring Tuesday, 9 April and Wednesday 10 April and the thematic workshops was remarkable, especially in that, for us, it was quite unexpected, never having toured the conference center's premises beforehand. That is not to say that the two segments' locations should be swapped. Since thematic workshops routinely did not attract enough audience to fill up the assigned rooms. This presents a strategic conundrum that is difficult to resolve for the WSIS Forum strategists. On one hand, if they lower the number of panel discussions taking place during the week, it would allow for the social media team to adequately publicize them early on and it would concentrate the audience's attention to key events. On the other hand, through the OCP anyone with the appropriate credentials can propose a panel discussion at Forum and organize it, deciding on the theme (which has to be, at least nominally, aligned with the SDGs), the panellists, the questions, etc. In this sense, the number and topical range of workshops—this edition, 300 workshops took place during the Forum—gives an idea of the involvement of WSIS stakeholders, and impacts the legitimacy of the WSIS Forum. However, the results of the OCP do not determine completely the workshops' subject matters. The WSIS Team has a critical role in pointing out to the supervisors' attention new stakeholders involved in WSIS-related topics and “bringing them to WSIS”—meaning either



inviting them to a panel discussion, having them fill out an OCP form or even encouraging them to organize a workshop on their own. In addition, the OCP's results are published too late (mid-February) for them to dictate the agenda. In this sense, the WSIS interns' work and interests are a deciding factor in designing the agenda.

Interns play a critical role in ensuring the organization of the Forum. The Team is comprised of approximately 30 people, the majority of which are unpaid interns, hired for a 4- to 6-month period of employment. This means that every year there are new individuals managing the Forum, with a limited amount of knowledge of the WSIS process' inner workings and best practices. Surprisingly, only two employees were in charge of, respectively, web design and logistics, which was disproportionate, in our opinion, to the importance of these two tasks. A better consideration of the human resources should undoubtedly be made, leveraging also the added value of the GTI/WSIS interns, before and especially during the Forum, where personalized and ad hoc lists of tasks should have been elaborated. A better coordination between GTI/WSIS interns and regular interns would have been welcomed as well as among the WSIS Team as a whole. The non-GTI/WSIS interns all had badges and a desk inside the ITU headquarters and could thus talk among themselves on a daily basis. The Team went over the organization's progress in weekly meeting, which were the opportunity to understand the advancement of each other's assignments, there were no online program used to streamline the process, such as Google Doc forms, which could have streamlined the process in order to have a reduced, to-the-point collective meeting addressing matters of interest for the whole Team. This point was brought up during the last Team gathering, post-Forum. The WSIS Forum is an event that would not take place without the decisive work of unpaid interns in all areas, may it be for social media, High-Level Track's organization, etc. This issue of unpaid internship is a systematic question as it relates not only to the ITU but to the United Nations management of human resources (Fair Internship Initiative 2018).

As of now, the majority of UN agencies do not offer paid internships (Bradley 2019). Unpaid internships are commonly presented as an "opportunity" rather than proper work, made to enhance the "employability" of young graduates (Chillas, Marks and Galloway 2015; Shade, and Jacobson 2015). By providing no or insufficient economic compensation, internships prescribe young professionals from low-income families from easily entering the UN system (Fair Internship Initiative 2018). As it is the case with internships in the ICT sector and in creative industries, "soft skills"—being personable, being able to communicate well, make small talk, etc.—are paramount in getting a foot in the door. Indeed, the WSIS Forum internship did challenge our soft skills rather than test our technical knowledge of ICTs. What



are considered appropriate soft skills, as it has been shown (Chillas, Marks and Galloway 2015) have a gender, race and class dimensions to them (Shade, and Jacobson 2015), further influencing who obtains internships and is able to network in professional settings. Securing a paid work position after an unpaid internship in the UN system is far from being a given (Fair Internship Initiative 2018).

As it relates to UN internal policy in Geneva, UN interns are considered “type I gratis personnel” (UN Secretariat 2014: 2), meaning that they do not enjoy the same labour protections as staff members, even though, at times, they perform the same tasks as them, as was the case with the WSIS Forum Team. In the last years, increasing political mobilization by interns—e.g. through organizations like the Global Interns Coalition<sup>25</sup>—have produced reports contesting the UN unpaid internship program and have led public demonstrations (Bradley 2019) pointing out the inconsistency between employing unpaid interns and the human rights regime and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development upheld by the UN institution, in the sense that the program does little to address structural inequalities (SDG 10).

#### **4.4. Critical position about the SDGs**

The SDGs are an agenda set by the UN General Assembly in 2016 consisting of 17 goals related to the achievement by 2030 of a host of challenges ranging from poverty (SDG 1) to education (SDG 4), passing by gender inequality (SDG 5). The 2030 Agenda substitutes the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expanding the list of goals (from 8 to 17) and the target countries (all signatory countries are now expected to implement the SDGs, even though the Agenda is not legally binding!). 169 targets and 304 indicators have been agreed upon to objectify by measuring the progress or backdrop of these changing global phenomena, predominantly by using quantitative data (Ziai 2017). The SDGs represent the latest iteration of the development discourse, which has come to prominence during the post-Second World War period. This structuring paradigm in international relations has been criticized for its euro-centric and binary worldview (between “developed” countries and “undeveloped” countries), linearly teleological understanding of history (Rist 2008) and tendency to depoliticize contentious issues (Ziai 2017). Despite ample criticisms and post-developmental calls to conceptualize not “alternative developments” but “alternatives to development”, the discourse has endured, due in part to the plasticity, if not ambiguity of the terms used (e.g. some reading it as a discourse of rights (Ziai 2017)) and the persistent belief in the dominant economic paradigm, which centers “growth” above all metrics of well-

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<sup>25</sup> <http://interncoalition.org> [Last accessed on 12 July 2019].



being (Rist 2008). As with “sustainable development”—first presented in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission’s *Our Common Future* report to propose a revised version of “development”, which addressed distress over the social and ecological impact of “growth”—the “SDGs” are a polysemic concept. The Agenda is riddled with internal discrepancies on how global issues are framed and what solutions ought to be pursued - the main paradox being between the urgency of climate change and the persistent call for economic growth, respectively SDG 13 and SDG 8 (Ziai 2017). This being said, a critical unpacking of the history, limitations and contradictions of the SDGs was not the central question at the WSIS Forum 2019.

Indeed, the SDGs featured prominently at the WSIS Forum. Significantly, the SDGs logo is part of the WSIS emblem. Furthermore, references to the 2030 Agenda are found on the WSIS website, in the online OCP form and explicit links to the SDGs are asked to be made in the description of the thematic workshops prior to the event as well as after, through the Outcomes Document. By its all-encompassing scope, the SDGs can easily be put in connection with a host of actions and projects, which may have been developed independently from the Agenda’s framework and indicators. In this sense, WSIS Forum was a space to acquaint the audience to the SDGs—at least the visual representation of the goals—more so than it was about in-depth, technical considerations around measuring and monitoring global ICTs trends. As one WSIS Team member told us, one can “hijack” the WSIS Forum as long as they can find the “development angle”, meaning that actors (NGOs, private companies, faculty members, etc.) who are even only tangentially related to the “ICTs for Development community” can speak and network at the conference insofar as they are able to discursively link their work to the broadly-defined advancement of the SDGs (may it be in the OCP, in the Outcomes Document, in the panellist’s mini-hagiographies, etc.). Significantly, endeavouring to make our events’ purview intelligible to the WSIS Forum’s audience in the session’s online description, we did resort to some rhetorical shortcuts, which included truisms and generalizations, as well as recurring associations to “sustainability”, without defining the term<sup>26</sup>. In this regard, the internship was the opportunity for us to learn and to use a language that was partially different than in academia (emphasizing short, to-the-point sentences and easy-to-understand terminology, without using peer-reviewed references). It is true that we could have endeavoured to bring to the WSIS Forum a meta-reflection on the SDGs and the techno-solutionistic tendencies found in

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<sup>26</sup> As we have seen with the panel discussion on VR and AR, not defining concepts ahead of time led to hearing a wider range of considerations and understandings of what “sustainable spaces” are. Interestingly, only the EPFL professor proposed another term of discourse during the conversation, namely “experience” rather than “space”.



IOs and NGOs' theory of changes. This possibility, however, was unfortunately not discussed among the group during the internship.



## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Personal Statement by Maria Oxamitnaia

After a year and a half of work at UNDP, I had issues summoning the motivation to re-enter another UN organization, be it for a part-time internship. My work experience left a mark of frustration and disappointment which had accumulated as a response to what I perceived as a crushing tide of bureaucracy and halting multi-stakeholder coordination efforts where all good will went to die. When Donata and Hanaé offered to join their group for the internship at ITU, I was categorically not interested, until they described their subject of interest, VR in peacebuilding, and the terms of the internship. I had previously worked both with Hanaé and Donata and knew that our group dynamics were conducive to creative, rewarding and interesting outputs. The scope of work offered a decent dose of autonomy and I quickly sensed that this opportunity would allow me to further my research interests, all the while fulfilling my academic requirements and collaborating with two close, like-minded friends - an offer I could not refuse.

The internship turned out to be a growing experience, allowing us to develop new competencies, acquire a taste for new types of activities and improve our understanding of the inner processes of the ITU. As I will specify further on, all of these things arose from the influence of both positive and negative factors, and resulted in what I consider a satisfactory and interesting product on our part. Most importantly, it was an exercise akin to navigating unclear, sometimes uncharted waters in a dense fog, which is certainly useful skillbuilding. I cannot say that my mixed feelings towards the UN processes have been resolved, but they have become more nuanced and I have gained a glimmer of hope as to the possibility of structural change within this type of organizations, as I will proceed to delineate in this statement.

#### 5.1.1 Learning outcomes

When first discussing the tasks at hand with our supervisors, I was surprised at the insistence with which we were encouraged to use and trust our own judgment. Although empowering, this insistence seemed to come at the expense of auxiliary guidelines and guidance. Having gone through a fair share of unpaid internships, I was no stranger to hands-on learning, prepared to gain a greater understanding of the organization and its work by jumping into the required tasks. Indeed, as complete outsiders to the ITU and WSIS, we were to organize a number of events at the WSIS Forum with very little to base ourselves



on. We were in touch with the full-time on-site interns, who would do their best to answer some of our questions, but were often confused too. After one substantial meeting, the weekly 5 to 15 minutes we got to bring our managers up to speed on our progress did not allow for much delving into the intricacies of the work that was expected of us nor our conceptualization of it. The vagueness that surrounded our activities was beneficial for me, and, I would like to think, even for the group as a whole, as this allowed us to brainstorm and expand our understanding of the themes that interested us in ways that stricter terms of reference would not permit.

This internship forced me to reevaluate my understanding of expertise. I enjoyed the occurring paradoxes in our status and role at the organization. We were interns with no official accreditation or formalized paperwork to show for it, and a very borderline understanding of the functionality of the organization we were interning at. Yet it became apparent soon enough that not only did our supervisors count on us to connect with the concerns of “the youth” and cater to that specific demographic through our activities, they truly attributed a sort of expertise to us which I had not considered as such previously. While frustrating at times, our miscommunications and misunderstandings stemmed partly from the fact that we were seeing the same areas (say, ICTs or sustainability) from very different mindsets and perspectives. And ours, the interns’, although not fully understood, was all the more valued as such. While I previously considered expertise to be a domain of conscious, deliberate practice, accompanied by clear learning objectives, as commonly defined in behaviour and pop psychology (as per Ericsson, 2007), I started interrogating what affinity my peers and I might have with modern reality.

Perhaps the abundance of tech and gadgets in our formative years did help us form a better intuitive understanding of the processes and changes occurring in the world? I recalled how I would spend hours exploring my new laptop as a young teenager, getting to know the way it functioned (which I have long since forgotten) and thus acquainting myself with its logic. I also thought about my slightly younger friends, who, through their smartphones, were already immersed in the parallel dimension of social media throughout their school years. Some of these people hold the most impressive research skills I have seen. So is this intuitive approach to technology and information propagation, a result of years-long, in some sense very deliberate learning and practice, qualifiable as expertise?

I started believing it could be. When thinking about the typical scope of work of unpaid intern, the mind often goes to social media management and communications. These are tasks so often unpaid, that they are commonly undervalued or even disregarded in the professional



sphere. In the meantime, I have friends who make their living exclusively from social media management, and others who understand how crucial well-managed social media is to the branding and reach of their businesses. Many of my peers and I also spend tens of hours per week on social media, producing, imbibing and processing content and information - does that not lead to some sort of intuitive grasp on current trends and processes? Within the internship, we tried to make use of the ITU's social media accounts in order to publicize our events, but their standardized visual format did not seem to inspire us or many others. We failed to reach many participants through the official accounts. This showed that perhaps we weren't such savvy social media experts after all.

But I was intrigued by the idea that mindsets emblematic of "the youth", somehow different from those of older generations, could and should present us with competitive or interpretative advantages in the realm of trend forecasting and associative thinking. It is tricky to generalise generational characteristics, but perhaps because I come from a family whose academic background is rooted in Soviet methodical rigor, I notice some differences in information processing and synthesis. My grandma, whose intellectual capacities were always downplayed due to her more free-form, artistic perception of the world, is now much more proficient in her usage of technology and social media than her peers and, undeniably, my very analytical grandpa. Perhaps this style of thinking is more widespread and therefore relevant today. In any case, I was tempted to integrate this idea into our work at the WSIS.

This was one of the contributing factors to the development of our serious game, HTTP Café. In the face of the intellectually restrictive format of many of the events at the WSIS Forum, laden with seven-minute speeches, oblique buzzwords and little opportunity for dialogue, we wanted to incite a free exchange of ideas, based on the premise that any person with an interest in a topic can have something to contribute to a discussion about it, simply due to her individual understanding of the topic's context. The format was meant to encourage a multilateral flow of ideas, which could influence and enhance each other, ultimately leading to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. It was a pleasure to see the genuine positive response and enthusiasm of the participants which were not deterred by our imperfect implementation of the game process and of its rules. Those of the participants who had been active at the WSIS Forum throughout the week stated, in various terms, that the game was essentially a breath of fresh air, and conducive to an interesting, enriching exchange of ideas. Some expressed the desire to participate anew in an improved version. Our supervisors observed the positive reactions and were duly satisfied with our work.



In this sense, the ITU reminds me of my grandparents, branching out in order to stay relevant, staying receptive to new developments and attempting to integrate them with a little help from “the youth”. I believe it was a judicious choice on the part of the WSIS management to allow young interns to take the lead on many of the organizational aspects of the forum. This avid desire to enter the forefront of technological advances for sustainability appears to be almost a matter of survival for the ITU, as evident through the importance granted to strategic paid partnerships and the prevalence of the private sector among those. But the accompanying openness to weighty involvement on the part of younger professionals, smaller initiatives and NGOs, and even school-age children could very well help shape a new direction for a structure that is otherwise teetering on the verge of obsolescence. Perhaps the quality of the youth’s work and inputs could even be improved through the instauration of paid internships, which I believe, in light of my expertise on the matter, to be an inescapable trend in the near future.



## **5.2. Personal Statement by Donata Dettwiler**

The WSIS Internship was an intense experience, which gave me the opportunity to develop my communication skills and aptitude for making sense of challenging tasks and requirements. It constituted a novel exercise as it is not often the case for me to be able to speak with knowledgeable people on matters of public interest.

In this brief, personal account of the internship, I will explain in the first segment what made me decide to pursue the internship, the communication and organization skills I have acquired and what audiences we could have centered more during our events at the WSIS Forum. In the second part, taking stock of my personal experience, I will briefly discuss the limits of institutional participation in international deliberative processes, such as the WSIS Forum.

### **5.2.1. Reasons for Pursuing the WSIS Forum Internship**

As it was presented, the WSIS Forum internship was to be an atypical training experience in that it would not consist of menial, repetitive tasks—like so many of UN internships experiences we had lived through or heard from friends. Rather, it would be an opportunity for us to organize events on our own from start to finish – entrusting us with great flexibility and freedom. This having been said, I did put to the test my sense of resilience and amenability in interaction with our supervisors, our teammates, the panellists and WSIS participants. I decided to pursue the WSIS internship opportunity because of the promise of having leeway in choosing the theme, format and invitees and because it resonated with our master's studies – the main point of intersection being the focus on the SDGs and the encouragement to center innovation. During my bachelor's studies how to rigorously think about technical artefacts was not a primary focus of our methodology courses. In this sense, I hoped that the WSIS Forum internship would be a practical occasion for me to get a better grasp on such critical questions as how technological innovation can participate of political realignments and modify our representations of social practices, of space or of communication. In the end, it is clear that my expectations were misaligned with the tasks and scope of the internship, in that it did consist less of policy-making discussion and evaluation and more of event management.

The internship was a stressful experience, due to having to piece together the scattered information, not only related to administrative concerns and the overall timeline of the internship (e.g. the OCP deadline), but also about more routine questions, such as the approved email of invitation to send out to possible panellists. I think that a part of our



frustration was due to not clearly understanding if we were part of the WSIS core organizers or part of the outreach effort to previously untapped WSIS audiences. We were teleworking, rarely interacting with the WSIS interns and not asked to help with the High-Level Track, but we were still invited to the weekly meetings. In this sense, we were inside outsiders, not having access to the full picture and having to grasp the magnitude of the Forum from off-handed comments or from information online. Furthermore, organizing panel discussions is not the exclusive purview of the WSIS Team, being that the goal is to get social actors to engage in the process and have them fill out the OCP. If we had understood better and more quickly the point and the opportunities given by an institutional space such as the WSIS Forum, I am convinced that we could have organized more interrelated events, with less time and energy expenditure.

In this sense, we did not have the wherewithal to successfully carry out our ambitions. It's only at the end that I got to talk and share with the other interns and realize that some difficulties on the outside were also shared on the inside. Indeed, by its nature the WSIS Forum requires a strong level of coordination at all levels. Much of how efforts were geared towards adequately accounting our intention and the advancement of our events' organization to the multiple parts involved, tailoring our explanations to the different people's interest. For example, Marc Lee, the VR/AR artist was very much interested in showcasing his project "10'000 Cities, Same but Different" and so much of our back-and-forth related to the subject, rather than the panel's topic of discussion.

Having to write the outcomes document and the description of the two events we organized made me gain a better understanding of how to link a specific work to the SDGs and WSIS Action Lines. As a broad frame of reference for WSIS Forum discussions, I am reticent to argue that the 2030 Agenda is an efficient one. None or few of the panellists of the Monday discussion and of the HTTP Café participants made a point of mentioning it during their presentations and debates. For the most part, I don't know the exact list of indicators attached to each goal, but I have not felt that it was a necessary set of information to know in order to adequately progress as a WSIS intern. Furthermore, one of the main issues is that there is not a prevalent knowledge about—or let alone a sense of ownership of—the agenda among the broader public and I believe that it has to do with firstly, the way in which the goals were discussed and agreed upon, which engaged predominantly professional politicians and UN representatives (Dodds et al. 2017) and secondly, with refraining from substantially overhauling the "sustainable development" paradigm, which, has been criticized for being an oxymoron, in trying to reconcile economic development and social and climate justice (Adelman 2018).



Writing this report gave me time to reflect upon the unrealized possibilities and the assumptions we took for granted. We spend much time and energy trying to understand the scope beyond having a certain number of speakers to our panel. We could have taken another direction, such as engage more youth-led efforts, like student associations, and what challenges and opportunities arise at the local level of sustainable development implementation. Having such an angle could have given us more ownership of the fact that we were not ICTs professionals but university students. This could have led us to recognizing that university students do have a stake in these deliberative forums and thus endeavoured to providing them with a platform to present their work and their point of views on these public matters. We could have invited students to present their project related to sustainability during one or more thematic workshops and not only in the Exhibition Space (3.3.). Furthermore, as we have discussed in the chapter concerning outreach efforts of the Hypertext Café (3.2.4), we had a limited amount of time to publicize and convince students to attend the event. Even though the entrance to the Café was free and complimentary lunch was provided, we fretted over the number of participants until the very last day. A number of reasons can be invoked for why not more people came, and seeing that we did not conduct a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research, our hypothesis can only be that, intuitive reasons and rationalizations. I believe, however, that what was at play was a certain wariness about participation in institutional organizations processes, and especially with the ITU, which is not the most well known existing UN agency.

### 5.2.2 Participation Devices at WSIS Forum 2019

The effort to include a broader participation of underrepresented actors constitutes one of the major challenges of maintaining the WSIS Forum relevant. However, from the standpoint of the participants, what does it mean to get involved in such an institutional structure? An institution that is constrained, willing or not, by such rigid a framework (may it be in the language employed or in the resources that it can dispense) and is not a household name outside of specific parties?

In this second part of my personal statement, I wish to take the opportunity to consider the challenges with participation in international forums and specifically the limits of engagement within the WSIS Forum, taking as a primary example the Hypertext Café. As I was able to experience first hand in helping shape the Café, involvement in the production of the event creates a sense of identification with the task and with the event at hand. I think that this is also very much what constitutes the potential of a serious game like the HTTP Café. We did have fun thinking about crafting it, looking for original names to give it, etc. It was designing it



that I felt the most engaged during this internship. The game encouraged polysemic understanding of words and trends, which constituted the foundation on which to have a discussion, which was not completely structured by us the organizers. The direction of the conversation was left purposefully to the discussants.

In the political public sphere, in which political participation is enacted, not all participants are equal. As Fouilleux (2013) has illustrated, there are certain discursive capabilities needed for an actor to successfully participate in international deliberative forums. These skills are linked to economic resources—e.g. a small NGO may not be able to appoint full-time one or two employees to either organizing a thematic workshop or to attend the WSIS for the whole week—and social and linguistic skills, being able to successfully interact with an international audience, using a technocratic language, etc. These resources constitute an entrance cost threshold, which proclive actors who do not possess them from engaging with the WSIS. With regard to the HTTP Café, it is reasonable to assume that the ones who came to participate did have confidence in their English skills and have a familiarity with these spaces. For example, by being active in student associations, as well as being knowledgeable about the scope of the game, because Hanaé, Maria and myself had explained it to them informally. In this sense, much of our outreach effort was geared toward underlining the fact that no prior knowledge in new technologies was needed to participate. In addition, the configuration of the room did foster equalizing, “peer-to-peer” conversations between “students” and the “experts”. By having small groups of discussion at each table, participants could have fruitful interactions among themselves. As we have noted, we were given the task of organizing the Café, which was part of the broader Youth Track, a month into our internship. A sign of trust given to us that we appreciated. The reasons for this decision were both because of competency—our supervisors thought we could best relate to the concerns of our peers when it came to the changing role of ICTs in society—and because of contingency, seeing that the WSIS Team was occupied with other tasks. This preoccupation with broader participation is not limited to the WSIS nor the ITU.

My internship experience resonates with theoretical and empirical considerations about participatory democracy, which has emerged as a model for social change in the 1970s. Opportunities of involvement for social grassroots movements have increased in UN processes due to ongoing mobilizations from activists’ groups, which demanded more say in the international organization’s deliberations (Fouilleux and Joubert 2017). This need for a more participatory approach can be observed at different levels of UN work, may it be, for example, in the process of crafting the UN 2030 Agenda and in the annual WSIS Open Consultation Process (OCP). Noteworthy, in the months leading up to the adoption of the



UN General Assembly, the “My World” online survey was arranged by a partnership of UN agencies and programmes to give the opportunity to untapped constituencies to vote on which area of development was for them more important. The votes did not, however, represent fairly the world’s population. 70 % of the seven million votes came from five countries and it gave the opportunity to “flood” the survey’s responses with specific activists causes, such as animal protection, which came in as the second most pressing issue after health at some point during the survey’s progression. The results were not legally binding, only having a consultative function (Dodds et al. 2017). The “My World” initiative is only one example of such participative methods, which are often put in place to have a semblance of wider inclusion in political arenas which are often surface level with no structural changes in the power dynamics of these institutions.

The increased number of participative devices in global governance as well as in national and local political arenas and forums has drawn some procedural and ideological criticism. The model of participatory democracy, first theorized and called for by *New Left* activists in the United States in the 1970s against an elitist conception of representational democracy, has been, in the last decades, co-opted by international organizations and public authorities, in some contexts more than others. Integrating participatory devices has been motivated by a need for legitimization from “ordinary folk”<sup>27</sup> with material and symbolic benefits not being redistributed equally (Gourgues et al. 2013). Wider inclusion in political processes has been criticized for depoliticizing social causes and reifying the status quo as well as being viewed as a strategy of instrumentalization of the participants (Gourgues et al. 2013). These critiques can be applied also to the WSIS Forum and, in particular, to its Youth Track, which, in a sense, concentrates much of the unscrupulous posturing of the Forum’s participation strategy. What I mean by that is that the WSIS Forum image and operation does rely on a semblance of inclusion of young people—notably, pictures of pupils from a Geneva elementary school with the ITU Secretary General during the inauguration of the Exhibition Space were shared on WSIS and ITU social media accounts—without, however, properly remunerating the own young people working for the Forum, namely its interns, which were recently graduates or still in university. Indeed, as Fraser (1990: 75) has expressed, “participatory parity is essential to a democratic public sphere and that rough socio-economic equality is a precondition of participatory parity”. A socio-economic equality which was not achieved at WSIS Forum, given that, other than encouraging remote participation, few adjustments were implemented to ensure a levelling of access and participation. As examples of equalizing initiatives, childcare program could be proposed to

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<sup>27</sup> Remains to be determined who these « ordinary people » are, but they are more of a rhetorical constituency than anything else (Gourgues et al. 2013).



encourage gender equality (Martin 2018) as well as financial support for flight and accommodation for participants with limited economic resources. To the point, opportunities for public engagement in international forums is increasing, however, these devices do not lead to substantial social change if they are not accompanied by greater institutional transparency and economic redistribution mechanisms to ensure participatory fairness.

### 5.2.3. Personal Conclusion

The WSIS Forum internship provided me with useful professional skills, such as amenability, resilience and problem-solving capabilities. Considering our expectations in the beginning of January with what we were able to deliver in the second week of April, I am satisfied with the result considering the fact that we were the first batch of GTI/WSIS interns and not having a blueprint to refer to. In the second part of my personal statement, I have endeavoured to propose some brief considerations about participation in deliberative spaces, taking as an example the Hypertext Café, which we organized. I have come to underline how an international event such as the WSIS Forum is constituted by a multiplicity of audiences who, even though they may share briefly a common space do not substantially engage with one another. Moreover, I believe more concerted efforts should be put into fostering interactions between participants. This can be done not by emphasizing the existing WSIS-only social media platforms, but by a more careful consideration of the unequalizing spatiality of the conference, which divided the audience into specific spaces, which were not always easy of access (e.g. I had to direct a number of participants to the Exhibition Space, located in the underground level of the building) and operated sometimes on a pay-to-play provision (only the WSIS Partners were invited to the Gala, which took place on Wednesday evening, the last day of the High-Level Track). The WSIS Forum is one of the most important conferences dealing with the broad topic of “ICTs for Development”. One of the most valuable characteristics of the institution is undoubtedly the attention to new audiences and themes, with which to expand the scope of the event, a curiosity which constitutes an opportunity for change in and outside the Forum for those who are able and willing to take it.



### **5.3. Personal Statement by Hanaé Taxis**

#### **5.3.1. Reasons for pursuing the internship at the ITU**

When Vladimir Stankovic first came to talk to our IHDS cohort about the WSIS Forum internship opportunity, I was a bit puzzled, not only concerning the internship itself, but about the topic and expectations that were given to us for the WSIS Forum. When researching on my own, I looked up the event of the WSIS 2018 as advised, from which I hoped to get a better and clearer vision of the actual event. I was not acquainted with the ITU, let alone the WSIS Forum. I learned from a family member that the ITU was one of the oldest international organisations, that it invented the telegraph and regulated the new inventions related to telecommunications, i.e. mainly the telephone. I was curious as to how the sector of telecommunications could be linked to the SDGs and sustainable development more broadly. Some intensive research sparked my interest in the forum, as its scope seemed diverse and comprehensive, with events such as “eco-city” topics of panel discussions linked to the SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, or other topics about emerging technologies in the world today, linked to the SDGs. This focus on emerging technologies and innovative approaches to sustainability issues is what motivated me to take a chance on the internship. For instance, being interns, we had the great opportunity and were encouraged to attend the sessions of our choice. I decided to attend the “WSIS Regional Group Meeting: Emerging Technologies with no one left behind in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)”. A few years ago, I was particularly interested by the work done by United Nations-ESCAP’s work. The link between what the organisation is doing with emerging technologies was especially interesting. IT allowed me to learn more about the efforts taken in the lines of mobile broadband, affordability challenges, and transport and energy sectors. In that sense, it really offered me another perspective to the UN-ESCAP organisation.

I was lucky to attend to the first edition of “WSISxTalks”, a session at the WSIS Forum, aimed to promote some new innovative projects. The latter offered an opportunity for inspiring speakers to take the stage and talk about their career stories. They conveyed it as a “Ted Talks”, only with a “new tech” component. I found this session to be a very aptly organised and moderated session. The speakers were interesting, and the topics broached were well picked, captivating a range of participants regardless of age or occupation. This opened my eyes to the potential that WSIS had to educate its audience about newer technology and promote a more reflexive approach to their development.



Through the course of my internship, this newfound enthusiasm for the WSIS Forum and its potential was tempered by some questions and frustrations that arose from the organization process and my observations on the format of the forum itself. I will expound on these further in my statement, while linking these to the choices we have made with our own events, particularly the Hypertext Café, which we saw as an opportunity to balance out the issues and opportunities that the WSIS Forum presented us with.

### 5.3.2. Impressions throughout the internship

Before the internship started, I was quite optimistic about the undertaking of such a project. Having the opportunity of doing an internship as a team, where we could design and create anything we wanted, was for me quite interesting and attractive, especially that it would have been the continuation of a great group dynamic experienced in the first semester of the master's programme.

When we all started to think about what our project at the WSIS process with Donata, D., M. and later on Maria, could be, we brainstormed on a huge variety of ideas. Narrowing down to one single topic or two was challenging and the difficulty of this task was very much impacted by the “flexibility” that the ITU was allowing us. In the original purpose of leaving us space to think and innovate for our group project, and working remotely at the ITU, left me a bit lost. Indeed, I felt detached from the institution where I was interning. This was further emphasized by the fact that details about the WSIS process and its functioning were omitted to us. Hence, in my view, the internship lacked a general structure and guidance.

On one hand, the fact that WSIS gathers stakeholders from different contexts is worth noticing. This year's edition was even more surprising regarding this point, as it introduced start-ups from different backgrounds, and included the “Tech for Good” sector of this start-up world. Indeed, even though I had not visited the event in the last years, a lot of feedback has been given of this kind. WSIS is catching up with the UN system in the sense that it aims to include various topics, organisations, and projects. The start-up environment is clearly getting a voice. This brings up the question of the IO-private partnership. Are the IOs picking up on the public private partnership (PPP) idea and creating a new kind of partnership? Some may in fact have critiqued the SDG institution as being formulated between the member states, but only vaguely discussed with the private companies. The NGOs were in fact heavily involved, but a lot less with the SMEs as well as the multinationals. Taking them into account with WSIS for instance, by inviting and including them actively, also in other UN



global event, may be a way to cope with this downside of the SDG implementation. To point out the involvement of small and medium firms for instance, but also small projects, means the broader involvement of the people for the achievement of the SDGs.

Furthermore, even though the efforts to create the WSIS Forum as the result of a participation process, through the Open Consultation Process (OCP), the method used to make this participation a reproductive process, whereby participants submit propositions for topics and events directly to the ITU. As detailed in the main corresponding chapter, the OCP serves as a first round of “brainstorming” with civil society to gather the topics that are the most attractive to them. However, this process relies on who shares the link of the OCP to whom. It suggests a word-to-mouth mechanism whereby the WSIS process and OCP stay in the networks of the people who know WSIS and thereby ITU. In our case, the organizers were the ones submitting the topics that were then used as a basis for our events. Our attempt to design and implement the Hypertext café was to challenge this idea and build our own participative event for students.

I noticed that the ITU, by observing the turn out of the WSIS Forum, is clearly focused on the impact of technologies. Standardisation takes an important part in the sustaining of the ITU for decades. I believe it would be interesting for instance to promote the work in standards that ITU has developed over the years. What are the mechanisms behind the technologies that we all use and that are broadcasted in the WSIS Forum? This does not mean to exclude any relationship and partnership with SMEs, start-ups or governments. It would just imply the understanding of the risks and functioning of the technologies, rather than their impacts. While ITU had a big role in our parents’ generations, by regulating and structuring the usage of pivotal technologies such as the phone and internet, the young generation today has a lot more to understand. I think it is the ITU’s role to reclaim this history and promote the memory of the diffusion of technology and all the tensions and administrative processes that accompanied it. An exhibit of the ITU and of telecommunications for instance would be interesting, as per the model of the ICRC in Geneva. Learning about when and how they came about can help new generations to foster a more comprehensive understanding and compassion about the world around them. Talking about empathy and the role of VR in generating a sense of grounding for an individual, but not to grasp how ICTs came about. With the VR/AR panel discussion we organised, we actually attempted to foster this, by engaging the technology in a deeper sense, as to how it impacts the individual itself. I believe that this would eventually allow the ITU to own a specific stance on the world stage and within the IO sector. The Hypertext Café has also aimed to better grasp the



perspectives of new technologies on the world of youth in the future. It showed pretty well that people are more impacted by technologies than impacting it. The rest is to be dealt with by the newest generations for a better management of organisations today.

Technologies today are in constant flux. They are arising and, after a while, disappearing. People don't see a process behind their apparition in the world. The WSIS does not follow the emergence of new technologies in real time, all the time. In fact, "new ICT issues are constantly emerging", which is why WSIS is de facto dealing with the past. This highlights a tension between the stated aspiration of the WSIS and its actual form. In my view, WSIS does not pinpoint the continuation of the different technologies but views them as siloed occurrences. This links back to how technologies are impacting individuals. This WSIS Forum should show more the influence of technologies on people, as a prolonged continuity, including more ideation on hypothetical future impacts of technologies. Once again, this is another opinion that converged with our aim for the Hypertext Café.

Some of the feedback we received about the Hypertext café was that we tried to create too much branding for the event. I would argue that WSIS also sinks into too much branding. By this, I mean that the rigid regulations on the visual and textual presentation of the WSIS and its topics is too rooted in jargon and trademark captions that end up losing their meaning and becoming empty signifiers. Actually, the whole IO environment attempts to meet the capitalistic and marketing strategy of company to attract customers. Organisations recognize the opportunity to collaborate, for example, on harnessing emerging technologies for sustainable processes, but this translates into events of questionable efficiency that mainly serve as content for a press release. By creating a brand, such as WSIS, or the SDGs, I believe ITU is creating a medium for a mutually beneficial cooperation between different stakeholders, which is not negative per se, but comes at the expense of focusing on the construction of a viable solution to achieve sustainable development.

Personally, I still have some interrogations about the role of ITU as an IO in Geneva today. Considering the mounting importance of private or semi-private organisms in achieving what the ITU was first designed to do – foster partnerships and cooperation for sustainability (SDG 17). Even a lot of efforts are taken to include every part of the global community. I have seen through WSISxTalks or the different projects exhibited in the Exhibition Space, that the partnership with the private sector and ITU is developing progressively. But at the same time, I can also notice the lack of cooperation within the UN, namely suggested by the repetitive format that WSIS Forum adopts compared to the events of other UN agencies, such as at the UN Development Programme. This contrasts with the partnerships that ITU is



attempting to create with some SMEs and non-governmental projects. In that sense, with the WSIS Process, the ITU fails to achieve the core principle of sustainable development, to foster partnerships and cooperation. There is a need to balance out the need to secure funding through the involvement of the public sector with a genuine alliance with other UN agencies, wherein the ITU can transfer its constantly accruing expertise on sustainable applications of emerging technologies.

What struck me the most about interning at the ITU this last semester was the importance of and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). Even within the Geneva environment, the SDGs are known by very few people and networks of people, which is why events like the WSIS Forum are essential. However, They are the ones familiar with the concept of the SDGs and their purpose. Therefore, I would argue that one of the main downfalls of the WSIS process, even though it succeeds in including the newest kinds of technological trends and movements, and bringing a lot of people, is the width of participation. Expanding such events elsewhere than in Geneva seems to me like an effective idea to widen the role of the ITU in educating people in the use of new technologies for a variety of sustainability projects around the world. To me, the ITU needs to truly develop its scope from “telecommunications” into “technologies”. This is the key to preserve the institution itself. In doing so, it would become more attractive to cooperate with various projects involving apps and VR for instance, for development projects in other UN agencies, such as at UNICEF or UNDP. Expanding its fieldwork would allow it to stay relevant in today’s world, rather than organising big events, attempting to make people participate. By developing UN inter-agency cooperation for instance, the ITU would definitely enrich its line of work by introducing more interesting concepts and conclusions about the links and impacts of technologies on individuals, engaging and empowering these individuals within technological development processes and their regulation alike.

### 5.3.3. Individual Lessons and Outcomes

I personally found my internship at WSIS very rewarding. It made me practice for the first time the skills of event organization, which I believe will serve me in my future career. I learned to curate events and select participants, facilitate their participation, and successfully run a panel discussion as part of a team of three. I also got to meet and converse with a lot of passionate people in the sector of the ICTs and the SDGs, which opened a lot of doors personally and professionally. This is also true for the students we met during the Hypertext Café.



It was also my very first experience in an international organization and with the United Nations. I found that ITU's event is aimed at "catching up" the rest of the IO world in Geneva. By organizing an event on new technologies and the link with the SDGs, it attempts to reclaim its role of leader as a telecommunications innovator with a broad, progressive scope of action. To do this effectively, in my opinion, it needs to focus on particular strategic lines of action, whether that is bridging the gaps between IOs, NGOs, the public and the private sector; or truly opening access to the discussion and participation in technological development processes to the wider public; or becoming the propeller for the integration of emerging technologies in UN-wide processes.



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## 7. Annexes

### 1. WSIS Forum Partnership Opportunities table

WSIS FORUM 2019 PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES*					
SERVICES	STRATEGIC PARTNER			PARTNER	
	PLATINUM (EXCLUSIVE)	GOLD	SILVER	SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES	CONTRIBUTING
Priority for policy statement at the high-level track	•	•	•	•	
Opening & closing ceremony speech	•	•	•		
Panelist in high-level dialogue sessions and interactive sessions	•	•			
Visionary speech at the opening ceremony (extended time)	•				
Special intervention at ministerial roundtable (government only)	•	•	•	•	•
Access to VIP lounges	•	•	•	•	
Extended number of invitations to high-level social events	•	•	•	•	
Assistance with arranging bilateral meetings	•	•			
High-level networking coffee (host)	•	•		•	
High-level networking lunch (host)	•	•			
High-level gala dinner (host)	•	•			
Exclusive high-level breakfast			•		
WSIS Forum 2019 Cloud Café host					
Logo on promotional materials of the WSIS Forum 2019	•	•	•	•	•
Exclusive thematic/country workshop & related promotion	•	•	•	•	•
Coffee before thematic/country workshop	•	•	•	•	•
Registration area branding	•	•	•	•	•
Exhibition stand <sup>1</sup>	•	•	•	•	•
Promotion of partnership through WSIS Flash, WSIS websites and social media channels (200 000 stakeholders)	•	•	•	•	
Branding on the photo booth	•	•	•	•	
Exclusive video interview of high-level representative	•	•	•	•	
Reflection in the official WSIS Forum press release	•	•	•	•	
Video highlighting the presence of partner at the WSIS Forum (2 minutes)	•				
Special photographer/videographer	•				
Reserved seating area at plenary meeting <sup>2</sup>	•	•	•	•	•
Dedicated focal point during the WSIS Forum	•	•	•	•	
Meeting room available during WSIS Forum	•	•	•	•	
Partners registration support	•	•	•		
VALUE	150,000 CHF	65,000 CHF	45,000 CHF	30,000 CHF	15,000 CHF

\*Please note that additional partnership offers and customised packages are available upon request. For more information contact us: [wsis-info@itu.int](mailto:wsis-info@itu.int)

<sup>1</sup> Prime spot only for Platinum and Gold partner.

<sup>2</sup> Exclusive seating only for Platinum and Gold partner.

Source: WSIS Forum (2019d: 4).



## 2. Concept note for Special Track GTI-ITU internship



### **Title / Special Track: ICTs for SDGs: Scaling Awareness and Education**

#### **Background (please provide a brief introduction of the topic – this will be reflected on the website):**

As a newly established collaboration between Geneva Tsinghua Initiative (GTI) and ITU-WSIS, this track aims to provide innovative solutions in the field of ICTs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The track will be the first of its kind to collaborate with socially-minded tech initiatives (high tech and low tech) and academia to contribute to the WSIS process. Our aim is to leverage the GTI community, which consists of a variety of actors from different fields and geographical locations to showcase how ICTs can facilitate achieving the SDGs. Overall, this track is focused on how emerging and frontier technologies can break through borders for institutional change and sustainable development through education and raising awareness. In particular, it would focus on Virtual Reality for climate change and peacebuilding, e-learning initiatives for refugee children and other underserved groups. The entire track would materialize in several workshops, panel discussions, workshops, and exhibitions dedicated to leveraging ICTs for SDGs.

#### **Track Programs:**

- **Three Panel Discussions:** Expert panellists from different fields (IOs, academia, private sectors, civil society organizations) for each panel discussion will i) give an individual presentation of their work and general standpoint on proposed topics (maximum five minutes), and ii) share their thoughts and discuss interactively with participants, under the guidance of a moderator (maximum one hour and ten minutes). Panel discussions will be concluded with Q & A sessions at the end of guided panel discussions (maximum 20 minutes).

#### ***Panel Discussion 1: Harnessing VR's Potential for Sustainable Spaces***

- **Description:** The discussion is aimed at exploring applications of VR/AR in the advancement of sustainable spaces, pinpointing entry points in climate action and development, and defining the beneficial potential of VR/AR technologies as well as their limitations and risks.
- **Moderator:** Fayez Alrafee, Research associate at University of Geneva (academia)
- **Confirmed panellists:**
  - Marc Lee (civil society): Swiss artist who realized the 10'000 Cities project
  - David Rudrauf (academia): *Inflection: VR Climate Action* project



- Touradj Ebrahimi (academia): EPFL professor who help develop the JPEG XS and JPEG Pleno formats
- **Time Format:** Monday, 8 April 16.30 - 18.15

### **Panel Discussion 2: E-learning for Refugee Children and Youth**

- **Description:** This panel discussion will focus on bridging the gap of unequal access to education for refugee children and youth in refugee camps and displaced communities through ICTs. Different experts will share their thoughts on the current projects taking place in the field, and discuss the possibilities for further innovation and scalability, in order to define best practices for e-learning for refugees.
- **Moderator:** Nikita Feiz, Founder of Asylrättstexterna (NGO), Sweden - Confirmed
- **Panellists:**
  - Mr Dexter Findley, Performance and Project Development Lead, Xavier Project (NGO), Kenya and Uganda - Confirmed
  - Hannah Bond, PADILEIA and King's College (UK - NGO) - To be confirmed
  - Govinda Upadhyay, LEDSAFARI (CH - StartUp) - To be confirmed
  - Paul O'Keeffe (or Barbara Moser-Marcen), (CH - NGO) - To be confirmed
  - Two experts on Education (school level) and Social Services - In progress
  - A representative from UNHCR (IO) - Ongoing talks with John and Jaqueline
  - Irina Bokova, Ex-secretary general of UNESCO - To be confirmed
    - Time Format: 14.30 - 16.15. Monday, 8 April 2019
    - **Related Sustainable Development Goals:**

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

**Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

**Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development**

**“SDG Solution Space” in the Exhibition:** “SDG Solution Space” is a special and interactive exhibition corner presented by University of Geneva students studying Innovation, Human Development and Sustainability in partnership with Geneva Tsinghua Initiative (GTI). For the first time in history, SDG Solution Space will be present at the WSIS Forum 2019 to showcase various SDG-related hands-on learning and innovation projects. The SDG Solution Space will present methods and outcomes of hands-on learning as used by students of the Masters in Innovation, Human Development and Sustainability. The connection between education, technology and sustainability will be highlighted through the students’ own projects and initiatives involving ICTs for SDGs.



- Day 1 (Monday):
    - Jesuit Worldwide Learning: Confirmed, and the organization sent the exhibition request form to Vera already
    - LEDsafari: Not confirmed yet
    - Marc Lee and the 10'000 Cities project: Confirmed
    - Presentation of *Inflection: VR Climate Action* project (VR for Climate Change): Confirmed
  - Day 2 (Tuesday):
    - Presentation of the Inflection project (VR for Climate Change): Confirmed
    - LEDsafari: Not confirmed yet
    - InZone: Not confirmed yet
    - Marc Lee and the 10'000 Cities project: Confirmed
  - Day 3 (Wednesday):
    - GTI Student projects related to sustainability challenges and ICTs
    - Sand Merchants (TBC)
    - +Sustainable, Hussein Dib
  - Day 4 (Thursday):
    - The SDG Fab Lab (ex. sandbox) and Addict Lab (ex. chocolate 3D printer)
  - Day 5 (Friday):
    - The SDG Fab Lab (ex. sandbox) and Addict Lab (ex. chocolate 3D printer)
- Confirmed Logistics Agreed with Vera and Erick:**
- 1 x banner with WSIS branding
  - 1 x normal table with skirt (WSIS branding) (Table size: 80 cm x 140 cm)
  - 4 x extra tables (no branding) (Table sizes: 3 tables of 70 cm x 60 cm & 1 table of 70 cm x 120 cm)
  - 6 x chairs
  - 1 x screen
  - 2 x multi-plug extension sockets

**Youth Café: *Programming Your Future at WSIS* Frontier technologies and the future of work/jobs**

- **Description:** A free discussion on the impact of new technologies on the job market (Employment in the Age of AI), the upsides and downfalls of automatization, what



freedom means in the digital era, and the link between ICTs and the democratization of our societies. The second edition of the Youth Café provides a unique opportunity to study the needs, preoccupations and opinions of 80-100 young people hold on questions related to ICTs, including the positive and negative ramifications of new technologies with regard to digital rights, privacy, and the increasing importance of social media. Students will have the opportunity to interact face-to-face with ITU experts around a cup of coffee to have a frank discussion on the political implications of ICTs and what strategies can turn ICTs into tools for empowerment.

- **Format:** We are designing workshops, where university students would be involved to discussed and debate actively on different topics. These activities will be organised in a way that students will choose among different topics and be grouped according to their own interests.
  - Internships in International Organisations
  - The Future of the Job market in the Digital Age
  - Capacity-building and training in the Digital Age
  - Privacy, security and freedom of a digital citizen
  - Ethics and AI
- **Communication:** advertising for WSIS Youth Track through official UNIGE, GTI, Graduate Institute, SDG Solution Space and student association channels (newsletters, social media, posters at university locations)
- **Experts:**
  - Jasmina Byrne (UNICEF)
  - Ahmed Riad (ITU)
  - James Common (civil society)
- **Moderator:** one student per table + general moderator. From 10:00 we can use the place. free to arrange agenda. Need for different things to happen at the same time, and regroup sessions?
  - 10-12: start with inspirational talk
  - 12-14
- **Slot and time Format:** Friday, 12 April at 12:14-14:00
- **Space:** 80 seats, 5-8 team members
- **Method:** registration and sign up of participants and topics of interests.

**Outcome:** what is vision that could be presented at the closing ceremonies, what are the trends that came up from the different events (panels, workshops, youth café) - futuristic vision? Why are you apart of the forum

### **Challenge-Based Learning: *Deep Dive on Digital Education for Underserved Communities***

Description: The participants will be given a challenge regarding e-learning in underserved communities which lack basic services and will aim to provide innovative solutions, by engaging various experts, university students, secondary school students.

- **Format:**
  - 1) Introduction of the workshop topic (15 minutes),
  - 2) Division of five teams regarding five different underserved topics, so that each team will come up with ideas of how to provide education for their specific underserved group (1 hour and 15 minutes),



- 3) Pitch session of each team's ideas (5 minutes pitch, 30 minutes)
- One Facilitator per each challenge group:
  - Ingoberg Albert (Geneus)
  - In Zone (Paul)
  - ILO (Uma)
- Participants: the University of Geneva, Tsinghua University (remote), EPFL, ETH, local primary and secondary school. Between 20 and 30 students (5 groups of about 5 students)
- Time Format: 2 hours from 10.15am to 12.15, Friday 12 April 2019
- Incentives: The final pitches will be features on the WSIS 2019 or/and on the Solution Space Websites. We could issue "participation certificates".

**fVR Panel Discussion Structure:**  
**4:15-6pm (1h30)**

### **3. Email Template to Potential Panellists**

**Invitation to United Nations WSIS Forum 2019**

**CC:** [gitanjali.sah@itu.int](mailto:gitanjali.sah@itu.int)

Dear X,

Greetings from the WSIS Team at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)!

As a follow up to the Trialogue event 2019, on behalf of WSIS Team, it is our great pleasure to invite you to participate in the **World Summit on the Information Society 2019 (WSIS Forum 2019)**, which will take place **from April 8th to April 12th in Geneva, Switzerland**. This year, the WSIS Forum will facilitate implementations of [WSIS Action Lines](#) to advance **UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The WSIS Forum holds a range of diverse events such as **workshops, panel discussions, or hackathons**. Your involvement and contribution would be of great value to us.

Given your initiative/involvement/project/work, we are inviting you/your company/your organization to contribute to a discussion on ***Virtual Reality in Development*** within the **"ICTs for SDGs: scaling awareness and education"** track. With regard to this topic, WSIS Team is collaborating with students from the University of Geneva, by whom the topic has been brought forward. In order to be an active participant, you must apply through the ITU's [Open Consultation Process](#). Please note that the deadline for submissions is on **February 10th**.

The WSIS Forum is funded through the voluntary financial contributions of its stakeholders. For this reason, all participants are asked to cover their own expenses for travel, accommodation and insurance.



We encourage you to get in touch with us for additional information or assistance, and we hope to hear from you soon!

Best regards,

**WSIS Project Officer, World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**  
**International Telecommunication Union**  
Tel : +41 77 9622893



[www.wsis.org/forum](http://www.wsis.org/forum)

[www.wsis.org/prizes](http://www.wsis.org/prizes)

[www.wsis.org/stocktaking](http://www.wsis.org/stocktaking)

Follow us on:



#### **4. Panel Discussion Structure: VR/AR for Sustainable Spaces**

##### **1. Introduction**

**Good afternoon everyone, my name is Alexandra Mackey and I'll be your moderator for the VR Panel Discussion. I am a student at the University of Geneva, pursuing a Masters in Innovation, Human Development and Sustainability as part of the GTI. Present GTI,**

The GTI provides an opportunity to foster collaboration between Switzerland and China in the form of a dual master degree focused on resolving the UN SDGs. Students have the opportunity the study in Geneva at the SDG Solution Space, working in a global setting with international orgs like ITU for example to learn about the institutional aspects of sustainability, then continue their studies with a year at Tsinghua University in Beijing to learn about SD from the Chinese perspective. The GTI aims to cultivate innovators who create unique, effective solutions for the SDGs who are comfortable working in diverse environments around the world

##### **Present Panellists**

Touradj Ebrahimi (EPFL, JPEG Committee) Eh bra he me  
Stephanie Mermet (HUG)  
Marc Lee (Independent Swiss Artist)



Salar Shahna (World VR Forum)  
Jennah Kriebel (Scaphe Robotics)

### **introduce topic of VR and entry points**

"We would like to introduce the topic of emerging technologies and their applications in development, through our entry point which is climate change, as showcased by the project that will be presented by Maja and Yvain.

### **introduce Maja and Yvain**

Maria Mruk and Yvain Tisserand (VR Climate Action Project)

### **>>>>>Inflection WSIS ppt**

### **2. Panellist presentations**

2. Presentation of the VR Climate Action Project (5-7 min)
3. Panellists present their projects and their understanding of sustainable spaces (~5min max each - 25 min total)
4. Panel discussion along the questions outlined below (~30min)
5. Q&A with audience (~20 min)

### **PANELLISTS:**

Maria Mruk and Yvain Tisserand (VR Climate Action Project)

-

Jennah Kriebel (Scaphe Robotics)  
Marc Lee (Independent Swiss Artist)  
Stephanie Mermet (HUG)  
Salar Shahna (World VR Forum)  
Touradj Ebrahimi (EPFL, JPEG Committee)

1. Alex does 2-3 minute intro of GTI, presenting concept and format, panellists and moderator
2. Presentation of the *Inflection: VR Climate Action* Project (Yvain and Maria) (5-10 min)
3. Opening to the panellists - Panellists present projects + their understanding of sustainable spaces (5min each - 20 min total)
4. Panel discussion along set questions (30min)
5. Q&A with audience (25min)

### **1. Introduction:**

- Context of VR/AR use in development and sustainability
- Vision for this discussion and desired outcomes
- Mention of our entry points - climate action
- Presenting panellists and moderator

"We would like to introduce the topic of emerging technologies and their applications in development, through our entry point which is climate change, as showcased by the project that will be presented by Maja and Yvain.



## 2. Panellist presentations

- Send emails requesting prep: short presentation of each project **and** a couple of lines on own understanding of “sustainable spaces”

>>>>> Pitch Video VRelief - Stephanie

## QUESTIONS

### 1. What does sustainable spaces mean for you?

Pointers: What does sustainability mean to you? Is sustainable space linked to safety? To which senses is it more related? How does space relates to time and the body, for you?

### 2. What is specific to how images are created as they relate to virtual spaces in VR? How is it different from AR? *-What is special about the creation of images in virtual spaces, what is the particularity of virtual spaces in VR?*

Follow up questions: To make an experience stick you should do it through a face-to-face interaction.

Follow up questions: What is still lacking in terms of technology to make the images better? Do the quality of the images necessary have to be better? What is the role of the imagination in re-creating / appropriating the computer-generated space?

### 3. How does the user come into play when you work on building a space in Virtual Reality? / How to think about unexpected uses of the space by viewers?

Follow up question to Marc Lee: what have been the reactions to your net-based installations ?

### 4. Can VR truly build empathy in viewers that is long lasting? *This seems to be the central question of the Green Project, maybe then we can start with you David Rudrauf.*

Follow up question: Is raising awareness enough to change behaviours?

### 5. WSIS Action Line C.10: is concerned with the Ethical Dimension of the Information Society. In this sense, VR/ AR has new technologies can be used differently. It is not only a mirror because it is also used to provoke a reaction in people. So how can we ensure that this is done responsibly? *We know that VR is used already to train military personnel for them to be more efficient soldiers on the field and in that sense uses of VR differ.*

Follow up question to Jennah Kriebel: when it comes to virtual agents that I assume is also part of the discussion around the interaction between a human and a virtual agent. Could you briefly say what a virtual agent is and how ethical questions come into play in your work.

Follow up question: what is the role of the ITU in helping manage these new questions?



**6. Concerning the democratization of the diffusion/mainstreaming of the two technologies, is the VR revolution yet to be realized? Has AR more potential to be widely used, if we think of the success of Pokemon Go, for example?**

Follow up question: what is the main obstacle to the democratization? Money, institutional interest, ... it is actually quite easy to use software that can create spaces in VR but people don't necessarily know about it.

Follow up question to Ebrahimi: Do your students seem interested and intrigued by the potential of VR or not? Does AR speak to them more?

***7. Is the preoccupation around addiction to VR grounded, can it threaten the social fabric because it isolates the user/when the difference between what is reality and what is the computer-generated simulation because they make the experience so hyperreal that our senses have difficulties distinguishing the two?***

Follow up questions: Do you have an example that illustrate what you are saying? What does VR tell us about how we use our sense to relate to our environment?

### **3. Leading questions**

- **Bouncing off your definitions of sustainable spaces, can VR really have a role in achieving sustainability? How?**
- What kind of sustainable spaces can VR/AR create or promote?
- **Is VR going to be co-opted by entertainment? Can this drive an imbalance of negative vs. positive effects of VR/AR technologies? Which domains should invest more in VR/AR?**
- **Are there hidden pitfalls or dangers to VR that we are not prepared for/paying attention to?**
- Can VR/AR be a vector to relate to our surroundings in a more sustainable fashion?
- Marc Lee: you have sought to investigate the relationships we have to screens and also to the isolation that they can bring. For you, what was it about VR and AR that could help investigate this relationship?
- What makes VR/AR unique among other emerging technologies?
- **Can VR/AR desensitise rather than develop empathy?**
- Prof. Ebrahimi: you wrote a while back a Manifesto on the future of Image Coding-- and I would encourage everyone one to read it--and in it you wrote: "Could there be a different and enhanced experience created when capturing and using images, that could go beyond the experience images have been providing us for the last 120 years?" My question to you then is: do you think that VR/AR is the enhanced experience you were talking about? And what Jpeg Pleno can offer in this context.
- If VR can help develop empathy, can it also help change behaviours? To David Rudrauf
- **Should VR technologies be widely accessible and for what purpose? Marc Lee has made a number of his installations available on the App Store.**
- **What has been the most challenging when building spaces in VR/AR? In what ways could JPEG Pleno help with?**



- To Marc Lee and Rudrauf: By working closely on digital spaces and how to create plausible interactions, has your sense of space and how you relate to your environment changed?
- To Jenna Kriebel:
- To Mark Lee: it is often said that art isn't about giving answers, rather discussing questions / and challenging them. Working on this topic, what do you find the most striking in how the audience experiences your art installations?

#### 4. Q&A - back-up questions

- What excites you about VR? Why do you choose to work with it?
- Should there be a separate/overarching entity directing/regulating the diffusion of VR technologies?
- What are the possibilities of VR for education; physical/mental health?  
Do you think these new tech can be used in policies, and if yes how can we manage to unite these two worlds, where new tech is important in raising these issues

How can someone join traditional politics with understanding of tech?

-in EPFL there is multimedia center with massive archive of all that has happened at Montreux jazz festival

#### **SPACES:**

**To all: What is a sustainable space for you?**

Pointers: What does sustainability mean to you? Is sustainable space linked to safety? To which senses is it more related? How does space relate to time and the body, for you?

*(If it doesn't call to mind anything for you. That's fine.)*

Virtually all spaces can be either sustainable or unsustainable. It is necessarily related to our perception of it. The question then becomes **how to ensure that we use the potential of VR for good?** **Salar Shahna**

Is it possible to use VR to profoundly question our relationship to the spaces we inhabit? May it be online or offline? Even though this distinction is a bit outdated.

When it comes to our relationship to spaces this is done through movement.

And **Professor Ebrahimi** you have thought a lot about images and how these can be enhanced. You have written in the Manifesto for JPEG Pleno: "Could there be a different and enhanced experience created when capturing and using images, that could go beyond the experience images have been providing us for the last 120 years?"

Can VR specifically, enhance the empathy of the viewers? What is the potential for creating deep human connections and fighting preconceptions? I know it is a controversial topic. It



seems that this question is at the heart of the VR Green Project, maybe **Stephanie Mermet** you want to start ...

**Marc Lee**: it is often said that art is not about providing definitive answers and more about questioning our relationship to our reality. What does VR and AR allow you to do that you would be able to using other medium?

What were the reactions of the audiences?

WSIS Action Line C.10: is concerned with the **Ethical Dimension** of the Information Society. In this sense, VR/ AR has new technologies can be used differently. It is not only a mirror because it is also used to provoke a reaction in people. So how can we ensure that this is done responsibly?

**Jennah Kriebel**: when it comes to virtual agents that I assume is also part of the discussion around the interaction between a human and a virtual agent. Could you briefly say what a virtual agent is and how ethical questions come into your work.

How does the user come into play when you work on building a space in Virtual Reality?

**Marc Lee & Stephanie Mermet**

#### **TIME:**

**To all**: Democratisation of diffusion: is there a timetable for it? Is it ever going to realize itself? What are the obstacles to it?

It seems like AR is more easily democratizable, if we think of the App Pokemon Go...

**Professor Ebrahimi**: Do your students seem interested and intrigued by the potential of VR or not? Does AR speak to them more?

**To all**: Kristin Gutekunst, Executive Producer of the UN SDG Action Campaign noted that VR was an effective tool in the field of face-to-face-fundraising. As it is now, do you find that VR is used more as a raising awareness resource or not? David Rudrauf, I know that you don't believe in "raising-awareness" as an effective method for change?

Tip of the Trade from Maria: IF THEY ARE NOT RESPONSIVE, ASK THE MORE BROADEST POSSIBLE QUESTIONS AND THEY CAN TAKE IT FROM THERE.

#### **QUOTES/RESOURCES TO BE INSPIRED BY:**

"This also means the relation between space, movement and body has always been misunderstood, or at least, been related in the wrong order. There just is no movement apart from image, no image apart from movement. The way we construct images within our bodies



is a million times more complicated than the cognitive concept of printing reality on light-sensitive gray matter.”

**Lars Spuybroek, Where Space Gets Lost, E-mail interview with Lars Spuybroek by Andreas Ruby, published in "The Art of the Accident," 1998.**

“A question to ask ourselves is: will we continue to have the same relationship to flat snapshots in time (the so-called Kodak moments) we call pictures, or could there be a different and enhanced experience created when capturing and using images, that could go beyond the experience images have been providing us for the last 120 years?”

**Touradj Ebrahimi, A manifesto on the future of image coding - JPEG Pleno, Epfl Blogs 2014, available at: <https://blogs.epfl.ch/article/41754>**

The future is already here. It's just not evenly distributed yet.

**Kennedy P. (2012). 'William Gibson's Future Is Now', *The New York Times* 13 January, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/books/review/distrust-that-particular-flavor-by-william-gibson-book-review.html>**

**VIDEO:** Virtual Reality Show: How the United Nations is using VR

<https://sdgactioncampaign.org/2017/07/07/how-the-united-nations-is-using-virtual-reality/>

#### **Sustainability of VR and AR - energy-wise**

- “I prefer to use the term *immersive experiences*, not sustainable spaces - the experience is the real thing. Space is just an enabler of the experience. It allows you to create immersion. The real thing is the experience that the immersion is going to create for you.” Touradj Ebrahimi (1:02:36)

### **5. Outcome document for the VR/AR for Sustainable Spaces Panel Discussion**

#### ***WSIS Forum 2019 OUTCOME DOCUMENT***

- 1) Title: Harnessing the Potential of VR and AR for Sustainable Spaces**
- 2) Organisers: International Telecommunications Union and Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative (Hanaé Taxis, Maria Oxamitnaia, Donata Dettwiler)**



**3) Relevance with the WSIS Action Lines: C1; C2; C3: E-Environment, E-Health and E-Science; C4; C5; C6; C7; C8; C9; C10**

**4) Key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments:**

- Presentation of “Inflection: VR Climate Action” project prototype by Maria Mruk and Yvain Tisserand.
- Panel discussion (Moderator: Alexandra Mackey (GTI)):
  - Touradj Ebrahimi (EPFL, JPEG Committee)
  - Jennah Kriebel (Scaphe Robotics)
  - Marc Lee (independent artist)
  - Stéphanie Mermet (Hôpitaux Universitaires Genève)
  - Salar Shahna (World VR Forum)

**5) Main outcomes highlighting the following:**

**I. Debated Issues**

- The main debate focused on the relation between VR/AR technologies and sustainable processes; ways to guide the diffusion of VR/AR technologies in ethical, responsible and democratic directions; the exploration of potential uses of VR/AR in political spheres and the importance of education in directing VR/AR development and diffusion.
- The Inflection: VR Climate Action project (a GTI and Campus Biotech collaboration) was presented as an example of emerging technologies at the forefront and intersection of Sustainable Development Goals and WSIS Action Lines.
- An audience member challenged the hypothesis that VR/AR can enhance sustainable development by questioning the overall sustainability of these technologies. Stéphanie Mermet (panellist), noted that VR applications for pain/stress management in pediatric emergencies present an all but exclusively beneficial alternative to a number of sustainability issues in hospitals, addressing the wellbeing of young children and their families and medication waste management.

**II. Quotes**

- “I think the most important part of it is to educate everybody, including ourselves-- those who create the technologies. What are the impacts of these technologies on us, on everybody else? With VR, it is the same. With a lot of the solutions we are talking about, I think that education is, and I am not saying it in a naive way, going to play a very, very important role in these things, and of course it encompasses also ethical issues.” Professor Touradj Ebrahimi, EPFL, JPEG Committee.
- “Je pense que la difficulté est beaucoup plus chez l’adulte parce qu’il n’a pas grandi avec ça, alors que l’enfant, on pensait qu’on allait en surprendre quelques uns. Mais en réalité très peu. Les questions un peu plus inquiétantes sont beaucoup plus chez l’adulte qui lui n’a pas grandi avec ça et a peur de perdre le contrôle. (...) Les enfants ont une capacité d’adaptation qui est bien meilleure que celle de l’adulte.” Stéphanie Mermet, HUG

**III. Overall outcomes of the session highlighting**

- With VR and AR, as with all technologies, they can be used for good or for more nefarious ends. The key is to have an ethical framework in order to use these



technologies responsibly. Education is one of the primary ways to ensure that ethics considerations participate in the design and diffusion phases.

- The JPEG Pleno framework is an enabler of the current era of virtualization. The trend of image coding is towards more immersion and virtualization of physical spaces, with new technologies being mainstreamed (such as, inter alia, light field technology and holography)

#### **IV. Main linkages with the Sustainable Development Goals: direct links of the discussion to specific SDGs: 3; 4; 7; 8; 9; 11; 12; 13; 17.**

- The Sustainable Development Goals provide an overall, holistic framework for development cooperation. To do so, engaging cross-disciplinary debates are needed on the challenges and pitfalls of emerging technologies for sustainable development.

#### **V. Emerging Trends related to WSIS Action Lines identified during the meeting**

- The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development (C1) has been effective in the panel, as it was a multistakeholder and interactive meeting.
- Information and Communication Infrastructure (C2), Access to information and knowledge (C3) and Media (C9) were largely reflected during the panel. This was emphasized by Salar Shahna and Marc Lee regarding their work in media and art.
- Enabling environments (C6) have been suggested throughout the panel, as the main theme was to define and contrast the different definitions of “sustainable spaces” according to the different backgrounds of the panellists. Jennah Kriebel considered the many types of walls, understood in terms of framework rather than only physical structures, to create safe spaces.
- The potential of VR for E-Health (C7.18) was considered through the HUG pilot project presented by Stéphanie Mermet as it relates to pain mitigation for children.
- E-environment (C7.20) and E-science (C7.22) have been discussed in depth as it relates to the conditions necessary to make a space, virtual or physical, sustainable.
- Cultural Diversity and Identity, linguistic diversity and local content (C8) was present, and well-manage throughout. Stéphanie Mermet brought a local perspective to VR at hospitals in Geneva and the global aspect was brought up by Salar Shahna with the World VR Forum for instance. Interpretation from French to English was achieved.
- Ethical dimensions of the Information Society (C10). Professor Ebrahimi noted that education was a fundamental dimension for an ethical use of new technologies. Stéphanie Mermet, as a medical professional, emphasized the importance of operating within an institutional ethical framework.

#### **VI. Suggestions for Thematic Aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2020**

- Further investigate the possible applications of VR/AR in politics and governments
- The democratization of this type of emerging technologies, especially in the development field. Can the potential of empathy creation of VR/AR be used to benefit poorer communities? Might this enhance global inequalities rather than contribute to eradicating them?



- Better understand the overall energy needed to produce, use and maintain emerging ICTs.

## **6. Hypertext Café Facebook Promotional Post**

We are looking for participants for the Youth Track at World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2019. Come join us to engage and share your ideas, projects and innovative solutions to the current challenges that different communities around the world are facing in ICTs. Youth engagement has an important role in actual and future development that can be empowered by the WSIS outcomes.

The Youth Track will take place on Friday, April 12th 2019. It is open to any school and university student interested in new technologies and their impact on the future of our society, in terms of education, jobs and internships, security, etc.

We are inviting you to two events:

- Challenge-Based Learning: Deep Dive on Digital Education (10:15-12:00): Challenge yourself to create innovative solutions to e-learning in underserved communities!
- Hypertext Café (12-14:00): Come voice your opinion around a cup of coffee on the role of youth in demystifying the Digital Age!

Free light lunch and coffee will be provided.

If you wish to attend, don't forget to register before the Sunday, March 31st, midnight CET via this form! The registered participants will get certificates at the end of the day of the event.

By registering for the Youth Track at the WSIS Forum 2019, you will also automatically be considered for the draw of AI for Good Summit 2019, taking place on 28-31st, May 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland at ITU.

We look forward to meeting you!



## 7. Cards titles according and color groups

	Trends	Stakeholders	ICTs
EVERY TABLE		government cities Social media companies Universities ITU UN Financial sector Start-ups international organisations civil society individuals Military sector marginalized communities (?) INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE HACKTIVISTS WORLD TELECOM POLICY FORUM OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE MOVEMENT BLOCKCHAIN DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES Open-source-software movement	
	SDGs Utopia		Internet AI VR/AR blockchain cryptocurrency 3d printing Internet of Things (IoT) Drones (?) personal assistance (gender neutral) 5G



<b>404 NOT FOUND (Privacy, Security and Big Data, Freedom on the Internet)</b>	E-banking Big Data and its ethics Fake news Surveillance capitalism Lobbies Privacy data ownership net neutrality online identity theft Electronic transactions (e-payments and e-signatures) General Data Protection Regulation	Facebook (private sector) Google Doctors Insurance Companies Open-source-software movement Ethics Research Committees Research and Development Labs International Court of Justice World Telecom Policy Forum	
<b>403.9 TOO MANY USERS (Social Networks, Connectivity)</b>	Elections Mindfulness Democracy Borders Social networks Digital Identities Communication connections Data ownership Isolation Privacy Information bubble Image Siloes citizenship	Blockchain Development Companies open platforms hacktivists	
<b>103 EARLY HINTS (Government 2.0 - Digital Rights &amp; Democratisation)</b>	e-government (e.g. e-Estonia) e-democracy resilient society Citizenship Borders Public Spaces Climate Change adaptation e-Participation political parties- Data ownership - Hacktivism Participative budgeting (PB)		



<b>426 UPDATE REQUIRED (Capacity Building &amp; Training)</b>	fake news MOOCs Big Data soft skills hard skills e-learning microwork recruitment bias (gender, racial, ableist,... ) Lifelong learning	Refugees ministry of education students Research and Development Labs students - United Nations Global Pulse	
<b>429 TOO MANY REQUESTS (The Future of work in the AI era)</b>	Youth unemployment design thinking Universal Basic Income (UBI) Unpaid internships recruitment biases Bullshit jobs Automation Machine Learning Deep Learning Microwork Rising income inequality digital literacy robot tax	Digital headhunters Online micro-task platforms Refugees Trade unions	

## 8. Email Template to Professionals before the Hypertext Café

Dear all,

Thank you so much for accepting to come to the Hypertext Café on Friday 12th, from 12 to 2pm!

We are emailing you the details about the Café and the role you will have as “professionals”.

First of all, the Hypertext Café will have a special format. There will be 5 different tables, each representing one of the topics. At each table sits:

- A **student facilitator**, making sure that everyone gets a chance to speak, facilitating a dynamic flow for the conversation and keeping an eye on time. The student facilitator is also responsible for synthesising the main insights into a short statement at the end of the session.
- A **professional**, providing support for the facilitator, insights, throwing in ideas and answering questions. As you already know, the primary objective is to make the students participate and voice their opinions. In that sense, we would ask you to be receptive to students’ inputs.
- A number of students interested in the topic at hand.



There will be two 30-minute discussion sessions, with the possibility of switching tables for the second session. We have developed a game to aid the discussion. Each table will have three categories of cards: **actors**, **ICTs**, and **phenomena**, linked to the topic of the table. The participants can use these to map out and brainstorm connections and trends, by questioning how these elements interrelate and thinking of concrete examples of these interrelations.

In order to do this, we are going to use the app/website [Mentimeter](#). This will enable the students to keep the discussion going live in between the tables, also allowing the connections between the tables.

The session will go as follows:

- 12-12:15 - light lunch & coffee - people choose a table
- 12:15 - Welcome, introduction (Stephanie Chuah) + Brain warm-up (**Jasmina Byrne**)
- 12:30-12:55 - First part of the game (incl. 5 minute synthesis)
- 12:55-13:05 - Table shuffling - people move around and choose another table for the second part. Two presentations (**Stephenie** and **Nyree**)
- 13:05-13:30 - Second part of the game (incl. 5 minute synthesis)
- 13:30-14:00 - Conclusion of game, Outcomes, Short speeches & conclusion/thanks
  - Conclusion of the game + Overall outcome synthesis + open discussion
  - 5min Presentation of AI for Good (**Ahmed Riad**)
  - 5min Presentation of Wandersafe (**Stephenie Rodriguez**)
  - Conclusion and thanks (certificate distribution)

The different tables and the distribution of the professional per table can be found below.

- **404 NOT FOUND** (Privacy, Security, Big Data, Freedom on the Internet)
- **403.9 TOO MANY USERS** (Social Networks and Connectivity)
- **103 EARLY HINTS** (Government 2.0 - Digital Rights & Democratisation)
- **426 UPDATE REQUIRED** (Capacity Building & Training)
- **429 TOO MANY REQUESTS** (The Future of work in the AI era)

We look forward to meeting you next Friday!

## 9. Script for the Hypertext Café

### STEPHANIE:

Welcome to the Hypertext Café!

**PURPOSE** The purpose of the Hypertext Café is to understand how technologies impact your life and identify the topics of particular interest for you. This is a space intended to listen to the many voices of the youth, so please just let your mind run free through discussion and have fun!



**FORMAT OF THE CAFE** // There will be 2 sets of discussions. You have been assigned to the first discussion based on your center of interest. But you will be free to choose the second topic you wish to discuss during the second part of the Café.

Short introduction of the table set-up, the experts: who they are,... Each table hosts a student facilitator, who will be assisting the discussion, and a professional, who will be enriching the discussion. But the aim is for you to use your existing knowledge and understanding to conceptualise what living in the digital age entails.

We would like to warm your brains up by introducing Jasmina Byrne from UNICEF, New York, who will give you a short inspiring talk.

**FIRST PRESENTATION:** Please welcome Jasmina Byrne of UNICEF!

Maria continues immediately after Jasmina

**MARIA:**

**WHY HYPERTEXT?** We chose this name because, for one, it reflects our daily experience of the internet, but also speaks to the original intentions behind its creation.

What is Hypertext? Very simply put, it is text that is not linear - rather consisting of different pieces of information, which are interlinked. Every time you click on a link and it takes you somewhere new, you are in the presence of hypertext or hypermedia. It was first used for the creation of databases, the programming of encyclopedias and dictionaries, but now it is ingrained in the structure of the internet as we know it.

So why Hypertext? This is what we're trying to replicate with HTTP Café. We all have existing resources, interconnected pieces of information that shape our understanding of the world. Today, we want to activate these resources - we want to create new connections between our existing pieces of information to expand our shared understanding of the digital age which we are swiftly entering.

Many of you have filled out the google form where we ask you to mention what you find inspiring or important about the digital age. Many of the answers included the words possibilities, connections and connectivity. That's perfect, that's exactly what we want you to crowd think about today.

And we would like this driving principle to be reflected in the discussions. It is meant to be a collaborative effort so we encourage each and every one of you to participate to the discussions.

We are going to use the app/website [Mentimeter](#).

- during the discussions, anyone can send a live feed of what's happening; this can be a thought, a quote, etc. This will be showed on a screen that everyone can see.



- each team will synthesise the main takeaway from their discussion into a short statement. These statements will also be visible on the screen at the end of each session.

## **BEGINNING OF THE FIRST PART OF THE GAME/DISCUSSION (20 min; 12:20)**

### **STEPHANIE:**

5 mins before end: wrap up and send the statements to the technical coordinator

### **END OF THE FIRST DISCUSSION (13:00)**

Brief summary of the roundtables by the student moderator via Menti App // main outcomes  
Would someone like to jump in and comment?

Please feel free to change tables, the topics are written on the table.

### **STEPHANIE:**

Get the student to synthesize and appoint someone to present (2 mins each)  
If no one has any burning thoughts, we'll switch tables:

**SECOND PRESENTATION:** Please welcome Stephenie Rodriguez (WanderSafe)- an example of how we could use technology like an app to address our concerns

### **BEGINNING OF THE SECOND DISCUSSION (30 min)**

**Brief summary of the roundtables by the student moderator. Main topics and trends that were discussed.**

Follow up question: How did it change from the first conversation?

### **END OF SECOND PART (13:30)**

Wrapping up the various discussions: what were the main trends out of what the student moderators pointed out?

### **STEPHANIE:**

Get the student to synthesize and appoint someone to present (2 mins each)

5mins: Follow up question / to the group: would someone like to comment on one of these topics? Anything to add? (play by ear depending on time)

### **STEPHANIE:**

Invite Ahmed for ITU AI for good

### **END OF Session**

### **Stephanie:**

The WSIS Forum's agenda is crowdsourced and bottom up, so anyone interested in shaping the 2019 Forum can contribute to the Open Consultation Process (before Feb). We invite you to contribute to the WSIS Consultation also for next year! (in terms of topic, etc.)  
Go to the website



## 10. Hypertext café Outcome Document

### **WSIS Forum 2019 OUTCOME DOCUMENT Hypertext Café (HTTP Café) - YOUTH TRACK**

- 1) **Title:** Hypertext Café (HTTP Café)
- 2) **Organizers:** International Telecommunications Unit and Geneva-Tsinghua initiative (Hanaé Taxis, Maria Oxamitnaia, Donata Dettwiler); **Moderator:** Stephanie Chuah
- 3) **Relevance with the WSIS Action Lines – please specify the Action lines C1 to C11:** C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7 (e-government, e-learning, e-environment, e-science), C8, C9, C10, C11
- 4) **Key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments**
  - a) **Game:**
    - i) The purpose of the Hypertext Café was to understand how technologies impact your life and identify the topics of particular interest for you. This is a space intended to listen to the many voices of the youth. Hypertext refers to a network of interlinked pieces of information, and we wanted participants to connect their pieces of knowledge in order for us all to expand our shared understanding of the Digital Age.
    - ii) There were 2 sets of discussions. Participants were free to join the table of their choice, for each part of the game.
    - iii) Each table hosts at least one “professional”, enriched the discussion. But the aim was to use existing knowledge and understanding to conceptualise what living in the digital age entails. Playing cards were given on the table to keep the discussion going and to help participants make links between elements, ideas, actors and ICTs. Overall, the discussion was aimed to be led by students, and professionals to participate in this debate as an added value.
  - b) **Presentations**
    - i) **Jasmina Byrne**, UNICEF
    - ii) **Stephenie Rodriguez**, WanderSafe
    - iii) **Nyree Oman**, digital skills for youth and mental health
    - iv) **Ahmed Riad**, ITU, AI for Good

#### 5) **Main outcomes highlighting the following:**

##### a) **Debated Issues**

We have explored the following interconnected themes:

- Privacy, Security and Big Data, Freedom on the Internet. How to gain better ownership of our internet activity and presence?
- Social Networks, Connectivity. What are the possibilities for better connections and connectivity offered by the Digital Age?
- Government 2.0 - Digital Rights & Democratisation. How can we transform systems for more equitable, just and democratic governments and access to services?



- Capacity Building & Training. Along which lines should education and skillbuilding develop?
- The Future of work in the AI era. What aspects of the labor market are becoming obsolete and how to prepare for the opportunities offered by greater automation and the rise of AI?
- ...and their interconnections with ICTs such as 5G, blockchain, cryptocurrency, nanotechnology, AI, VR/AR etc...
- We have developed and tested our HTTP Game prototype - a card game that helps ideation, associative thinking and trend forecasting along the lines of ICTs, stakeholders and various applications of technology.

**b) Quotes**

- i) In terms of capacity building, more efficient matching of skills on the labor market is desirable. AI could reduce the recruitment bias, but cannot solve it completely. AI could help people find skills in short supply to learn.
- ii) 5G will enable the biggest big brother!
- iii) Technology as a way of grouping and ideas sharing but not the place where the action take place. This online idea sharing should be regulated as often subjected to fake news. How can there be (e-)democracy without a common truth? -- Government 2.0 Table.

**6) Overall outcomes of the session highlighting**

- a) Youth should be more assertive in furthering their interests, concerns and understanding of the digital age. This should be done transversally, whether in professional situations, in defining new directions and methods for education, or in addressing questions of privacy and security on the internet.
- b) Scaling engagement should be done through interactive events that bring together a diverse range of stakeholders for further dialogue, exchange and collaboration with a strong focus on the intersection of WSIS Action Lines C3, C4, C5, C8, C10 and C11.

**7) Main linkages with the Sustainable Development Goals (please specify the SDGs)**

- a) The Hypertext Café succeeded by providing an open platform for university students, where participants shares ideas to attempt to reinvent the ways we see jobs opportunities and society in the digital age of the internet (SDG 8 & 9).
- b) In that way, students and professionals exchanged about their thoughts and ideas about their future careers (SDG 8).
- c) The use of sustainable materials in technology production (SDG 6, 8, 9 & 14) was discussed at length. The global sand crisis is impacted by the extensive, unregulated use of sand and other minerals in the production new technologies and devices such as smartphones. A shift to more sustainable methods of production is integral to achieving SDG 9.
- d) Stephenie Rodriguez presented her project WanderSafe centered around helping enhance the sense of security in public spaces for women, through



easy-to-use signaling equipment. Her project provided an example of the ways in which ICTs can help gender equality (SDG 5).

- e) The Café achieved its aim of enhancing education (SDG 4), as its participative and horizontal format gave the chance for participants to learn from each other, with the help of “elements cards” given to engage the discussion. The interactive play that the session took also We also want to push for new viewpoints and ways to view today's issues, to collaboratively anticipate future professional issues and opportunities. This participated in the achievement of SDG 9 as an innovative practice to engage the discussion. Additionally, the whole session was formatted with the usage of the app/website “Mentimeter”, to get live feedback and thoughts from the participants. This enhanced engagement and innovative thoughts from them (SDG 9).
- f) The game at hand has engage the debate around the actors of each table, including the institutions that are involved in particular problematics. For that reason, strong institutions were discussed (SDG 16).
- g) The AI for Good Summit presentation provided an additional element to link the session with the SDG, particularly linking all issues together, ensuring the SDG 17 for partnerships for and in between the goals.

#### **8) Emerging Trends related to WSIS Action Lines identified during the meeting**

- The role of youth is central in the promotion of ICTs for development (WSIS Action Line C1)
- Access to information and knowledge (C3)
- The need for robust cybersecurity and data protection (C5), through an appropriate regulation of the use and ownership of data was tackled in various roundtable discussions.
- ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life (C7). The potential benefits and human rights implications of 5G were considered.
- The implications of AI and for 5G for consumer protection (C6) were considered. A student noted that privacy should not be an acceptable upended in exchange for access to internet.
- The issue of the ethical dimensions of the Information Society (C10) was tackled in all roundtable discussions. Jasmina Byrne (UNICEF) has noted youth engagement in policies processes is essential to ensure that internet remain a common good. was discussed in all the roundtable discussions.
- Development of platforms that encourage intersectional exchange and collaboration (C11).

#### **9) Suggestions for Thematic Aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2020**

- The WSIS Forum 2020 might benefit from an emphasis on further democratisation of ICTs and the impact on youth.
- A stronger focus on interactivity and horizontal knowledge exchange could be integrated into workshops, encouraging both professionals and young people to learn from each other.



## 11. Donata Dettwiler's blog post for ITU News<sup>28</sup>

### Hypertext Café engages students to shape our digital future for the better

"We have to invent new forms of democracy," said one university student, summarizing a discussion on Democratization and Digital Rights at the Hypertext Café, which took place during last week's [World Summit on Information Society \(WSIS\) Forum 2019](#) in Geneva, Switzerland.

Over a cup of coffee, 50 students were invited to voice their views on the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their future according to five overarching themes, which ranged from Capacity Building and Training to Privacy and Security. At each table, one more-experienced "professional" was invited to participate and enrich the conversations.

"We hope that you and your generation can help us create technologies and platforms that serve humanity and bring us together, rather than drive us apart," said Jasmina Byrne, Chief of the Policy Lab at UNICEF. "We'd like to hear from you what we need to do to ensure the Internet is a public good that can benefit this and future generations."

The [Hypertext Café](#) was part of the 'Youth in ICTs' Track implemented to engage young people and ensure a space in which they may contribute to the WSIS process by identifying pressing issues for them, keeping in mind that "youth" as a category encompasses people with vastly different worldviews, aspirations and access to resources.

Within these frameworks, I co-organized the Café, with fellow master students, Maria Oxamitnaia and Hanaé Taxis.

What is the Hypertext Café

The concept of the Hypertext Café takes inspiration from its namesake, the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP), which standardizes requests and messages between computers and servers.

As with the digital protocol, the Hypertext Café aimed to serve as a participatory, multimedia space where students can meet and share their opinions, experiences and doubts about the digital age.

Participants could use the [online tool Menti](#) to share with the group memorable quotes and table outcomes, thus ensuring that students who hadn't participated in all the discussions could still be aware of what had transpired.

Non-linear discussions

The direction of the conversations could be nonlinear, jumping from one idea to another, like we do using hyperlinks when reading, for instance, a newspaper article online. In this sense, we wanted to encourage participants to make creative, unexpected uses of playing cards given at each table to keep the discussion flowing and to help participants make links between elements, ideas, actors and ICTs. For example, one discussion focused on how hacktivists, cryptocurrency and democracy are interlinked, if at all.

The roundtable dialogues did not veer toward so called techno-solutionism, which is the tendency to view technology alone as the solution to social problems. On the contrary, the participants were reflexive of the ways in which new technologies, especially Artificial Intelligence and 5G, could alter our freedom.

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<sup>28</sup> Available at: <https://news.itu.int/hypertext-cafe-wsis/> [Last accessed on 17 August 2019].



In particular, the question of privacy and data ownership was raised in multiple instances. The students at the Privacy and Big Data table noted that a lack of privacy should not be the price to pay to use the Internet and its services.

The boundaries between digital spaces, like social media, and physical ones was also explored as it related to effective strategies for climate action.

“It’s extremely important to enhance people’s participation through online platforms, but not to forget to also create physical and tangible places where people can meet and where people can innovate and where people can share ideas and organize for concrete action,” Maël Azokly, a student in attendance, estimates. The participant had taken as an example Greta Thurberg’s work for a global climate strike.

As the Hypertext Café was built on the success of last year’s first edition, I hope that it will be a part of the WSIS Forum’s future, may it be with a different name and concept all together, but with the same intention of creating a collaborative and horizontal space that centers young people’s many voices in order to ensure a sustainable use and design of ICTs.



## 12. Attribution Sheet

### Donata Dettwiler's tasks:

- ☐ Assisting in the writing of concept notes (of the panel discussion, the GTI/WSIS Track, the Youth Track, the Exhibition Space)
- ☐ Researching potential panellists online
- ☐ Drafting and sending emails to potential panellists
- ☐ Follow-up with potential panellists through email (Touradj Ebrahimi) or Skype (Marc Lee), throughout the lead up to the WSIS Forum 2019
- ☐ Writing of the questions for the panel and coordination with Alex Mackey, the moderator
- ☐ Filling out the Open Consultation Process form online
- ☐ Presence at WSIS meeting, depending on seat availability (usually, 2-3 GTI/WSIS interns would be in attendance)
- ☐ Coordinating with fellow GTI/WSIS interns to allocate space and time opportunities at the GTI Exhibition Space booth
- ☐ Researching potential names/concepts for the Youth Café
- ☐ Assisting in the design of the HTTP Café poster
- ☐ Coordinating with WSIS team members for the HTTP Café social media posts
- ☐ Going to University of Lausanne, EPFL and HEAD Geneva campuses and UNIGE CUI building to put up posters
- ☐ Coordinating with WSIS team members to secure a booth for UNIGE bachelor students' project, via Whatsapp and email. The student also went on the newly created WSIS OpenSpace Podcast.
- ☐ Coordinating with WSIS team member to allow for an extra thematic workshop, two weeks prior to the event.
- ☐ Contacting UNIGE professors to present the HTTP Café to their students
- ☐ Presenting the HTTP Café at two university of Geneva's auditoria (with prior green light by the professors in charge)
- ☐ Assist in the crafting of HTTP Café timeline and writing the moderator, Stephanie Chuah's presentation
- ☐ Welcoming panellists on Monday and discussing Exhibition Space's logistics with Marc Lee
- ☐ Helping with the on-the-spot questions during the panel discussion



- Assisting with the logistics of the Exhibition Space arrangement and setting up Marc Lee's project demonstration
- Interacting with Exhibition Space visitors and explaining the GTI master's program
- Assisting with the logistics of the HTTP Café area on Friday, 12 April 2019
- Assisting with the registration of participants at the HTTP Café
- Writing outcome documents for the panel discussion and HTTP Café following the events
- Writing a blog post for ITU News about youth engagement at the HTTP Café.



### Hanaé Taxis' tasks:

- ☐ Assisting in the writing of concept notes (of the panel discussion, the GTI/WSIS Track, the Youth Track, the Exhibition Space)
- ☐ Researching potential panellists online
- ☐ Drafting and sending emails to potential panellists
- ☐ Writing of the questions for the panel and coordination with Alex Mackey, the moderator
- ☐ Filling out the Open Consultation Process form online
- ☐ Presence at WSIS meeting, depending on seat availability (usually, 2-3 GTI/WSIS interns would be in attendance)
- ☐ Coordinating with fellow GTI/WSIS interns to allocate space and time opportunities at the GTI Exhibition Space booth
- ☐ Researching potential names/concepts for the Youth Café
- ☐ Assisting in the design of the HTTP Café poster, communication flyers and promotional text for social media (Facebook)
- ☐ Coordinating with WSIS team members for the HTTP Café social media posts
- ☐ Going to University of Lausanne, EPFL and HEAD Geneva campuses and UNIGE CUI building to put up posters
- ☐ Contacting and promoting the HTTP Café to potential student groups, from university outside of Geneva, including France.
- ☐ Coordinating with WSIS team members to secure a booth for UNIGE bachelor students' project, via Whatsapp and email. The student also went on the newly created WSIS Podcast.
- ☐ Coordinating with WSIS team member to allow for an extra thematic workshop, two weeks prior to the event.
- ☐ Contacting UNIGE professors to present the HTTP Café to their students
- ☐ Presenting the HTTP Café at two university of Geneva's auditoria (with prior green light by the professors in charge)
- ☐ Assist in the crafting of HTTP Café timeline and writing the moderator, Stephanie Chuah's presentation
- ☐ Welcoming panellists on Monday
- ☐ Helping with the on-the-spot questions during the panel discussion
- ☐ Designing and creating the registration form for the Youth Track and HTTP Café with fellow GTI-WSIS interns, monitoring and collecting of results
- ☐ Organizing the different topics of discussion for the preparation of the Café
- ☐ Setting up and packing the Exhibition Space stand



- Interacting with Exhibition Space visitors, promoting and explaining the GTI master's program, and well as the SDG Solution Space.
- Researching about the "serious game" concept to help design the format of the HTTP Café
- Design and create the playing cards for the HTTP Café
- Coordinating the Menti feedback for the HTTP Café with a fellow GTI-WSIS intern
- Coordinating the HTTP Café.
- Recording of the HTTP Café (photo)
- Assisting with the logistics of the HTTP Café area on Friday, 12 April 2019
- Assisting with the registration of participants at the HTTP Café
- Writing outcome documents for the panel discussion and HTTP Café following the events
- Following up with various participants of the HTTP Café about the format of the session (Ahmed Riad, Janet Shaner)



### Maria Oxamitnaia's tasks:

- ☐ Assisting in the writing of concept notes (of the panel discussion, the GTI/WSIS Track, the Youth Track, the Exhibition Space)
- ☐ Researching potential panellists online
- ☐ Drafting and sending emails to potential panellists; follow-up
- ☐ Presence at WSIS meeting, depending on seat availability (usually, 2-3 GTI/WSIS interns would be in attendance)
- ☐ Liaising with WSIS management
- ☐ Going to University of Lausanne, EPFL and HEAD Geneva campuses and UNIGE CUI building to put up posters
- ☐ Assisting with content creation and poster design for event publicity
- ☐ Presenting the HTTP Café at two university of Geneva's auditoria (with prior green light by the professors in charge)
- ☐ Co-conceptualization of Hypertext Café and HTTP Game
- ☐ Recruitment and liaising with panel speakers and Hypertext Café professionals (particularly Jasmine Byrne of UNICEF)
- ☐ Providing in real-time translation for one panellist (French to English)
- ☐ Preparation of Hypertext Café professionals and speakers prior to the event
- ☐ Interacting with Exhibition Space visitors and explaining the GTI master's program
- ☐ Assisting with the logistics of the Exhibition Space arrangement and setting up Marc Lee's project demonstration
- ☐ Coordinating the Hypertext Café logistics and facilitating it in real time
- ☐ Running the Exhibition Space stand with a special responsibility for the FabLab materials (chocolate printer, sandbox, ...)
- ☐ Promoting our events through word-of-mouth at the WSIS Forum
- ☐ Composing outcome documents for the events
- ☐ Following up with participants and speakers