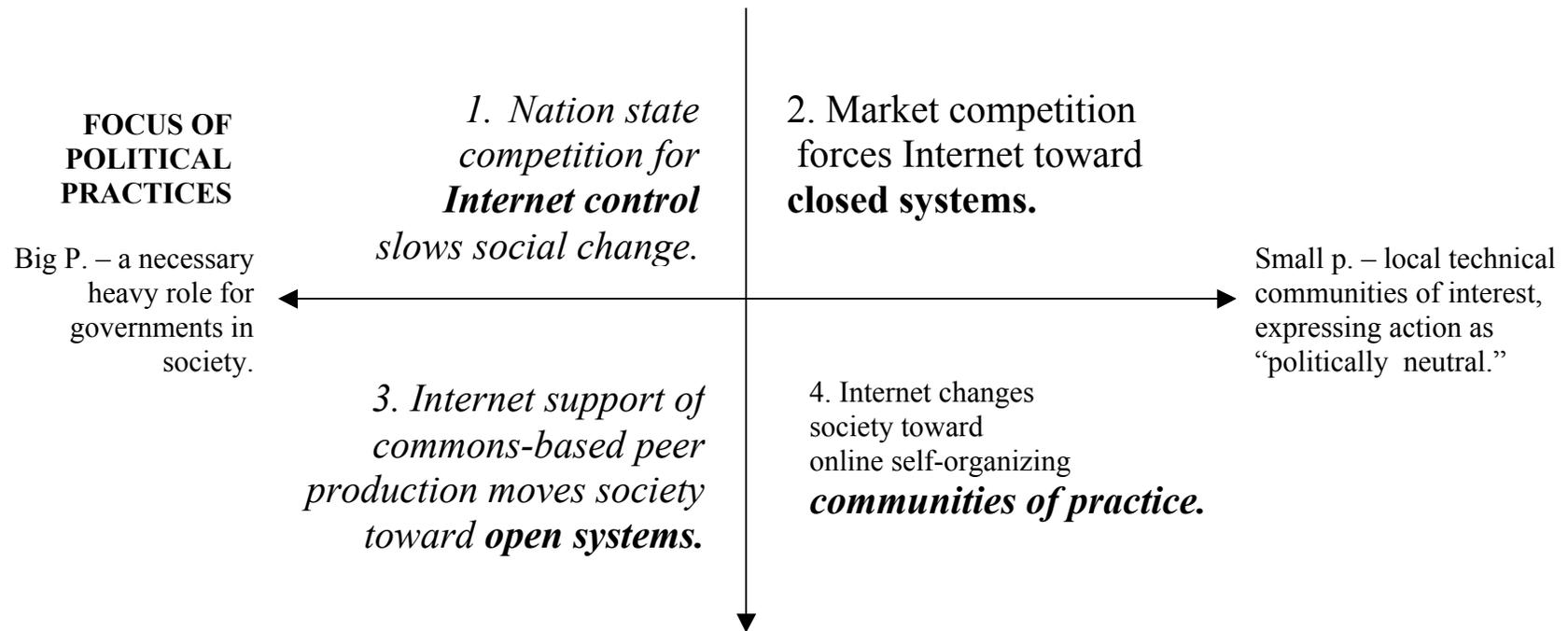# EXPERIENCING THE INFORMATION SOCIETY:
FOUR INTERNET FUTURES

BELIEFS ABOUT THE ROLE OF AUTHORITY IN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Hierarchy – explicit rules imposed on systems from outside and express difference and separation.
The reality of the system's creator transcends the reality of the system he creates.

FOCUS OF
POLITICAL
PRACTICES

*1. Nation state competition for **Internet control** slows social change.*

2. Market competition forces Internet toward **closed systems.**

Big P. – a necessary heavy role for governments in society.

Small p. – local technical communities of interest, expressing action as "politically neutral."

*3. Internet support of commons-based peer production moves society toward **open systems.***

4. Internet changes society toward online self-organizing ***communities of practice.***

Distributed - implicit rules are internal to systems and express the possibility of open interaction. Systems self-organize. The reality of the system's creator is not separate from the reality of the system she creates.

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Notes for …
EXPERIENCING THE INFORMATION SOCIETY:
FOUR INTERNET FUTURES

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WGIG defined Internet governance (IG) as:
> *The development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.*

In mapping these four scenarios from the perspective of being in an Information Society, I do not assume that assigning "respective roles" to governments, the private sector or civil society is a key driver of change or even essential to the definition of Internet Governance. I suspect that structure in an Information Society is inherently "open," and has a different typology of elements than those three. In effect, self-organizing communities of practice would emerge from "below." A better definition of IG might then be:
> *The development and application by anyone of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.*

The four scenarios each present a different context for viewing the issues of Internet Governance:

1. If nation states decide to compete for **Internet control**, they would seek to shape "the evolution and use" of the Internet by creating "a predictable and well coordinated public policy environment for Internet Governance." The ccTLD's would be seen as the property of nation states, and oversight and control of institutional practices would be contested among nation states. Any forum function would blend into an oversight function, and many oversight reforms would be undertaken by favouring existing multilateral organizations.

2. In a world dominated by privatization, trends to monopoly in communications, and market competition, **closed systems** would seek to internationalize ICANN and bring it to account internally. They would build on the existing structures of

IG but keep it outside the UN. Agreement that neither the USG nor a multilateral group of governments should provide an oversight function might open the way for an agreement on the internationalization of ICANN on a privatized and multi-stakeholder basis.

3. The proponents of **open systems** intend to compliment the existing structures of IG with a forum for broad issues of public policy (a new space for dialogue, under the oversight of the Secretary General of the UN). The forum would be about identification of problems and recommendations for action and change, open to all stakeholders, and allowing for peer-level interaction similar to the open consultations of the WGIG process. In this scenario, there is no possibility for agreement on a specific oversight organization.

4. The fractal world of online **communities of practice** would seek to ensure the operational stability and growth of an Internet where ccTLD's are resources of a commons, there is rough consensus among actors that are pursuing a common goal, and institutional practices are cooperative, autonomous and self-organizing. In this scenario, there is no need for a specific oversight organization.

The debate about Internet Governance is hung up over the issues of appeal and conflict resolution mechanisms, and "oversight." WSIS is unlikely to resolve this impasse, except to note that there is a difference between the levels of "principle" (Non-ICANN issues) and of "day to day operations" (ICANN issues).

The Internet presents an anomaly when it comes to understanding how and where conflict resolution is applied. In the performance of its day-to-day functions, it needs to operate cooperatively via rough consensus and running code. Therefore its operations are a non-zero-sum game. But to describe principles or policies for "corrective or preventative actions" at the level of uses means that the debate has moved from operational necessity as an end in itself to a point where the Internet has been captured as means to political ends other than itself. Conflict at that level is a zero sum game. In a zero-sum game, Internet operations will always lose.

The 4th scenario is obviously an ideal that WSIS is incapable of achieving. This is because it is precisely centered on the experience of daily life online in an Information Society and, whatever WSIS is about, it is not that. The 3rd scenario is the preference of the civil society agencies that are most active in the IG debate. However what is most likely to emerge downstream of WSIS is a blend of 1 and 2.