This research examines arguments and values expressed in the debate about the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the management of the Internet’s technical core resources, which took place during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Furthermore, it highlights how the values and argumentation of the stakeholder groups differed from each other. A comparative viewpoint between the stakeholders participating in the WSIS process was chosen because the vast amount of participants was one of the novelties with the summit.

The theoretical framework of the study is founded in social constructivism. The nation state’s changing role in world politics has been viewed from the theoretical perspective of Manuel Castells’ theory about the Network society. The main method used is Chaîm Perelman’s argumentation theory. His theory has been modified and implemented in combination with the practical tools for argumentation analysis by Marja-Liisa Kakkuri-Knuutila.

As a simplification there were three sides in the debate about ICANN’s role; in favour of ICANN, against ICANN, and revised ICANN. Those in favour of ICANN largely consisted of the business sector, some governments like the United States. They can be said to represent the status quo in the debate. This group mainly highlighted the importance of maintaining the stability and security of the Internet. Technical matters were prioritised over other values like the democratic, accountable, and legitimate governance of the technical core function’s of the Internet.

The current organisation of ICANN was primarily opposed by developing countries. They wanted an intergovernmental or international organisation to take over the functions of ICANN. A common justification was that the Internet is a global utility and therefore it should be governed accordingly. In their argumentation they referred to abstract values like equity and justice.

Those promoting a revised ICANN, had no coherent view on ICANN. Rather they were connected by a preference for a pragmatic compromise. As a simplification this group wanted the ICANN to stay the same but be reformed to the better.

The results of this research reflect certain common trends within the current media policy arena, and more specifically, within the field of Internet Governance. Particularly the tension between the North and South is visible. Furthermore, the results highlight how technical matters prevail over abstract moral values.