

Countries without Borders: An Economic Geography of Country Domain Names (ccTLD)

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Country code top-level domain names (ccTLD) are part of the Domain Name System (DNS) hierarchy, forming a protocol for registering and managing domain names associated with countries and territories. Examples of ccTLDs include .uk, .jp, .us etc. The ccTLDs share the highest level of the Domain Name System with generic top level domains (gTLDs) such as .com, .org, .net etc. While attention to date has focused on the development of the gTLD system, little research has been conducted on the evolution of the ccTLD. As ccTLDs form an evolving regulatory space, analysis of the spatial dimensions of this system show the continued importance of national boundaries in cyberspace.

Analysis of the ccTLD system shows wide variation in standards and practices as each country follows different models for domain registration and use. Despite the growing importance of domain names and their management, the lack of consistency and a well-defined best practice foundation has led to problems with the ccTLD system. With over 240 ccTLDs recognized approximately 15 per cent of the ccTLDs have yet to be activated and ten per cent of ccTLDs have their administrative and/or technical operations located in other countries. For example, the Tongan (.to), Nuie (.nu), and Iraq (.iq) ccTLDs are managed from the United States, Angola from Portugal, Reunion from France etc. This paper explores the emergence of the ccTLD system, focusing on territorial determination and the addition of new names (such as Palestine), and the current organization of ccTLD control by institution and location.