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Multi-Stakeholder Power Dynamics and Intra-Civil Society Networking

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Introduction

In 2003 and 2005 the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was organized by the ITU/UN and held respectively in Geneva and Tunis. The UN General Assembly asked the Summit to address 'the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society' (UN General Assembly, 2001: 1). Given the breadth of the theme of the WSIS it is surprising and at the same time highly relevant that it was the ITU that took the initiative for this summit rather than for example UNESCO. While the ITU has its history in global telecommunication regulation, UNESCO's cultural agenda has historically also engaged with media and communication matters. In this regard, the so-called MacBride report can be considered as a genuine milestone in global debates on media, communication and information issues and their societal impact (MacBride, 2004 [1980]). However, with the increasing convergence of broadcasting, computing and telecommunication, the ITU is seeking a new role within the community of international organisations and it is evident that the WSIS fitted well with the aim of the ITU to reassert itself on the global scene.

However, at a more deeper level of analysis, Raboy (2003: 110) notes that '[w]ithin the UNESCO logic, media are cultural institutions, part of the process of human development. Within the ITU logic, media are technical systems for information delivery'. This paradigmatic distinction, which ran through the Summit and for obvious reasons constantly clashed, has implications for how different issues relating to the information society are addressed and how the role of technology in society is perceived. In many ways, the information society is a new meta-narrative, linked to (radical) changes in economic, social, cultural and political values and practices, a *leitbild* whereby the meaning is flexible and not questioned anymore (Kubicek, et al., 1997: 11-12). From this perspective, the meta-narrative of the information society is very much an empty signifier – 'the very condition of hegemony' (Laclau, 1996: 43).

In fact, the information society is about everything and nothing at the same time, which is why it is so persuasive. The introduction of the internet and the increased importance of information and knowledge in our post-Fordist societies, makes that all policy sectors – education, health, employment, economy, innovation, development aid, media, and politics itself – are being affected. This explains why all kinds of lobby groups, movements, and at times conflicting interests projected their causes and ideals onto the WSIS agenda and why it was difficult to pin down what the WSIS was actually about. To put it bluntly, for some it was a means to reinvigorate the debates of the 1980s relating to communication and human rights, for others it was about reasserting the global copyright regime.

Despite the efforts of civil society (CS) to advocate for a 'people-centred, inclusive and equitable' information and communication society 'in which everyone can freely create, access, utilise, share and disseminate information and knowledge, so that individuals, communities and peoples are empowered to improve their quality of life and to achieve their full potential' (WSIS CS Plenary, 2003), it could be argued that the world summit process amounted to a mere re-affirmation of the critical perspective

that 'the information society is actually an advanced and very sophisticated stage of industrial-style capitalism' (Schement and Lievrouw, 1987: 2). The mantra of liberalisation, free markets and copyright protection rang as strong and unquestionable as ever before. In this regard, Vincent (2006: 9) remarks:

The continuing dominance of the market-based neo-liberal ideologies of the 1990s meant that many platforms and agendas which served as foundations for the summit were not open to negotiation. Since a number of CS claims were based on challenges of the existing market structure and its philosophies, the evolving summit schema increasingly proved closed to serious discussion on a variety of topics.

However, while Mansell (2008: xix) agrees that 'the United Nations' effort to foster a multi-stakeholder dialogue changed very little', she also acknowledges that 'the processes initiated during the UN-sponsored Summit did enable some representatives of CS to play a watchdog role and to mobilise an alternative and more equitable perspective on the information society'.

CS's engagement with global policy processes has clearly increased and the WSIS was a case in point. The participation or rather engagement of CS actors in policy-processes can be addressed on two somewhat separate, but at the same time inter-connected levels of analysis: 1) the formal process, where access to and limited forms of (partial) participation in the policy process are of relevance and 2) that of the more informal level of networking and meso-mobilization amongst CS actors and activists, which was extensive in the case of the WSIS and deemed by many to be the real success of the summit (Bridges, 2004; Ó'Siochrú, 2004a; Cammaerts, 2008).

In this chapter one of the most conflictual and visible issues of the summit, namely the debates about internet governance (IG), will be used to address power dynamics in formal multi-stakeholder processes, but also within CS as one of the new stakeholders. An in-depth analysis of the mailing list of the IG working group – one of the most active CS caucuses in the WSIS process, in addition to email interviews with the most active members of that mailing list, exposes not only an intricate relationship to the formal policy process but also the intense networking within CS, largely sustained through mailing lists, but also by face-to-face meetings. As such, this analysis not only confirms the importance of the dialectic between online and offline interactions in terms of networking and policy processes, but it also exposes internal power-dynamics within CS problematising issues of legitimacy.

A quantitative analysis of the mailing list of the CS IG-caucus assesses the transnational character of the IG-caucus, the gender balance, and the number of postings per month or per participants. This was complemented by a qualitative assessment by the most active respondents of the use of the internet in terms of networking, the functions, opportunities, as well as constraints of the mailing list and at a process level an appraisal of multi-stakeholderism in practice relating to the case of IG. As such the analysis adopts both an inward-looking perspective on CS's engagement in the IG debates and an outward-looking perspective that focuses on multi-stakeholderism as a practice again specifically in relation to the IG-case. The results of this research points to a much more positive and at times even enthusiastic assessment of the multi-stakeholder approach in the debates on IG, then in the more conflict-ridden assessment of the WSIS as a whole. Notwithstanding this, several respondents also voice their criticisms, concerns or reservations, which in retrospect proved to be highly relevant.

First, however, the concept itself of multi-stakeholderism has to be problematized and theorized. Therefore, in the next section multi-stakeholderism as a new mode of governance will be introduced, embedded in political theory and subsequently linked

to the specific case of IG within the WSIS-process as an empirical case of how multi-stakeholderism is operationalized in a global context where different actors and interest come together and clash.

Multi-stakeholderism beyond the state: the case of IG

Without disregarding the long history of non-state actors' involvement at an international/transnational level, the multi-stakeholder discourse emerged in the aftermath of the disrupted WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999, as well as several massive co-ordinated protests against the EU and the G8 (pre-9/11). Multi-stakeholderism has been championed by many as a way to bring 'the citizen' closer to decision-making processes at an international level and making such processes more democratic, legitimate and accountable (Aksu and Camilleri, 2002). In her research on democratic legitimization, Héritier (1997: 180) concludes that one of the main reasons for involving CS actors in decision-making processes beyond the nation state 'is to avoid conflicts by forming a broad consensus prior to embarking upon legislation and to sustain legislation once it is in place'. Along the same lines and within a European context, Magnette (2006: 23-4) claims that '[t]he emergence of "civil society" in EU parlance is merely the result of strategies of legitimization developed by EU institutions in recent years'.

An excellent illustration of this, beyond a European context, is the setting up of a Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Civil Society Relations by former UN secretary General Kofi Anan. In its final report, the panel pointed out that:

the United Nations should emphasize the *inclusion* of all constituencies relevant to the issue, *recognize* that the key actors are different for different issues and *foster multi-stakeholder partnerships* to pioneer solutions and *empower* a range of global policy networks to innovate and build momentum on policy options. (Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Civil Society Relations 2004: 16 – emphases added)

Multi-stakeholderism is thus perceived to be the solution to solve a deep crisis in the legitimacy of international (and national) political institutions, a way to bridge 'the gap between the governed and the governing' (Wind, 2001: 1). Besides this, multi-stakeholderism refers to the aspiration for a more effective, transparent and legitimate decision-making process concerning complex contemporary issues. It has in the mean time been formalised in policy documents and as a result it became part of a supra-national public discourse and as some argue a 'lexical innovation' (de la Chapelle, 2007: 23). It remains, however, an elusive and fuzzy concept that is under-theorised and as a consequence differently perceived by stakeholders in a real policy context. Often, the implicit assumption that a consensus on how participatory political processes should be organized and managed exists. Recent research has shown however that the contrary is the case (Padovani and Tuzzi, 2004; Milan, et al., 2007; Hintz, 2007; Cammaerts, 2008).

Nevertheless, the WSIS was the first UN sponsored world summit where CS actors were explicitly invited to be actively involved in the preparatory process of the summit. In 2001 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 56/183, which encouraged 'intergovernmental organisations, including international and regional institutions, non-governmental organisations, civil society and the private sector to *contribute to*, and *actively participate in* the intergovernmental preparatory process of the Summit and the Summit itself'. (UN General Assembly, 2001: 2 –emphasis added).

This represented a break with practices at previous summits, such as the World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban (2001), where CS was kept at a distance from the official process in so-called NGO-forums. This shift in approach is in line with efforts by the UN to raise its legitimacy and include as many actors as possible in their policy-making processes. As made clear by Fernando Henrique Cardoso (2004), the former Brazilian president and chairperson of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Civil Society Relations, in a letter to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan:

Global governance is no longer the sole domain of governments. The growing participation and influence of non-State actors is enhancing democracy and reshaping multilateralism. (...) this opening up of the UN to a plurality of constituencies and actors [should] not [be seen] as a threat to governments but as a powerful way to reinvigorate the intergovernmental process itself.

Theorising Multi-stakeholderism

The 'multi-stakeholder' approach is not as neutral as it often being presented in policy-documents. In this regard, there is a clear risk that multi-stakeholder processes merely serve as a way to neutralize criticism towards institutional actors. From this perspective, multi-stakeholderism might give civil society organisations (CSOs) more access to political processes, but by no means the ability to have any genuine impact on their outcomes (Carpentier, 2003).

However, if multi-stakeholderism is to be conceived and implemented as a means to democratise (international) political processes, the conceptual nexus between democratic theory, participatory practices and multi-stakeholder communicative interaction must be properly addressed. Hemmati (2002: 2) defines multi-stakeholderism as 'processes which aim to bring together all major stakeholders in a new form of communication, decision-finding (and possibly decision-making) on a particular issue'. She furthermore emphasizes the importance of democratic principles of equity and accountability, as well as transparency and participation, in multi-stakeholder practices and design. Multi-stakeholder processes come in many shapes and forms, can relate to different levels of governance and be applied to distinct phases of policy formation, from formulation to implementation and evaluation. As such, multi-stakeholderism is a very flexible framework and is constructed as 'a new species in the eco-system of decision finding and governance structures and processes' (Hemmati, 2002: 3). There are many assumptions embedded in these attempts to define the multi-stakeholder approach within policy contexts that require unpacking.

First, the inherent tensions between the hegemonic representative model of democracy and participatory models are often not made explicit (Held, 2006). Of crucial importance here is the need to clarify the precise relationship between the still hegemonic representative model of democracy (on which international politics and diplomacy is still largely based) and participatory experiments, which are inherently embedded in a very different – more decentralised – paradigm (Pateman, 1970; Macpherson, 1977). In order to do so, it is paramount to elucidate and make explicit the conceptual connections or disconnections between multi-stakeholderism, participation and power, especially in light of the tensions between the elitist and participatory paradigms.

As such, a second assumption made, relates to the core-notion of participation, which is often loosely used without precisely defining what precisely is being meant, leading to diverging expectations amongst distinct stakeholders. Just as democracy

itself, participation is an essentially contested notion in political theory. Pateman (1970: 70-71), for instance, distinguishes between full and partial participation, whereby the former refers to stakeholders having 'equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' and the latter to one stakeholder having 'the final power to decide'. Others introduced further differentiations with concepts such as non- (Arnstein, 1969), fake (Verba, 1961) and manipulative (Strauss, 1998) participation. As Pateman points out, power clearly emerges as a pivotal concept in relation to participation. This exposes itself both in the participatory discourses being produced as well as the practices of participation. Combining Giddens' (1984) dialectics of control, accounting for generative and restrictive power with a Foucauldian take on power, which addresses power as non-subjective, mobile and constitutive of all social relations (Foucault, 1978), allows to approach participation both from a formal (macro) and informal (micro) level of analysis, thereby underscoring the productive capacity of power in the process, and being inclusive of resistance practices in the analysis. As argued elsewhere:

Instead of almost unavoidably having to put an exclusive focus on the degree of structuralized participation, this theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of localized and fluid (micro)power practices and strategies without ignoring the overall (political) structure. (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2005: 22).

A third assumption that is often made concerns the uncontested nature of the concept of 'civil society'. In this regard, it is also often assumed that CS is a singular actor, which is by no means the case. Key questions such as who is included and maybe more importantly of who is excluded from such constituencies are not being adequately addressed. Following Hegel and Marx CS can be conceptualized as everything that is non-state. However, more recent interpretations analytically separate CS from both the state and the market, following Gramsci (Cohen and Arato, 1992). Some even make a case for an even more minimalist model, limiting the scope of CS to a 'solidarity sphere in which a certain kind of universalising community comes gradually to be defined and to some degree enforced' (Alexander, 1998: 8), thereby excluding family-life and the private. The whole issue of who and what CS 'represents' can and should in itself be problematized, especially so in international fora. Issues concerning the professionalization of CSOs, ongoing geographic imbalances favouring Western CSOs, leading to an exclusion of the distant; but also the contentious issue of internal democracy within CSOs, their accountability and their political responsibility remain as challenges to a legitimate inclusion of public interest non-governmental actors in world politics.

Fourth, multi-stakeholder processes are often portrayed as being deliberative, which situates these participatory experiments squarely in a rational Habermasian consensual paradigm (Habermas, 1984). This entails a number of normative 'ideal speech' conditions that need to be upheld. Habermas emphasizes that deliberative communicative action not only requires open access for citizens, but at the same time also presupposes participants to act rationally and be knowledgeable. Furthermore, in deliberative 'communicative' processes the status of participants should be disregarded in favour of the strength of the rational arguments they put forward. The dialogue should not be centred on self-interest, but focussed on and to the benefit of the common good. According to those who see the political as conflictual rather than consensual, this view of policy processes negates the complex power-mechanisms and strategies, as well as the many tensions between conflicting interests that are inherent to social and political relations (Mouffe, 1999). Instead, political differences, passions and conflicts of interest—present in every society at all levels—should be made explicit, exposed and mobilised rather than brushed aside. This does not mean that no compromises need to be made in order to bridge or accommodate conflicts of interests in a democracy, but these compromises do not

make the conflict as such evaporate, they are merely 'temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation' (Mouffe, 1999: 755) reached at a given moment of time.

In addressing the complexity of contemporary policy processes all the above-mentioned inter-linked components – participation, power, inclusion/exclusion, consensus/conflict – are to be properly addressed when it comes to promoting, and analysing, multi-stakeholder arrangements. The danger of not elucidating these core-components lies in generating high expectations and a perceived lack of opportunities to genuinely 'participate', which may produce more frustration and disengagement; the exact opposite of what was initially intended by introducing participatory arrangements in the first place.

Finally, since the multi-stakeholderism discourse has foremost emerged in the supra-national context, it is also deemed relevant to embed it in International Relations (IR) theory. In this regard, the social constructivist tradition in IR, situated at the 'intersection between rationalist and reflectivist approaches' (Smith, 2001: 242), was identified as most adequate to make sense of multi-stakeholder processes beyond the nation state (see Cammaerts and Padovani, 2006). Social constructivism in IR theory negotiates a position between features of world politics that are central components of rationalism – such as the anarchic nature of an international system inhabited by state actors – and concerns relating to the meaning actors in world politics attach to their actions, which are relevant to critical theories, feminist theory and post-structuralist approaches to IR. Two inter-related aspects foregrounded by the IR constructivist approach are of particular interest here. The particular emphasis on transformations in actors' identity and interests in international politics opens up the potential for agency and political change (Wendt, 1992). Besides this, IR constructivists point to the crucial importance of speech acts and discourse in the genesis and consolidation of rules, producing a 'web of promises' made up of the rights and duties that actors know they possess with respect to others (Onuf, 1989: 66-7).

The WSIS and its follow-up processes, as well as the now diffused multi-stakeholder discourse can be seen as a small, but nonetheless significant, step towards making global policy processes more participatory and democratic. Regardless of its relatively poor outcomes, the WSIS can be seen as a learning experience for all actors involved. The policy process not only formally adopts and legitimates the multi-stakeholder approach; it also directly contributes to its 'social construction' as an open-ended political horizon (Laclau, 1993).

The Case of Internet Governance

The internet has since its conception been characterized by both a top-down hierarchical ethos as a military tool and a bottom-up hackers ethos, thriving on anarchy and a firm belief in consensus-building and participatory decision making – 'embed[ing] the free distribution of information within the technical structures and social mores of the Net' (Barbrook, 1999: np). However, with the controversial subcontracting by the US National Science Foundation of the management of the domain names system (DNS) to a private company in 1994 and the establishment of the Internet Company for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in 1998, the history of the internet entered a new phase.

In addition to the US government, military and academia, it brought to the fore new players. The most important and influential emerging actor was of course the corporate sector, but also other nation states, and international organizations such as the ITU and CS manifested itself more and more. ICANN presented itself to the world as an open public sphere, where the different interests and stakeholders would meet

in order to reach a 'deliberated' consensus. Ester Dyson, the then ICANN Chair, claimed in 1999 during a hearing before the US House of Representatives that

[ICANN] reflects the participation of a large and growing number of technical, business, public-interest, academic, and other segments of the Internet community. It is this collection of diverse interests and experiences that produces ICANN policies and decisions, as a statement of the consensus of the participants. (Dyson, 1999 quoted in Malcolm, 2008: 303)

However, as many observers have noted, ICANN did not quite live up to the participatory and inclusive expectations it raised (Mueller, 2002; Malcolm, 2008). On the contrary, ICANN – in essence a US-based private (non-profit) organization – increasingly came under attack 'for its lack of transparency and accountability and Western-centric mode of governance' (McLaughlin and Pickard, 2005: 362). This particular debate not only exposed the conceptual flaws inherent to the deliberative model, as discussed above, but it also pointed to a conflict between those who approach IG as a purely technical matter and those who on the contrary consider it to be much more a deeply political issue, having broad societal implications.

Approaching the internet merely as a neutral technical infrastructure or considering it to be a vital backbone of the economic, informational, social and political fabric of societies is very distinct when considering which policies need to be enacted and are required in the public's interest. As such, reducing IG to a technical issue, and thus denying the political implications of IG, is in itself a political tactic to remove the need for a more voluntaristic agenda in relation to IG. This confrontation between a minimalist 'technical' paradigm and a voluntaristic one made the calls by (parts of) CS and by developing nation states for fundamental reform of ICANN stronger by the day.

As a result IG evolved into by far the most contentious issue being debated during the WSIS (although considerable attention was also devoted to the establishment of a digital solidarity fund addressing the global digital divide). Unsurprisingly, during the negotiations in view of the final declaration in Geneva 2003, no consensus on IG or ICANN could be reached and a decision was postponed to the second phase of the WSIS, held in 2005 in Tunis. Consistent with the minimalist technical paradigm, David Gross, the US ambassador representing the US administration in the preparatory process, downplayed the WSIS-process and outcomes by framing it as a political summit, unfit to solve mere technical problems: 'It would be incorrect to see a political summit as a way to decide technological issues' (Gross, quoted in Malvern, 2003).

To keep the reformers from disengaging all together, the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was given the mandate to set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) with 'active and full participation' of all stakeholders. The working group was asked to define IG and 'to investigate and make proposals for action, as appropriate, on the governance of the Internet' (ITU, 2003: paragraph 50). The WGIG consisted of 40 members, representing the different stakeholders in equal measure and they 'all participated on an equal footing and in their personal capacity' (WGIG, 2005: 3). Four physical meetings were held in Genevaⁱⁱ, but besides that the internet itself also served as a potent tool in terms of CS interaction, consultation and debates (see subsequent section).

The working group's report (WGIG, 2005) was widely acclaimed and deemed fairly balanced, adopting a somewhat broad definition of IG including domain name administration, cyber security, copyright issues and access issues in relation to development, gender, etc. The report included CS discourses relating to the

problematic nature of the unilateral control of the root by the US, development issues, freedom of expression, open source, intellectual property rights, consumer rights and 'meaningful' participation of CS in policy processes. Furthermore, several proposals were developed in relation to IG-reform – going from a very light reform of ICANN, involving other governments more, to the abolishment of ICANN and the creation of a Global Internet Council.

The US response came swiftly and was unambiguous. One month after the publication of the report, the National Telecommunications & Information Administration let it be known that 'the United States will continue to support market-based approaches and private sector leadership in Internet development broadly' (NTIA, 2005). Case closed. This also points to the unresolved relationship and tension between a hegemonic state-centered paradigm and the participatory discourses emanating from the UN, 'between a traditional, hierarchical vision of global governance and a process of dynamic integration that is open to new actors participating at different levels' (Raboy, 2004: 354).

To sweeten the defeat of those who fought for a more fundamental reform of ICANN, the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society created the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and defined IG rather broadly 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' (WSIS, 2005). The IGF is by no means a regulatory body, 'it possesses no authority to establish policies or regulations', but is rather 'a place for open dialogue and discussion' (Napoli, 2008: 3-4). According to some, this reduces the role of the IGF to that of a talking shop, 'unable to influence significantly the hard issues and choices at stake' (Dutton and Palfrey, 2007: 3).

Without a clear mandate and thus also without the need to reach some sort of compromise at some stage on anything specific, research has shown that the different stakeholders merely express normative positions and rarely engage beyond 'broad, hardly controversial, proclamations about the importance of the Internet to civic participation, economic development, and the full realization of human right; and about the need for an open, accessible, diverse, and secure Internet' (Napoli, 2008: 20).

However, despite these pertinent critiques and limited results, the IGF is in many ways a radically innovative body within the UN constellation. It is fairly open as only online registration is required and it has procedures in place that are multi-layered, enabling for both top-down as well as bottom-up initiatives to emerge. de la Chapelle, (2007: 26) argues in this regard that the

recognition of the "multi-stakeholder principle" for Internet Governance is therefore a limited but essential step towards the global governance system our interdependent world needs, and the Internet Governance Forum constitutes a laboratory for new modalities to organize the international community.

It could furthermore be argued that the dynamic of the IGF also sustains CS internal dynamics and networks and even more importantly the IGF, as a process and in line with a constructivist position, produces alternative discourses and thus expands the political horizon of IG beyond the policy context.

Inward-looking: analysis of the IG-caucus mailing list

With about 3.000 messages in a period of more than 2 years, it is fair to say that the mailing list of the CS WSIS-Internet Governance Caucus was very active and vibrant before, during and in between the two Summits. The mailing list had some 100 active participants, but besides those posting messages many more subscribed and received the postings. The period of analysis ran from 30/03/2003, the start of the mailing list, to 03/07/2005 or roughly 2 years and a half. Furthermore, a set of questions were sent to the most active participants of the WSIS IG-mailing list, meaning those who have posted 20 or more messages during the 2 and a half years that the mailing list in operation (N=26). Nine key-participants responded in detail. They have been anonymized, apart from gender.

The analysis assessed the degree of transnationality of the mailing list, the gender balance of its participants, the background and affiliation of participants and the dynamics between offline and online interactions. Besides this, a number of questions to respondents also related to their experience with and assessment of multi-stakeholderism as a process. This will be addressed in the subsequent section.

Transnational character of the mailing list

According to many respondents the e-mail based list allowed for a broader and more global constituency to be involved, to engage and to be informed then would have been possible if the only option was face-to-face engagement. As one respondent pointed out, the mailing list had 'the capacity to involve people who could not attend and the capacity to get a wider range of viewpoints' (R-1, m).

This is confirmed in part by the quantitative analysis of the mailing list (see Table 1). As the Internet is a global medium, it is only logical that the participants of this mailing list are scattered around the world and that all regions of the world are represented. However, as with internet access, there is a clear dominance of participants from the Western hemisphere, where about 65% of participants reside. Following behind Europe and North America are Latin-America (including Brazil), Asia and Africa. If the number of postings are taken into consideration, the under-representation of participants from developing countries is even more outspoken. Participants from Europe and North-America account for about 75% of all postings, whilst for example participants from Africa and the Arab world only posted 3% of all messages. Asia, on the other hand, has relatively speaking few participants, but very active ones.

Table 1: Distribution of participants according to region

	Participants (N)	Participants (%)	Postings (N)	Postings (%)
Western-Europe	36	34%	1192	40%
Eastern-Europe	1	1%	163	5%
North-America	29	28%	831	28%
Latin-America & Brazil	10	10%	143	5%
Caribbean	2	2%	44	1%
Asia	9	8%	471	16%
Australia & New Zealand	5	5%	66	2%
Southern & SS-Africa	8	8%	56	2%
Arab Countries	4	4%	17	1%
TOTAL:	104	100%	2983	100%

If participants who posted 20 or more messages are isolated (N=26) the dominance of European, North American, and – to a lesser extent – Asian participants, increases even further. Within the population of most active participants, those residing in Europe, Asia or North America account for almost 85% of participants and a staggering 95% of postings.

Gender-Balance

Although gender balance is considered to be ‘a fundamental principle’ by the WGIG (2005: 11), the gender balance within the Internet Governance mailing list itself is very skewed towards a male dominance as more than 75% (N=80) of participants are male (see Table 2). This male dominance is also reflected in the number of postings, where male participants account for more than 80% (N=2462) of sent messages.

Table 2: Gender of participants

	#Participants	%	#Postings	%
Organisation	1	1%	5	1%
Female	23	22%	516	17%
Male	80	77%	2462	82%
TOTAL:	104	100%	2983	100%

When only the most active participants are taken into account (N=26), the lack of gender balance becomes even more apparent as only 25% (N=4) participants are female and only 15% (N=852) of messages originate from female participants. It could be argued that the highly technical nature of the IG debates is a factor that plays here. At the same time it should also be noted that policy and elite advocacy circles are often (white) male-dominated environments (Kathlene, 1994; Lovenduski, 2006).

The unequal representation of women in the area of IG has been taken-up by the UN. In the framework of the IGF, Nitin Desai – the UN Secretary General Special Advisor on Internet Governance – has urged the Gender coalition to compile a ‘directory of women who are active in this area, either from the side of industry or as civil society activists or in policymaking in government, or in Internet organisations involved in this at a global level’ⁱⁱⁱ.

Expertise vs. Elitism

Several respondents stated that the online space allows for more reflection on complex issues, as well as debate on these issues to be aired and thought through. This can be related to the need for expertise, both in the issues that are being debated as in political skills. The qualitative analysis of CS-involvement in the IG-process also indicated the importance of expertise in order to be taken seriously by other actors and be able to make a difference. This might lead to what McLaughlin and Pickard (2005: 365) describe as ‘global neo-corporatism’, raising the question of the representativeness and legitimisation of the CS actors and advocacy groups working within the IG process.

This importance of ‘expert-isation’ shows itself in the affiliations of participants of the mailing list (see Table 3). Although the affiliations of participants to the WSIS IG mailing list reflects the different stakeholders within the IG-debates, it is obvious that when analyzing the number of postings especially academics have been most active (about 50% of messages). Individual activists on the contrary were not so active.

This again refers to issues of time and resources, as well as the fact that involvement in policy processes is on a voluntary basis and unpaid.

Table 3: Affiliation of participants

	#Participants	%	#Postings	%
Activist	13	12%	104	3%
(Transnational) CSO	19	18%	669	22%
Academics	38	36%	1402	47%
Independent Researcher	5	5%	27	1%
Consultants/Software Developers	9	9%	116	4%
Internet Regulatory Agencies ^(*)	11	11%	627	21%
Government-Linked Agencies	6	6%	8	0.5%
International Organisation	2	2%	10	0.5%
Unknown	1	1%	20	1%
TOTAL:	104	100%	2983	100%

(*) Internet Society, Internet Address Registry, ICANN, RIPE

One respondent is adamant in her critique of the mailing list for appearing to be the 'vehicle of a few people who want to keep in contact before and after meetings and to present some document (in the name of a larger group than they are) into the WSIS process' (R-5, f). From her perspective, those actively involved in the IG process are no more than another elite acting in the name of a larger constituency.

Most respondents are aware of the danger for elitism and this awareness causes amongst some a feeling of unease, as is illustrated by this comment: 'we should not be too quick to assume that silence means agreement' (R-8, m). However, as many recognize too, if a controversial issue emerges, more people will respond and give their view. As such, the 'silent lurking majority' also fulfils a watchdog function on those who are very active within the policy process and on the list. One respondent, who was not able to go to the meetings, refers to this specific function of the mailing list:

'The global governance mailing list hasn't really given much way to participate in what is happening, but rather the chance to watch those who seem to be able to go to the meetings' (R-5, f).

A large number of (passive) lurkers is not necessarily detrimental, and can even be construed as legitimating the online proceedings. As another respondent points out, gaps 'between "insiders" who are active on the ground, and people who've simply joined a listserv can occur, but under the circumstances it's not that bad' (R-6, m). This last observation regarding the particular circumstances is reminiscent of a pragmatic perspective with regards to CS involvement within formal policy processes, requiring a number of (semi-)professionals ready and able to perform the difficult balancing act of on the one hand getting the alternative discourses through, forcing policy makers to listen and on the other hand seeking consensus and support within the CS caucus.

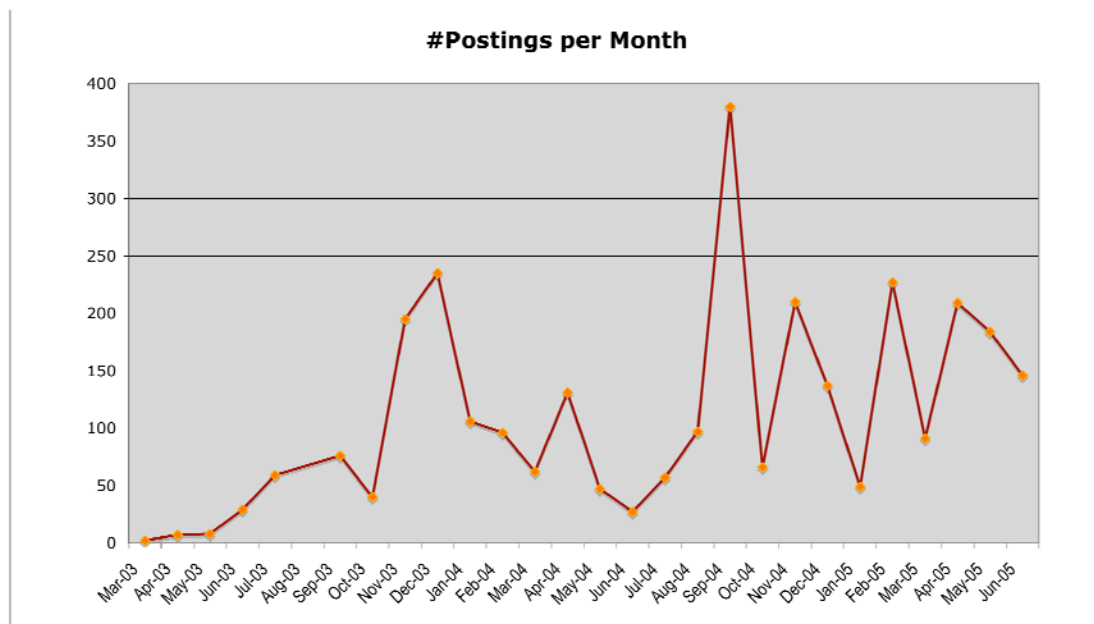
Online vs. Offline

As argued by Diani (2001) it is not easy to sustain activism in an exclusively online environment. In relation to the IGF, de la Chapelle (2007: 25) also claims that 'multi-stakeholder governance requires a combination of physical interactions and "intersessional" online collaboration'.

The importance of face-to-face encounters to reach agreement or organize concrete

actions also became apparent within the WSIS IG-caucus. As one respondent noted, 'actual statements and agreements on particular courses of action tended to come from f2f meetings' (R-2, m). Another respondent referred to the importance of social interaction between activists during face-to-face encounters: 'as usual, the active people had beers together f2f many times, that is why the online collaboration goes so smoothly. It's not either-or' (R-4, m). Indeed many respondents stress the dynamic relationship between the online and the offline interaction, confirming other analyses of mailing lists (Hill and Hughes, 1998; Wilhelm, 2000; Cammaerts, 2005a).

Figure 1: Number of postings on the IG-mailing list per month



In Figure 1 the cyclical character of listserv-use can be observed. As can be expected summer months are less active. Furthermore, the mailing list had to establish itself in the beginning and a surge in the number of mails can also be observed in the run-up to the Geneva Summit (December 2003). It is fair to state that the mailing list became more active after the 1st phase of the WSIS, but ups and downs can also be observed in the post-WSIS1 period.

Surges in the level of communicative interaction on the mailing list can be attributed to the preparation for physical meetings. The big surge in messages in September 2004 relates to a deliberative voting procedure to nominate CS-representatives in the UN Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), as well as the drafting and agreeing upon CS recommendations on structure and modalities of WGIG. In the period after that there were several WGIG meetings, as well as the prepcom2 meeting (17-25/02/2005) for Tunis, which explains the many ups and downs.

The online, it is argued, assured 'the continuity of work in between f2f meetings' (R-4b, m), but this necessary dynamic between the online and the offline also creates new barriers for those who are not able to attend or those who do not have the time and resources to be heavily involved. This can potentially lead to frustration, intra-movement tensions and the marginalization of minority or more radical positions.

Outward-looking: assessing multi-stakeholderism

Almost all respondents felt that the impact of CS in terms of the debates on the issue of IG within the WSIS process had been substantial and as a result CS was able to provide serious and considerable input. As one respondent put it 'civil society-actors [...] played a major role in setting the agenda, providing commentary on WGIG drafts that corrected or identified problems, and injecting specific ideas and proposals into that process' (R-2, m).

It also emerges from the analysis that CS representatives active within the IG debates had a high level of expertise in the issues under debate and, as one respondent put it, the ability 'to translate the technical into political issues and the other way round, while still having in mind the broader vision of global CS for a human-centred Information Society' (R-4, m). As pointed out earlier, this is also reflected in the final report of the WGIG.

Most respondents were convinced that there had been a reasonable opportunity to make a major contribution to the IG debates in the Working Group. One respondent stated that '[t]he Caucus produced concrete language for the final document and pushed for a "multi-stakeholder composition" of any IG follow-up mechanism', which according to him demonstrates a 'recognition of civil society as an "important player"' (R-3, m). Most refer to their positive experience with, extensive involvement in and considerable impact on the WGIG and its final report as demonstrating that the multi-stakeholder discourse is proving to be more than mere rhetoric, especially after the reality check that was WSIS-1 in Geneva. One respondent claimed: 'In other WSIS issues ... it has been mostly rhetoric, however in the case of IG it has been different' (R-7, m). In many ways, the debates relating to IG are presented as an example of best practice in multi-stakeholderism, as suggested by this comment: 'I think we have been successful and hopefully have set some precedent (small steps perhaps) for WSIS and also perhaps for future UN processes' (R-8, m).

As the words used in the comment above ('hopefully', 'perhaps') indicates, most respondents had some reservations and were careful to stress that the relatively positive outcomes of the WGIG should indeed be seen as 'temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation' (Mouffe, 1999: 755). This is exemplified in the following comments:

- 'Lets see as we move to a more formal, nation state part of the negotiation' (R-7, m)
- 'Lets see what eventuates, but the process to date has been multi-stakeholder' (R-1, m).

When the participants to the IG mailing lists were surveyed (just before the Tunis Summit), it was, as one respondent pointed out, 'too early to tell' (R-7, male). It was at that time unclear whether the CS discourses in the WGIG report would survive the final political negotiations in view of the 2nd phase of the WSIS in Tunis (2005). One respondent asked the almost rhetorical question: 'When the WSIS process goes back to traditional diplomacy mode ... will the outcomes of CS involvement stay in or be forgotten and dropped out in the struggle between few governments over control of the root zone file?' (R-4, m).

As pointed out above, it is clear that ultimately vested interests took priority over participatory discourses of equity, transparency and accountability, which lost out or – as in this case – were reduced to vague commitments in terms of improved consultation through the IGF. Thus, this respondent was quite correct in his prediction:

I think there will be some kind of forum or mechanism, it will be 'lite'. But most likely there will be no agreement on the key issue of the role of the US ... So I suspect Tunis will be seen as something of a failure in that it won't bring consensus (R-8, m).

Nevertheless, given the 'contradicting positions' (R-4, m) and conflicting interests inherent to the issue of IG this is hardly surprising for many respondents and observers. This brings us back to the question of the lack of theoretical grounding of multi-stakeholderism and its practices. As argued elsewhere: 'Different actors hold very different perspectives as to how stakeholders should be conceived, who is to be included and who is excluded and how their interaction should lead to information exchange, deliberation or decision' (Cammaerts and Padovani, 2006: 1). In relation to IG, this translates into 'a lack of foundational agreement on principles and norms' (Mueller et al., 2007: 252), leading Napoli (2008: 38) to conclude that 'future scholarly and advocacy organization work should be devoted to establishing these definitional boundaries in order to ensure that they adequately reflect the necessary public interest elements and priorities'.

Conclusion

In this chapter the aim was to assess multi-stakeholderism from the perspective of CS through the mixed experiences of the WSIS IG-caucus. This was done on two levels of analysis: 1) more inward-looking through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the IG-caucus mailing list over a period of 2.5 years and 2) more outward-looking through a qualitative assessment of multi-stakeholderism as a practice of global governance and international decision-making in the case of IG based on e-mail interviews and desk-research.

At the inward-looking level of meso-mobilization, the analysis of the WSIS IG-caucus mailing list confirms the increasing importance of the internet in terms of intra-movement networking and access to policy processes. The analysis of the mailing list also enables us to deepen our understanding of the dynamics between the online interactions and the offline face-to-face interactions. High levels of online interaction precede offline meetings. As such, it also emerged that while the internet serves many functions such as the diffusion of information beyond those that are directly involved, circulating draft-proposals and even choosing representatives, it is often during face-to-face meetings and interactions that the real decisions are being made. Despite this, 'passive' participants to the mailing list can also act as a watchdog towards those that have the time, resources, expertise and dedication to be actively involved and provide some sort of implicit legitimacy for these elites within the network.

At the same time, this analysis exposes constraints, such as a dominance of participants from the Northern hemisphere and of (male) experts and CS-professionals, which could potentially lead to a (neo-)corporatist relationship between CS and state actors. Sustained active involvement in policy processes requires different types of resources and skills to be able to travel to meetings, lobby officials, and advocate for change within a formal political process. To a large extent, a complex issue such as IG requires expertise and a high degree of knowledge in order to be taken seriously by other actors and be able to play the wheeling and dealing political game, typical of (global) politics and diplomacy.

This brings us to the more outward looking perspective. According to most respondents and observers the CS-caucus was treated and accepted as a somewhat equal partner within the WGIG, introducing a social and democratic discourse into

the debates and in the final report of the WGIG (2005). The way CS representatives were treated and the inclusion of their discourses in official documents, contrasted greatly with the experiences of exclusion and marginalization in the Geneva 2003 WSIS (see Ó'Siochrú, 2004b; Hintz, 2007; Cammaerts, 2008). However, while most respondents were fairly happy with the proceedings within the WGIG, many were also doubtful and realistic as to its genuine impact, once 'real diplomacy mode' would kick in again.

Their skepticism was justified in that the central role of ICANN and its embeddedness in the US remained intact and in return an unthreatening IGF was set-up to 'openly' discuss and disagree. Many recent publications on the WGIG and IGF are not surprisingly less enthusiastic about the WSIS experience and multi-stakeholderism than the respondents were at the time of data collection (see McLaughlin and Pickard, 2005; Hintz, 2007; Mueller, et al., 2007; Padovani and Pavan 2007; Malcolm, 2008). As Hintz (2007: 12) points out, the 'WSIS sent mixed signals to civil society – sometimes offering unprecedented levels of participation, then again pushing it out of negotiation spaces'. It seems, as is often the case, that CS is only treated as a legitimate and equal partner when the stakes are all together not too high. Once difficult and real choices and decisions have to be made, things revert to the classic state-centered diplomacy-mode, CS is sidelined and their emancipatory discourses ignored.

In this regard, as McLaughlin and Pickard (2005: 365) point out, it should be acknowledged that the promotion of multi-stakeholderism by states and international organizations can be viewed as 'an attempt to defuse radical opposition by co-opting more moderate groups', implicating or entrapping the reformists in the intrinsically neo-liberal agendas of these international organisations. To put it bluntly, given the poor results of the time and effort that went into trying to achieve change from within the policy process, the question remains whether all this was not to the detriment of organizing, mobilizing, campaigning, and informing outside the policy process? There is a strong argument to be made to redirect the fight for and mobilization around emerging emancipatory communication agendas 'beyond the liberal-institutionalist base of global governance' (Hintz, 2007: 12), translating them and making them relevant to local contexts and constituencies worldwide.

However, when considering political and democratic theory as well as the constructivist approach to IR, it is not just visible victory or defeat that is of importance here. Power is highly diffused and social change at a global level is often a slow, but at the same time dynamic and dialectic, process whereby produced outcomes are always temporal and situated in a context of ongoing struggles between conflicting interests and goals. While CS has not been able to affect the official outcomes of the WSIS process all that much, the WSIS has produced a stronger, more networked and interconnected CS-caucus, as well as a set of distinct counter-discourses (see WSIS CS Plenary, 2003/2005). Future UN-sponsored meetings and initiatives will have to acknowledge and build upon the small steps to democratize global politics that were made in Geneva and Tunis. Nevertheless, given the growing critique amongst key-CS actors regarding the effectiveness of overt policy involvement, it remains to be seen whether next time round the enthusiasm of CS to invest time, energy and resources in engaging with policy makers at an international level will be as high as was the case at the outset of the WSIS.

For sure, Samuel Beckett once stated: 'Ever tried. Ever failed. Never mind. Try again. Fail better' (quoted in Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2005), but many CS actors and activists are getting tired of waiting for Godot.

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Endnotes:

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ⁱⁱ Face-to-face meetings of the WGIG were held on 23-25/10/2004, 14-18/02/2005, 18-20/04/2005 and 14-17/06/2005

ⁱⁱⁱ IGF Open Consultation, 23/02/2009, for transcript see: <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/index.php/component/content/article/80-23-24-feb-2009-open-consultations/380-open-consultation-23-feb-2009-transcript> (last consulted May 2009).