International political communication and the role of civil society: words and networks in the World Summit on the Information Society

Reflections on governance, participation and the changing scope of political action

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Reflection on the Civil Society Agenda
Setting the context
Global change and transformations in political communication: non-state actors, roles, modes and discourses

Our analysis is a reflection on changing structures of civil society in the global context, towards a better understanding of political processes. We assume that:

- Trans-national connections emerge from and create linkages between inter-national, national and local spaces
- Focusing on on-line/off-line communication, on praxes of involvement in political processes and on the elaboration of common discourses are all crucial aspects for our understanding of such connections
- Global civil society: not (only) an elite (nor an homogenous) experience
The UN World Summit on the Information Society
(Geneva, December 2003 – Tunis, November 2005)

- An un-precedent situation in global communication governance (but not the first time in the history of international communication debates)
- **Convergence** of strands of debates, issues and actors + CS realities
- The struggle over words and meaning: a world of words
Civil Society @ WSIS

Some research questions

1. How to define the “boundaries” for GCS? Which ideas/versions of civil society?
2. How can we assess the growing self-perception of civil society as an actor in global governance?
3. What can we say about the impact of civil society in the WSIS process?
Different “realities” of civil society converging at WSIS …

**Convergences**: themes and subjects, experience in international contexts, historical or recent involvement on communication issues + level of institutionalization

- Institutional and NGO tradition (from art 71 of the UN Charter, through ECOSOC rules and Res 56/183 of December 2001 to the Cardoso Report, June 2004)
- Globalization from below, social movement, contentious politics (from the ’70s, through the mobilizations around Communication to the WSF)

Civil Society @ WSIS: a plural reality
# How to look at civil society in WSIS?

## Praxis and discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CS convergences at WSIS</th>
<th>practice</th>
<th>visions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>within civil society</td>
<td>who, what, how</td>
<td>Lexicon textual analysis of civil society documents throughout the preparatory process, focus on “governance” (the who, what and how of global governance within civil society discourse)</td>
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<tr>
<td>relation to official process</td>
<td>who, what, how</td>
<td>Lexicon textual analysis of official WSIS documents together with those elaborated by civil society in two stages: prepcom 2 and the final Summit (the who, what and how of global governance comparing official positions and civil society visions)</td>
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The method: applying lexical-textual analysis

- Documents selection
- Pooling texts in a corpus
- Texts clustered according to Phases in WSIS
- Direct coding of texts in textual units (then CTU: recoding through lexicalization in multi-words, phrases and sequencies of words “civil_society”, “global_culture_of_cyber_security”) – through TALTAC
- Two ways contingency tables: CTU per clusters/phases
- Selection of CTUs referring to governance (analysis conducted on 165 CTUs with frequency > 3)

3 analysis of the tables:
- Exclusive CTU
- Specific CTU
- Correspondence analysis
Looking at Civil Society as an actor in global politics

How to conceive “governance”

- Actors (who)
- Levels (where)
- Modes (what)
- Quality (how)
Civil Society discourse: an open, ended, learning process.

Consistency, over time, ended exercise, private hands synergies democratic processes enforced empowering benchmarks.

Internet governance implemented best practice frameworks all parties right to participate.

Decisions should be made by all parties, empowered by citizens, account for the needs and interests of all stakeholders.

Regulatory frameworks should be transparent, solutions developed by multi-stakeholder processes.

All stakeholders should participate in decision-making, public policy implementation.

Global governance, international law, and individual legal frameworks should be established.

Among others, national and intergovernmental agencies should be involved.

Consensus and collaboration among all parties, including governments, civil society organizations, and private sector representatives, are necessary.

Citizens, companies, and individuals should have equal rights and responsibilities in democratic processes.

Involvement of all sectors, including the Internet industry, is essential for the success of such initiatives.

National and international cooperation and coordination should be implemented to achieve the best outcomes for all.

Citizens and organizations should work together to ensure accountability and transparency in decision-making.
Civil society, governance and self-perception as a global actor: bottom-up perspective, integrative approach, plurality and the “right to participate”
Final remarks
The changing scope of international political communication

- Converging versions of civil society: plurality and consistency + capacity to develop structures and norms + common discourse and identification as a sector in relation to others
- Not just a trans-national coalition/network: a global dynamic of social movement in action + continuity of exchange + the “glocal connection”
- CS and the official event – conflicting visions of governance: an aggregative (top-down) model vs. integrative (bottom-up) model of governance
Civil Society and impact?  
WSIS and beyond  
Directions for further research

I. Output ≠ outcome (broaden agenda, convergence within sector, continuity in interaction, presence in official process phase II…). Yet we are working on WSIS I documents to assess impact of CS discourse

II. Focus on MSPs (beyond the rhetoric, looking at other experiences, promoting dialogues among experiences and the idea of evaluating processes of participation)

III. An emerging global movement on communication rights? (transnational, multilevel, plural, networking: how to represent? How to study?)
I - Working on WSIS I documents to assess the impact of CS discourse

we are now able to take into consideration official drafts and civil society input documents in different stages of the process and assess the impact that civil society has had in those stages. We shall develop a three step analysis, which should allow us to uncover different aspects of civil society impact.

We shall consider documents from two stages of the process - prepcom2 and prepcom 3 – comparing the language of civil society contributions and official drafts that entered and exit those phases. Then we shall review the entirety of civil society inputs and writings in relation to the final official Declaration of Principles.

Looking at different stages in the process should allow not only to assess the actual "impact" of civil society contributions on the final document but also to reflect on the relation between potential/actual impact and the participatory mechanisms that characterized different stages in the process as well as the process overall, which is certainly to be conceived as an evolving learning process from this point of view.

We are fully aware of the fact that a number of other aspects (individual states’ interests, issues that entered the debate, impact of other stakeholders, such as the private sector) were at play in those processes; yet it is important to be able to identify overlappings and differencies with a specific focus on civil society contributions.
II – Focus on Multi-Stakeholder Processes (MSPs)

- Seminar in Venice, 22-23 November 2004: practice, reflections, pre-conditions, levels...
- Contacts with earthsummit.org/msp (Multistakeholder processes for governance and sustainability, 2002)
- WSIS working group on CS structures for phase II

Plans (and call for cooperation): EU IST support action funding to develop a framework for MSP assessment in communication policies
II – Focus on MSPs: synthesis from Venice colloquium

MSPs

issue based /thematics networks? (role of actors? single model?)
desirable? necessary? inevitabile?
representativity legitimacy accountability transparency integrity
externalities interest of mobilizers

levels

international/ global

national

local (regions, provinces, cities)

issues

discussion deliberation decision
resources: time competencies finance
formal and informal exchange (where is innovation?) +
the role of individuals
culture of participation (what conception of participation? role of different subjects?)
need to consolidate experiences (and communicate them) +
role of clusters
II - An emerging global movement on communication rights? Looking at WSIS