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Through the Looking Glass: civil society participation in the WSIS and the dynamics between online/offline interaction

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Abstract: Struggles for social change have become much more complex and need to be fought at several fronts at the same time, on a local, a national, as well as on an international stage. In this paper the focus will be the international level and more specifically the tensions and lessons that can be learned from civil society involvement in (formal) multi-stakeholder processes. The case concerned here is the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and it's preparatory process. The paper will critically assess the summit in terms of outcomes and process from a civil society perspective and the role of the Internet in that process. To do this, some of the results of a worldwide survey into civil society participation will be considered and will provide an indicative picture of the way in which civil society actors perceive the implementation of participatory discourses within a context that goes beyond the nation state and the use of the Internet in that regard. Furthermore, this will be complemented by an in-depth analysis of the Internet Governance Caucus and their mailing list. From the survey a mixed image appears whereby some perceive the glass to be half-full, others half-empty and some even totally empty. In many ways this debate can be related to the difference between *'what ought to be'*, paraphrasing Gramsci, and *'what is possible'.* This tension between utopia and realism also exists within civil society. A continuum can be observed, going from those that think already a lot has been achieved to those that feel (much) more needs to be done.

Key words: WSIS, Civil Society, multi-stakeholderism, Internet, Internet governance

Introduction

Processes of social and political change have become as complex and dynamic as our mosaique societies themselves. Current movements for social change, such as the alternative globalisation movement, gathering at the World Social Forum, or civil society networks trying to influence the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), are very diverse and comprising local grass-root organisations from all over the world, as well as

regional umbrella organisations or transnational networks of organisations. Although the Internet has increased the connectedness and networking-capacities of these movements, the question of impact remains problematic. The broad diversity of civil society organisations, activists, sometimes even political parties adopt a wide variety of strategies. Some prefer strategies of direct action and do not see any benefit in a dialogue with the formal political world, instead focussing on changing values, behaviours and attitudes. Others focus on lobbying, doing the 'dirty' work of actually negotiating and voice the aspirations and sometimes utopian goals from the bottom-up to the formal political level of governance. And finally there are those who combine both strategies, active in direct action, but also mediate in translating sentiments and passions from an informal political sphere to the formal one. (Cammaerts, 2005)

Governance is increasingly no longer solely the prerogative of Nation States. Although still powerful actors, international organisations and institutions, treaties, increased globalisation of the economy and of communication slowly eroded the sovereignty of States (Rosenau, 1990; Held et al., 1999). States have, to a large extent lost or given away—depending from which perspective you look at it—their grip and control over the economy and especially over trade, global finance, but also over telecommunication. Communication is now firmly a commodity, almost totally stripped from its public good heritage. This is most felt by developing countries, but due to the multiplication of channels; Internet, fixed phone, mobiles, cable subscription, and despite the promises that accompanied privatisation, communication and media costs have increased considerably for average families in the developed world as well. Hence, the increasing discourses regarding the digital divide, both from a global perspective and a national one (Nulens et al., 2002; Cammaerts, et al., 2003).

There is an inherent inconsistency when governments and international organisations on the one hand allow a very oligopolistic market to rule communication and on the other hand adopt a discourse that the digital divide has to be bridged, without having the means to actually do something about it. Social and development policy often has many other more important priorities. The WSIS is no exception in this regard. Much talk about a digital divide fund, but no funds to back it up (ITU, 2003a&b).

In a bid to strengthen the legitimacy of policy initiatives beyond the nation state the WSIS was presented as an experiment in multi-stakeholderism, where the participation of civil society would be promoted, taking into account the views of those organisations that mediate between the 'bottoms'

and the 'ups'. As was to be expected, many were left frustrated and felt betrayed after WSIS1 in Geneva. The discourses of 'full' participation and involvement created amongst many CS-actors high expectations on which the ITU and powerful Nation States could or would not deliver. Some bending of the rules by some States could be observed (Kleinwächter, 2003), but in terms of real impact of civil society discourses on the declaration and especially on the action-plan the assessment was very bleak (see Fücks, 2003; Dany, 2004; Ó'Siochrú, 2004). From these latter perspectives the glass was half empty or even downright empty.

In this foremost empirical paper, it will be argued that this metaphor has to be diversified into different glasses, some of which are empty—no compromise, others half empty—bad compromise, and again others half full—symbolising a 'good' compromise. Some actors will only be satisfied with a full glass, of which there are very few, others smell victory with a good compromise and there are also CS-actors who spin a bad compromise into a big step for mankind.

A worldwide survey assessing civil society participation in the WSIS maps these different positions, especially in the open questions, which allow for a qualitative analysis of the polarisation within civil society when evaluating the WSIS1. The survey also shows the increasing importance of the Internet for intra-movement networking, gaining access to documents and information. From the qualitative analysis the issue of time and thus resources also emerges. Involvement in multi-stakeholder policy-processes requires commitment of funds for travelling, attend meetings, time to be active on mailing lists, consult local or transnational constituencies, write resolutions, and the nitty gritty of lobbying and bargaining. This also, in part, explains the disappointment of many in the process. Many of the aims and goals of civil society did not make it to the final declaration in Geneva, which prompted the civil society caucus to write an alternative declaration, stating its position and thereby criticising the official declaration deemed to be too much geared to solving social problems through facilitating the market and trade (WSIS Civil Society Plenary, 2003).

If we, however, consider the specific issue of Internet Governance, a contentious issue that was postponed at WSIS1, a more shaded picture emerges regarding multi-stakeholderism and the impact or influence of civil society. The mailing list of the civil society IG-caucus was analysed and this allows us to determine where participants are located, who is active within this debate and how active the mailing list was. To the most active participants of the mailing list a number of questions were sent to evaluate

the use of the Internet in this process, as well as the process itself and their impact on it.

This sub-case will allow us to depict a more complex interplay between the different actors in multi-stakeholder processes and go beyond the polarisation of utopian and realist dispositions. First, a short overview of the WSIS-discourses regarding participation of civil society will be given.

WSIS, Multi-stakeholderism and civil society 'participation'

In view of its longstanding partnership with NGOs, the UN considered the involvement and participation of civil society in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to be paramount. UN Resolution 56/183 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, 2001: 2)

In this regard, the Executive Secretariat of the WSIS created a Civil Society Division team that was given the task *"to facilitate the full participation of civil society in the preparatory process leading up to the Summit"* (emphasis added). The WSIS is also one of the first summits where ICTs are being used extensively to facilitate the interaction between the UN-institutions and civil society actors. It is also the first world summit where civil society has been involved in the preparatory process from the very beginning and as such a first step in putting the more participatory policy discourses into practice. In many ways the WSIS was presented as a model for the multi-stakeholder approach adopted by the UN.

International institutions are faced with a double challenge. On the one hand their own legitimacy is increasingly being questioned by large protests and a lack of trust by citizens. On the other hand the legitimacy of the state-actors and their—often—representative democratic regimes, from which international organisations derive their legitimacy, is also in crisis showing amongst others in low voter turn-outs, declining interest in politics, and the rise of anti-democratic, populists and even post-fascist movements. Institutions such as the EU and the UN increasingly look to civil society and

business actors in a bid to legitimise policies that can build on the broadest support possible from the different actors involved in the complex game of multi-stakeholder governance.

Hemmati (2002: 2) defines ideal-type multi-stakeholder processes 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 also points to the importance of equity and accountability, as well as to the need for the presence of democratic principles such as transparency and participation.

By putting an emphasis on equity, transparency and participation Hemmati links up with democratic theory where 'real' or 'full' participation is defined as a process where there is equity between all actors involved and equal power to influence outcomes (Pateman, 1970: 70). Reality is, however, much more messier, which explains why many theorists dealing with participation have introduced notions such as partial participation (Pateman, 1970: 71), manipulative participation (Strauss, 1998: 18), pseudo participation (Verba, 1961: 220-221) or fake participation. These gradations indicate the many subtle differences between enabling an actor to potentially influence, but not to decide upon things—as Pateman conveys with partial participation and giving an actor the impression or feeling that s/he can influence and participate, without actually delivering—as Verba and Strauss capture with their respective notions.

Elsewhere the notion of participation and power relating to civil society involvement in the WSIS was already explored (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2005). From that analysis it emerged that introducing the notion of (full) participation in the context of the WSIS and civil society involvement in the preparatory process was a bit over-optimistic. However, it was also concluded that power is a dynamic notion and is distributed amongst all actors, be it in an unequal way.

A complex interplay between generative and productive power mechanisms on the one hand and repressive or restrictive power mechanisms on the other hand, could be observed, situated at both a micro- as well as macro level of analysis. Besides this, acts of resistance by the different actors to both generative power and to repressive power were put to bear. Civil society 'participation' in policy processes beyond the nation state is flawed and—as the results of the survey explored below show—contagious. This does, however, not mean that the multi-stakeholder discourse should be

reduced to mere rhetoric, as will, amongst others be shown by the Internet Governance case.

In a first part the empirical results of a worldwide survey assessing the WSIS1 from a civil society perspective will be explored, as well as the use of the Internet. The second empirical part will analyse the mailing list of the Internet Governance caucus and present the view of the more active participants of that mailing list regarding their impact on the process.

WSIS-phase1 evaluated

In order to assess the WSIS multi-stakeholder process, the nature of civil society involvement, as well as to get to grips with the role of ICTs in that process we can draw upon a survey that was conducted in May 2004. With regard to the results of the survey a number of biases need to be taken into account. The response rate was rather low. Of those organisations that actually received the request to fill in the survey (N=522) 54 responded, which accounts for a response-rate of 10.34%. Other biases relate to the regions where the civil society organisations (CSOs) are active, the type of organisation, and the degree of involvement within the WSIS-process. However, when these are taken into account, the sample of 54 organisations can be regarded as reasonably indicative (not statistically representative) of those civil society actors that were fairly active within the WSIS-process.

In this section, the assessment of respondents regarding the outcome and the process as such will be considered. Besides this, attention will also go to the importance of civil society networking, the use of the Internet, intra-movement tensions and the lack of resources experienced by some respondents.

Civil Society Assessment

Respondents were asked to evaluate the WSIS consultation process and the involvement of their organisation in that process. This resulted in very conflicting comments that represent the different positions outlined in the introduction. One respondent remarked: *'I am very happy with the outcomes we succeeded to have. (…) Without our efforts, we faced the risks that youth would not have been mentioned in the documents'* (R-3a, m). Another stated that the consultation process was a *'very good approach'* (R-12a, f). Such

comments represent the full glass perspective and can often be linked to whether the issue the respondent wanted to address has been taken into account or not. Others were positive, but also realistic as to the outcomes: *'Very significant effort leading to modest outcomes which we were content although not ecstatic about'* (R-48a, m), which can be related to the glass half full position.

However, not all respondents were so positive about the WSIS consultation process. Many were critical of the rhetoric's regarding the so-called multi-stakeholder process: *'Remained far behind the expressed innovative approach to the summit (process tri-partite); Civil Society in various regards was treated as a fig leaf'* (R-26a, m) or *'The consultation process itself was largely a disaster, and Civil Society was not brought in as a "partner" in the way described by the ITU'* (R-49a, f). In line with these remarks another respondent dismissed the dominance of states within the process, especially during the final stage of negotiations when finalising the declaration and action plan: *'Closed government working groups excluded us from what we had been informed would be open meetings for us to take part.'* (R-36a, m). These statements indicate very much an empty glass or half-empty perspective being adopted by respondents.

Asked if the WSIS was a success in terms of the declaration and action plan, about 45% (N=24) of respondents answered 'absolutely' or 'more or less'. About 40% (N=22) disagreed with that, which shows the disappointment amongst many CS-representatives, as well as a polarisation within civil society (see figure 1).

Figure 1:

Was the WSIS a success?

N=54

Official Declaration and Action Plan: 5% | 39% | 15% | 30% | 11%

Civil Society Networking: 28% | 50% | 15% | 7%

■ Absolutely, yes ■ More or less ■ Neutral ■ Overall it was a dissapointment ☐ It was not a success at all
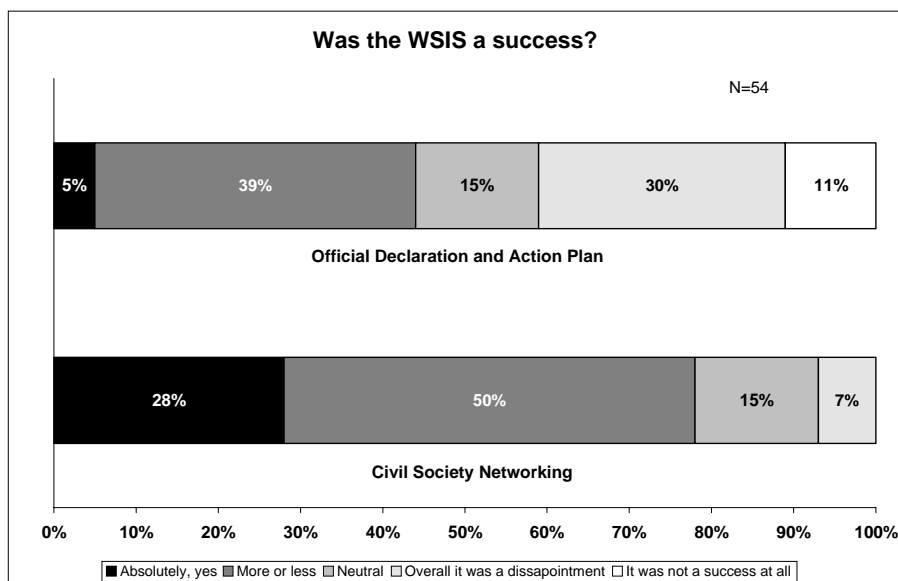
Intra-Networking

Many more respondents are convinced that the real outcome of the WSIS was not so much the formal declaration, but the networking-efforts within the civil society caucus, as illustrated by this respondent noting that *'through meetings and opportunity to engage in face to face discussions as well as agree on a lot of points, we developed our contacts and had a more insightful view on the international politics and networks of civil society organisations'* (R-3a, m). More then 75% (N=42) of respondents agree (absolutely/more or less) with this statement (see Figure 1).

WSIS represented for many CS-organisations also a learning experience, as this responded pointed out; *'Being involved in the process, the way official documents stated, offered a fruitful occasion to discuss both issues of content (the issues at stakes) and procedure (civil society participation). Therefore a growing awareness of this aspect paralleled involvement in the process'* (R-51a, f). Other respondents referred to the alternative civil society declaration as the more important outcome of the Summit, not the official declaration: *'it was about as successful as we expected - not much in it. The real focus was the Civil Society Declaration'* (R-16a, m).

The Internet

The Internet is becoming increasingly crucial to be inside civil society networks and have access to documents, to voting procedures, and to information. The Internet was deemed particularly important in view of intra-movement networking. When asked about the nature of their networking practices with other organisations during the WSIS process, there was a considerable difference between organisations that responded 'Yes' to Internet contact as one means of networking and those who responded 'No' to this question (see Table 1).

Organisations that do not network through the Internet are (only) dependent on physical meetings and thus miss out on those networking opportunities for which Internet access and capabilities are crucial. They are also often out of the loop as to the when and where those meetings take place. Organisations claiming not to use the Internet for networking-purposes were not active in co-organising events with other organisations, nor did they (with one exception) co-sign or co-write documents with other organisations.

Table 1: Ways by which civil society organisations network

	Co-Signing Document	*Co-Organising events*	*Joint Meetings*
Internet contact Yes (N=41)			
Yes	**61% (N=25)**	**54% (N=22)**	**85% (N=35)**
No	39% (N=16)	46% (N=19)	15% (N=6)
Internet contact No (N=13)			
Yes	8% (N=1)	0%	46% (N=6)
No	**92% (N=12)**	**100% (N=13)**	**54% (N=7)**

That a large majority of organisations using the Internet to network were also active in (offline) joint meetings shows the real and persistent importance of face-to-face interaction in combination with electronic communication. About a third of respondents claim that the Internet is crucial and only a very limited number of respondents suggested that face-to-face meetings are more important for networking than the Internet.

Table 2: Importance of the Internet in terms of Networking?

	% (N)
It is essential, everything is done through the Internet	33% (N=18)
The Internet is very important, but so are face2face meetings	**61% (N=33)**
The face2face is much more important then the Internet	6% (N=3)
Everything is done through face2face contacts	0%

Besides this, a majority of respondents value the Internet as much as face-to-face contacts. This confirms other research focussing in the interplay between online and offline (Diani, 2001).

Intra-Movement tensions and differences

Civil society is not a singular actor, nor is it conflict-free. The following quote illustrates this: *'[The WSIS] has allowed already organised groups to strengthen their links, as well as those who are new to familiarise themselves with these kinds of activities. However, we also think that a large part of civil society has disengaged from the process, specifically the most militant groups as well as the new ones, leaving the 'professionals' of civil*

society to claim a central place in the movement.' (R-50a, m - translation by the author). Another respondent made a similar remark relating to the power mechanisms within civil society and the pressure to strive for consensus and thus speak with one voice in an international setting, which tends to silence radical views: *'the mode of networking, which was guided largely by the more prominent NGOs strove for consensus in a way that buried what may be considered productive dissent and disagreement within Civil Society.'* (R-49a, f).

This dominance of organisations from the Northern hemisphere showing in a quantitative analysis of the ITU attendance-lists, is also problematic in this regard (see Table 3). Some 80% (N=2602) of participants to the WSIS–Phase1 and about 65% (N=301) of organisations present in Geneva, resided in Europe and/or North America. CSO from developed countries are also able to send larger delegations as the average number of participants per CSO indicates.

Table 3: Average # of participants per CSO for WSIS-03 in Geneva

	Total	West-Europe	East-Europe	North-America	Latin America	Southern-SSAfrica	Arab World	Asia	Oceania	Unknown
# of CSO-participants	3205 (100%)	1977 (62%)	26 (1%)	599 (19%)	86 (3%)	204 (6%)	165 (5%)	138 (4%)	4 (<1%)	6 (<1%)
#of CSO	462 (100%)	208 (45%)	8 (2%)	85 (18%)	32 (7%)	54 (6%)	35 (5%)	33 (4%)	3 (<1%)	4 (<1%)
Average # Participants/CSO	6,9	9,5/7,1[1]	3,3	7,0	2,8	3,7/3[2]	4,7	4,1	1,0	-
Median # Participant/CSO	2	3	3	2	2	1	3	2	1	-

Source: Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2005

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[1] World Electronic Media Forum, based in Switzerland, does skew the results for Europe considerably, as they had 507 participants at the WSIS2003. For the average number of participants we made the calculations with WEMF included and excluded.

[2] APC, transnational but officially based in South Africa, does skew the results of Africa as they had 47 participants to WSIS-1. For the average number of participants calculations calculation with and without APC were made.

Time & Resources

Finally a number of respondents complained about a lack of resources to attend and to follow up a time and money consuming processes such as the WSIS: *'We shall continue to monitor WSIS and take action as appropriate, but as an organisation with limited resources, we will measure our participation against how much impact we feel we can make, and/or what contribution it will bring to the WSIS.'* (R-32a, f) and also: *'We joined the process late as we did not have the resources to join in earlier.'* (R-41a, m).

If we consider the results from the quantitative analysis of the ITU attendance-lists (cf. Table 3), it becomes apparent that organisations from the Northern Hemisphere dominate, especially considering the average number of participants per organisation. The fact that Geneva is one of the most expensive cities in Europe in terms of accommodation and cost of living and that travel-costs from poorer regions in the world are generally speaking considerably higher might also explain why participants and organisations from these regions are substantially under-represented, despite (minor) efforts to alleviate this.

Internet Governance and Civil Society Internet-use

The results of the assessment above indicate that the participatory discourses adopted by the UN and ITU are flawed. First, many respondents feel disapointed with the end-result and the limited impact they had on it. Second, there are also issues of exclusion relating to the resources needed to be involved and to the dominance of professional NGOs. The use of the Internet in policy-processes has to be analysed on two levels, that of the formal level, where it facilitates access to the process, but not participation and the informal level of networking amongst civil society, which was extensive and deemed by many to be the real success of civil society.

From this perspective the evaluation of the 'participation' of civil society in the WSIS is quite bleak. However, a more in-depth analysis of the case of Internet Governance will show that a much more complex and differentiated image appears. Besides this, the Internet Governance case confirms the dynamics between online and offline in terms of networking and policy processes.

During the final negotiations at the WSIS1 the sensitive issue of Internet governance was postponed to the WSIS2, to be held in Tunis, 16-18th of

November 2005. The WSIS1 did give the UN secretary general Kofi Annan the mandate to set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) with 'active and full participation' of all stakeholders and charged 'to investigate and make proposals for action, as appropriate, on the governance of the Internet' (ITU, 2003a: paragraph 50). The WGIG consisted of 40 members , representing the different stakeholders and "who all participated on an equal footing and in their personal capacity" (WGIG, 2005: 3). Four physical meetings were held in Geneva (23-25/10/2004, 14-18/02/2005, 18-20/04/2005 & 14-17/06/2005), but besides that the Internet itself was also a much-used tool, especially in terms of civil society interaction and debate.

At the moment of writing the WSIS2 has not yet taken place, it remains thus pre-mature to make definite conclusions as to the impact of the very balanced final report of the WGIG and the extensive and productive involvement of civil society on the final decision, but some trends are emerging. These will be deduced from the replies from a set of questions that were sent to the most active participants of the IG-mailing list meaning those who have posted 20 or more messages during the 2 and a half years that the mailing list has been operating now (N=26). Nine key-participants responded and this resulted in a distinctly different—more positive and even at times enthusiastic—assessment of multi-stakeholderism and on the impact of civil society then in the more conflict-ridden assessment of the WSIS1 as a whole, presented above. Notwithstanding this, several respondents also voice their criticisms, concerns or reservations.

A quantitative analysis of the mailing list of the Internet Governance Caucus will allow us to assess the transnational character of the IG-caucus, the gender balance, and the number of postings per month or per participants. This will be complemented by a qualitative assessment by respondents of the functions, opportunities, as well as constraints of the mailing list and the use of the Internet in terms of networking and multi-stakeholderism.

Impact of Civil Society actors on the process

Almost all respondents feel that the impact of civil society in terms of the debates on Internet Governance within the WSIS-process has been substantial and the input it provided serious and considerable. One respondent asserted: *"CS-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-2b, m). It also emerges that civil society representatives active within the Internet Governance debate have a high degree of expertise regarding 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-4b, m). This also shows in the final report of the WGIG, where civil society discourses relating to the unilateral control of the root by the US, development issues, freedom of expression, intellectual property rights, consumer rights and 'meaningful' participation of CS in policy processes are present at times in strong language, at times balanced with other views (see WGIG, 2005).

Most respondents therefore feel that they have made a reasonable enough to major difference in the process. A respondent phrased it this way: *"The Caucus produced concrete language for the final document and pushed for a 'multi-stakeholder composition' of any IG follow-up mechanism"*, which shows according to him *"the recognition of CS and an 'important player'"* (R-3b, m). The case of Internet Governance as well as the continuing involvement of CS in the proposed Forum that will institutionalise dialogue shows that CS-representatives have been taken more seriously as the process evolved.

There were, however, also some critical perspectives. Two areas of concern can be identified. First of all, some respondents have reservation regarding the final political negotiations and whether the CS-discourses in the WGIG-report will survive the expected wheeling and dealing during WSIS2 in Tunis. A respondent refers to this with an open 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-4b, m). In many ways, it is, as one respondent states: *"too early to tell"* (R-7b, m) when it comes to the question if CS has been able to transform input into real impact. The second concern relates to the representativeness of the actors active within the IG-process. One respondent expresses the criticism that the mailing list seemed *"a 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-5b, f). From this perspective those actively involved in the IG-process are just another elite acting in the name of a larger constituency. This perception is re-enforced in another comment by the same respondent, voicing disappointment at the absence of the citizen, opposed to the user, in the

process: *"sad that this whole process left out the netizen, the net.citizens"* (R-5b, f). Another respondent also acknowledges that 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-6b, m).

This latter observation regarding the circumstances can be linked to a realist perspective that CS-involvement within formal policy processes requires a number of (semi-)'professionals' ready and able to perform a difficult balancing act of on the one hand getting the alternative discourses through and on the other hand seeking consensus within the CS-caucus.

Multi-stakeholder practices

Finally, regarding the praxis of multi-stakeholder, most respondents refer to their positive experience with, extensive involvement in and considerable impact on the WGIG and it's final report, as the prime example that the multi-stakeholder discourse is proving to be more then mere rhetoric, especially after WSIS1. One respondent claims: *"In other WSIS issues, … it has been mostly rhetoric, however in the case of IG it has been different"* (R-7b, m). In many ways, the IG-governance process is presented as a best-practice case regarding 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-8b, m).

As the careful phrasing in the last quote already indicates (cf. hopefully, perhaps), most respondents make reservation and are careful to stress that the relatively positive outcome is a temporary 'ceasefire' in an ongoing struggle. Examples of this are following comments: *"Let's see as we move to a more formal, nation state part of the negotiation"* (R-7b, m) *or "Let's see what eventuates, but the process to date has been multi-stakeholder"* (R-1b, m). Indeed there are reasons for serious concern and scepticism in this regard, as illustrated by the absence of the most powerful nation state as well as corporate actors in the WGIG and the recent strong statements coming out of the US-administration. This respondent echoes this fear: *"The US is not giving up its existing role"* (R-7b, m). This 'reality' prompts others to adopt a realistic stance: *"Taking into account that the US was not a member of the WGIG, but delivered a strong and clear statement recently …, it is rather unrealistic to expect a solution for 'oversight'"* (R-3b, m). It is clear that at the end of the day when it comes to vested interests, power and control, participatory discourses of equity, transparency and accountability often

loose out or are reduced to possible commitments to improved consultation through the proposed Forum. *"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-8b, m). But again, given the *"contradicting positions"* (R-4b, m) and interests, this is hardly surprising to many respondents.

Nevertheless, for most respondents the glass is definitely half-full, but that might change after the WSIS2 where the really though decisions will have to be taken, not by Civil Society, but by Nation States. For some, adopting a realist position, the outcome of the Tunis-summit is secondary to what has already been achieved, others, adopting a more ethical view, will be disappointed and are likely to change their assessment from half-full to half-empty.

Assessment of the Internet Governance 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 civil society WSIS-Internet Governance Caucus was very active and vibrant. The mailing list had some 100 active participants, but besides those posting messages many more subscribe and receive the postings. The mailing list can also be consulted on the world wide web, hosted by the Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility . The period of analysis ran from 30/03/2003, the start of the mailing list, to 03/07/2005 or roughly 2 year and a half.

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 was the case for the face-to-face engagement. As one respondent put it, the mailing list had *"the capacity to involve people who could not attend and the capacity to get a wider range of viewpoints"* (R-1b, m).

This is confirmed in part by the quantitative analysis of the mailing list. 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 4: Distribution of participation 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 Zeeland	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 have 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. More then 75% (N=80) of participants are male. This dominance is also reflected in the number of postings, where male participants account for more than 80% (N=2462) of messages.

Table 5: 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

Expertise vs. Elitism

Several respondents stated that the online allows for more reflection on complex issues, as well as debate on these issues to be aired. 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 need for 'expert-isation' also shows in the affiliation of participants of the mailing list. Although the affiliations of participants of the WSIS Internet Governance mailing list reflects the different stakeholders within the IG-debate, when analysing the number of postings it is clear that 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.

Table 6: 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

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-8b, m). However, as many recognise too, if a controversial issue emerges more people will respond and give their view. As such, the 'silent majority' on the list also fulfils a control function on those who are very active on the list and in the process. One respondent, who was not able to go to the meetings, refers to this 'watchdog" 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-5b, f).

Online vs. Offline

This also refers inexplicitly to the importance of face-to-face encounters to reach agreement or organise concrete actions, as one respondent noted: *"actual statements and agreements on particular courses of action tended to come from f2f meetings"* (R-2b, 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-

4b, m). Indeed many respondents stress the dynamic relationship between the online and the offline interaction. This also shows in the quantitative data where the cyclical character of listserv-use can be observed. This confirms other analyses of mailing lists (Hill & Hughes 1998; Wilhelm, 2000; Cammaerts, 2005).

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 has become more active after the WSIS-phase 1, but ups and downs can also be observed in the post WSIS1 period.

Figure 2:
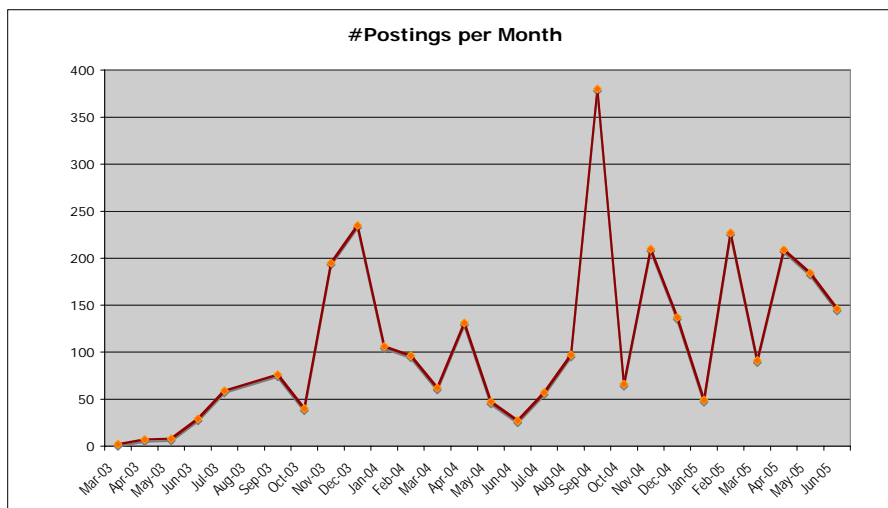
Surges in communication on the mailing list can be attributed to the preparation for physical meetings. The big surge in messages in September 2004 relates to a deliberative voting procedure to nominate CS-representatives in the UN Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), as well as drafting and 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.

In that sense the online 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 marginalisation of minority or more radical positions.

Conclusions

These results show that civil society is deeply divided over the WSIS-process; some fiercely critical, describing the WSIS participatory rhetoric as window-dressing, a 'fig-leaf' to legitimise a process that did not have the citizens in mind for whom it is intended, others hopeful, proud of what has already been achieved, with a realist and reformist attitude to social change. A variety of positions going from an empty glass to a full glass emerge. While most respondents acknowledge that on some issues advances have been made, there is no consensus on how to qualify these 'small steps'. A large group accepts this as part of the 'compromising' game and an equally large group aims for more and feels betrayed by the participatory discourses of multi-stakeholderism. It is clear that participation is an essentially contested notion and that serious questions can and should be asked as to the degree and nature of civil society involvement. Many respondents instead focussed on civil society networking and dynamics as the real and important outcome of its 'participation' in the WSIS.

The use of the Internet in the WSIS-process is extensive and access to the Internet, as well as the capabilities to use these tools are increasingly becoming crucial for participating in such complex policy-processes. This opens-up opportunities, of which a potential for greater transparency, more access to documents, to network more efficiently and to debate issues amongst civil society are the most important. But at the same time obstacles to participation also emerge. Actors who do not have easy access to the Internet and/or the skills or time to manage the vast amount of information may feel excluded or do not engage. In a policy context the use of the Internet also creates a symbolic, as well as physical or real distance, which can easily be (ab)used by those who hold the power to give participants the illusion of participation. When it comes to the actual decision-making process the Internet provides maybe access to the process at a formal level, but does not facilitate participation as is often claimed in policy discourses.

This also points towards an increasing perception amongst some grass-root activists and organisation that those representing civil society are part of a professionalised elite too. Equally true in this regard is the observation that

active involvement in a complex policy process such as a World Summit requires time, resources and a level of expertise and lobby-power, which in-turn necessitates that other actors, especially State-actors, take you seriously. For a variety of sometimes conflicting reasons some States within the UN, of which not surprisingly the current and emerging super-powers US and China are the most important, were not ready to do this (yet ?). This leaves many civil society actors frustrated with the process and makes that for them the glass is definitely half-empty or even downright empty.

Assessing the case of Internet Governance brings us to shade this fairly negative perspective and argue for 'looking' at the WSIS through different 'glasses'. Within the WGIG the civil society caucus was treated and accepted as an equal partner, introducing a social and democratic discourse into the debate. This is also reflected in the final report of the WGIG. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent these social and democratic discourses will survive the to be expected difficult negotiations between states during WSIS2 in Tunis. In any case, for most respondents the WGIG-process was a best practice case regarding multi-stakeholderism. From their perspective the 'IG-glass' is half-full or even full, although many remain careful as to the definite outcome.

The analysis of the IG-caucus mailing list confirms the increasing importance of the Internet in terms of intra-movement networking and access to policy processes, the documents and drafts. However, it also reveals constraints, such as a dominance of participants from the Northern hemisphere and of experts and CS-professionals. This is difficult to overcome as a complex issue such as IG requires experts and a high degree of knowledge and skills to be taken seriously and to be able to play the wheeling and dealing political game, typical of (global) policy processes. Besides this, the analysis of the IG-caucus mailing list also allowed to deepen our understanding of the dynamics between the online and the offline. While the Internet serves many functions relating to the diffusion of information beyond those that are directly involved and circulating draft-proposals and even choosing representatives and thus providing some degree of legitimisation, it is during face-to-face meetings and interactions that the real decisions are being made. This, in combination with the expertisation, creates issues of representation and exclusion, which need to be addressed, not only by international organisations such as the UN, but also within civil society itself.

Finally, this analysis also concurs with results published elsewhere (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2005) that social change and power is a dynamic and dialectic process, where outcomes are always temporal and have to be

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seen in the context of an ongoing struggle between conflicting interests and goals. Furthermore, participation and participatory discourses have to be critically assessed and cannot be reduced to access and making policy processes more transparent. If during final negotiations civil society input does not result into some form of impact, the opposite of what was intended by involving CS will be achieved, namely more frustration and disengagement and the end-verdict will be a variation of the French proverb:

'je participe, tu participe, elle/il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils profitent'

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