1. Introduction

Contemporary forms of global governance transcend traditional inter-governmental relations to include business actors and 'civil society'. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) serve as proxy for including civil society's voices, and increasingly mechanisms have been created to accommodate their participation. Multi-stakeholder policy debates, such as the recent United Nations’ World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), seemingly involve all relevant parties in decision-making.

However, well-resourced 'professionalised' NGOs only form a certain part of civil society. Activist groups, informal networks, temporary coalitions and individual campaigning make up a significant portion of collective action for social and political purposes. With the proliferation of new technologies, the spread of trans-border delocalised communities, and increasing disillusionment with traditional forms of organisation, the number and relevance of these 'informally organised' actors is growing. Yet they constitute a type of civil society which often stays below the radar of public discourse and does not have a space in governance.

In this paper, we turn to the field of media and communication in order to explore emerging informal and non-representational forms of civil society and their role in global politics. Media and communication governance has long been a space for innovation in the development of new forms of organisation as well as policy-making, and in the participation of non-state actors. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has involved businesses as official members since its early days; the Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), i.e. the main regulatory body for the Internet, has been led by non-state actors since 1998, and the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 and 2005 developed new standards and represented an important test field for multi-stakeholder processes (Hintz 2009). Civil society activity in the field has been characterised by a strong presence of temporary/informal collaboration rather than formal organisation, high issue specialisation and technical expertise, and grounded in libertarian
values and 'open source models' of cooperating and interacting. Practitioners, professionals and 'experts' are playing a crucial role, whereas traditional forms of campaigning and mass mobilisation are rather rare (Hackett and Carroll 2006; Milan 2009). Media activism thus provides an interesting ground for the analysis of emerging new forms of collective action and their interplay with established and more highly structured groups. We believe that findings from these observations can be applied in, and compared with, other sectors.

In this paper, we will look at the WSIS and related processes as key fora where civil society participation was enhanced but also met boundaries, and from where we can therefore draw conclusions for the relation between civil society and governance arenas. We will identify new forms of political organisation, their political objectives and action repertoires with regards to global governance, and present a dynamic model of civil society relation with policy arenas, distinguishing between an 'inside', an 'outside' and a 'beyond' approach to global governance. Bringing together the analysis of governance spaces and activist networks, we will finally analyse the challenges that 'informal' civil society poses to the current global governance system, discuss the compatibility between evolutions in governance and the newer forms of civil society mobilisation, and propose changes in governance structures to allow for more participation.

2. Methodological Notes

Qualitative data for this paper was derived from two different data sets. The first was based on a three-year-long participatory observation of the WSIS process, including both summits, most of the official preparatory conferences and side-events, and relevant mailing-lists. This included document analysis of summit-related statements by a diversity of participants and observers, and a series of in-depth interviews with WSIS key actors as well as media activists who did not participate, on strategies, policy agendas and their relation with institutions.

The second was a series of e-mail interviews with media and internet activists between 2006 and 2008. Activists were asked about their motivations, action repertoire, obstacles to their activities, values underlying their activism, and their attitude towards policy fora and institutions. Interview transcripts were unpacked using frame analysis. Part of these interviews were conducted in the run-up to the Internet Governance Forum meeting in Rio de Janeiro, November 2007, in the framework of a project looking at forms of exclusion in participatory governance processes (Hintz and Milan 2009b, forthcoming). They are occasionally quoted in this paper.

The methodological choice of e-mail interviewing, particularly in the case of internet and technological activists and collectives, was based on the scarce availability of these groups in an offline context and on the conviction that the researcher should relate to the object of inquiry according to the ways "in which social practices are defined and experienced" (Hine 2005: 1). E-mail interviewing is a specific form of online interaction, consisting in an asynchronous exchange of questions and answers (Kivitz 2005), and it allowed for a pro-longed exchange between researchers and activists, and for collective feedback as well as individual impressions.

The common aspects amongst the different civil society groups addressed in the separate streams of research are their focus on democratic communication values and their
exposure over time to institutions and policy-making processes of different kinds, including participation as well as repression. Interviewees are kept anonymous to maintain their privacy and not endanger their projects. We refer to them as ‘Interviewee’, followed by a number and date. Full references, with clear indication of their nature of interview data, are to be found in the bibliography at the end of the paper.

In writing this article, we benefited extensively from our own experiences with media activism and advocacy in the activist networks and civil society coalitions that we analyse. Our notion of activist networks emerged within a long-term experiment of ‘collaborative theorizing’ (Ryan and Jeffreys 2008) with activist groups, part of an ongoing reflection on new forms of participatory governance and the role of grassroots activists and informal groups.

3. Civil Society Participation at WSIS

Multi-stakeholder governance...
Whereas traditional notions of ‘government’ have implied the direct capacity of political leaders to steer society, the more recent interest in ‘governance’ has focused on systems interdependent problem-solving by a diversity of actors on a diversity of policy levels (Rosenau 1995). It encompasses webs of policy-making fora with the participation of new actors, particularly business and civil society, which have “transformed sovereignty into the shared exercise of power” (Held and McGrew 2003: 11). The United Nations world conferences of the 1990s offered a laboratory for global governance by going beyond the diplomatic exclusivity of states and experimenting with ‘multi-stakeholder’ policy debate (Hemmati 2002) as a collaborative process involving all ‘stakeholders’ – usually governments, business, and civil society. Some institutions have gone further, e.g. ICANN has replaced traditional modes of national representation by the main groups of actors involved in the development and operation of the Internet: the technical / professional / expert community, the private sector, and civil society.

The multi-stakeholder terminology has rapidly become the buzzword for creating consensus at and giving legitimacy to current policy processes. However, the actual degree of participation by civil society actors is under dispute and is often limited to access – i.e. the ability to attend and observe the process – rather than full participation – i.e. the ability to substantially influence the outcomes (Cammaerts and Carpentier 2006). Generally, these forms of “neo-corporatism” (Messner 2003; McLaughlin/Pickard 2005) only involve certain sections of civil society – usually professionalised NGOs.

... at WSIS
“Summit Breaks New Ground with Multi-Stakeholder Approach” headlined the official press statement published at the end of the preparation process for the first World Summit on...
the Information Society in Geneva in 2003 (ITU 2003). Focusing on process innovations rather than thematic outcomes was symptomatic for the summit debates which stretched over five years and during which the question of participation of non-state actors often displaced discussions on substance. The main summit organiser, the International Telecommunications Union, had promised a ‘new kind of summit’ based on the ‘full participation’ of ‘new’ actors, particularly business and civil society. Expectations were high that non-state actors would be able to participate on equal footing with government delegations, recognised as ‘partners’ and treated “as peers and equals to nation-states” (Ó Siochrú 2004: 334).

The WSIS was the first in the recent series of UN summits to focus on information and communication, and the first UN-level debate on these issues since the conflict over the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s/80s. It was divided in two successive summits, with the first one taking place in Geneva in December 2003 and the second in Tunis in November 2005. The declared aim was to develop an understanding of the ‘information society’ and tackle its main challenges, such as the ‘digital divide’. Civil society was officially invited to participate in the whole summit process, including all preparatory conferences. A large number of NGOs and other civil society actors followed the call, came to participate, created effective mechanisms for lobbying and thematic exchange, and were able to achieve some successes, particularly with regards to the high degree of recognition that their statements and contributions received. However, they also faced obstacles:

(1) Registration and accreditation: The requirements for receiving accreditation for the WSIS process were geared towards formal non-governmental organisations and failed to consider the structural background of loose grassroots groups, non-hierarchical networks, temporary coalitions. To participate in the preparatory process, a civil society entity needed to demonstrate that it was a formally established organisation with a headquarter, constitution and annual reports.

(2) Summit security: The registration process involved privacy infringements which discouraged some civil society activists from participating. Several activists noticed special treatment as they had their bags searched when they entered the summit compound. Bureaucratic registration procedures occasionally blended in with direct repression by state authorities: In Geneva, a media activist space was temporarily closed by police, and in Tunis, any independent self-organised civil society meeting outside the summit compound was prevented by large numbers of secret police.

(3) Financial resources. Effective participation in WSIS preparatory conferences involved covering flight tickets and two weeks of hotel accommodation, food and drinks in an expensive Swiss city – several times a year. Little funding was provided for civil society delegates by the WSIS organisers. Only larger NGOs which could mobilise sufficient funds, for example through established contacts with potential donors, could cope with this restriction.

These obstacles can be partially traced back to the legitimate concern by the UN to secure manageable summit procedures and therefore place certain obligations on participants. However, such obligations are political in that they allow certain actors to participate and exclude others. They thus relate to the findings on other institutional processes which

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3 Civil society comments on the draft summit declaration and action plan were annexed to the draft documents and thus became part of official UN (draft) documents, and the separate civil society summit declaration at the end of the first WSIS phase was included on the WSIS website as an official summit outcome.
suggest that international organisations are highly selective in inviting civil society actors to policy debates and are tightly constraining those actors’ influence on policy results (Wilkinson 2002; Nelson 2002).

A number of further aspects complicated the advocacy efforts of civil society groups and decreased the interest of those who were not directly involved:

(4) From 'participants' to 'observers': As the preparation process proceeded, civil society actors were increasingly excluded from negotiation sessions and officially relegated to the status of 'observers'.

(5) Framing of summit discourses and objectives: The central role of the ITU, the UN specialised organisation for technical communication infrastructure, led to a bias towards technology and infrastructural problems at the expenses of political, social and cultural perspectives.

(6) The predominance of state/business interests: This was reflected in a focus on free market principles and business-led development; the security interests of states; and a top-down approach which saw states and business as prime actors and did not recognise grassroots- and community-based self-organised infrastructure.

Participation and its limits
Participants and academic observers agreed that WSIS helped to open previously closed spaces of inter-governmental debate to organised groups of citizens and activists. Civil society groups praised the “innovative rules and practices of participation” established in some areas of the WSIS process (Civil Society Plenary 2005: 7). The high degree of formalisation of civil society involvement in WSIS as well as the autonomous structures created by civil society participants, argues media scholar and WSIS observer Marc Raboy, “form the basis of a new model of representation and legitimation of non-governmental input to global affairs”, and as a result, “the rules and parameters of global governance have shifted” (Raboy 2004: 349). However, access by non-state actors to the negotiation process “was fragile, was frequently challenged and regularly withdrawn” (Ó Siochrú 2004: 338). Insufficient opportunities for participation risked to reduce multi-stakeholderism to a “rhetoric exercise aimed at neutralising criticism through the adoption of an unproblematic consensual understanding of political life” (Padovani & Pavan 2007: 100).

Even though it took important steps towards participatory governance, the WSIS process did not overcome the separation in ‘official NGOs’ and wider civil society. Partially, this was due to the unwillingness of many governments to progress on a path towards including wider sets of actors – and thus further watering down the governmental monopoly in decision-making – and partially it reflected the lack of appropriate concepts for including actors which are not based in traditional and familiar formal structures and organisations. Many of those who were building information society in their everyday practices were either missing or participated in alternative events outside the summit compound. Few autonomous media practitioners, free software developers, creators of grassroots communication infrastructure, such as citizen-based community wireless networks, etc., attended the summits. Community informatics researcher Michael Gurstein noted that “while there has been a very considerable degree of ‘talking about’ ICTs for Development there has been remarkably little ‘talking with’ those who are actually doing the job on the ground” (Gurstein 2005b), so that WSIS lacked “significant participation from
those working directly at the grassroots in initiating and implementing ICTs” (Gurstein 2005a).

Some of those ‘working directly at the grassroots’ met outside the Geneva summit at a series of events under the title of WSIS?WeSeize!. WSIS?WeSeize! gathered media and communication activists, largely from loose networks such as Indymedia, who rejected participation in a summit dominated by state and business interests and instead sought to develop an information society “from below”. Its series of events encompassed a separate conference, practical workshops, a 24-hour live video stream, and a space for media and technological experiments under the name of “Polymedia Lab”.

The IGF
The most prominent follow-up process of WSIS has been the establishment of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a new forum for a multi-stakeholder dialogue on Internet policy. The first edition of the IGF took place is Athens (2006), the second in Rio de Janeiro (2007), the third in Hyderabad (India, 2008), and the forth will convene in Sharm El Sheikh next November. The IGF does not have a decision-making role and cannot negotiate binding agreements, but it can set policy agendas. It has further advanced WSIS practices and moved closer to ‘full participation’ through innovations such as the establishment of ‘Dynamic Coalitions’ in which members of all stakeholder groups discuss specific Internet policy sub-themes – such as spam, privacy, freedom of expression, linguistic diversity – and try to find common positions. However, despite these progressive steps, several of the above-mentioned access challenges persist. A large number of NGO representatives have participated in meetings and debates, but many ‘informal’ groups are missing.

4. Activist Networks

Case study: Grassroots tech groups
An example for such ‘informal’ actors are ‘grassroots’ or ‘radical tech groups’ – groups providing alternative communication infrastructure to civil society activists and citizens on a voluntary basis through collective organising principles. They aim at counteracting commercial as well as state pressures on information content, media access and the privacy of media users. Grassroots tech groups usually offer web-based services such as website hosting, e-mail and mailing list services, chats and other tools such as anonymous remailers and instant messaging; or provide platforms for self-production of information. They are “organisations running a server to support movements for political change to get direct and participatory access to the web and media” (People’s Global Action 2007). Based on an experimental do-it-yourself ethos, some of them were amongst the pioneers of Internet development in the early 1990s and many of them have since then contributed significantly to innovations on the web (including audio and video streaming, interactive tools, etc). Current examples include the Spanish SinDominio, the Italian Autistici/Inventati, the German Nadir, the British Plentyfact, the North American riseup.net, and the open-publishing platforms of the Indymedia network.

A typical radical tech collective would consist of half a dozen volunteer media activists who are often, but not necessarily, based in the same town. Some have weekly meetings for strategic discussions and decisions, some even operate a computer laboratory or an Internet cafe, but most communication and work takes place online via email and chat. Daily tasks include managing webservers and list-servs, larger projects may include
developing software tools, such as content management systems or encryption programmes, that other civil society activists can use for their communication and campaigns.

They become more visible when they step out of cyberspace. Radical tech groups have established media centres at major protest events such as those against G8 meetings. Indymedia UK, for example, have set up tents with computer equipment in the middle of actions and action camps to allow other activists to write and upload reports directly from the street. The group Nadir once transformed a countryside barn in a remote North German village into a high-tech media hub that provided thousands of environmental activists with sophisticated communication infrastructure, enabling them to send out their reports on a protest against nuclear waste shipments to a global audience. The New York-based group May First/People’s Link runs the communication infrastructure of the Social Forum of the Americas.

Common characteristics and a common rationale include:

- Autonomy and direct action: They develop self-organised and self-run alternative communication infrastructures that aim at emancipating civil society groups, social movements and individual users from predominant providers of information and communication channels.
- Collectivism: They are organised as collectives of equals working on a voluntary basis, with horizontal consensus-building and a rejection of formal leadership and representation. The sustainability of the projects depends on the voluntary contribution of knowledge, skills, time and financial support.
- Service for, and members of, social movements: Supporting diverse movements by providing communication infrastructure and information exchange tools, they constitute a form of “meta-organisation activism” (Interviewee 8 2007). At the same time they are an intrinsic part of those movements, and contribute to their agenda-setting by raising awareness of privacy protection and knowledge issues.

Defining Activist Networks

Grassroots tech groups are part of the broader category of activist networks which we use in this paper. The autonomous creation of communication infrastructures by grassroots activists without the involvement of states and the private sector plays a crucial role in the contemporary mobilisations on communication and media justice, emerging within the so-called global justice movement. Entities of this kind form broader networks for mutual support and collaborative action. Typically their aim is to provide alternatives for citizens to commercial and state-owned communication infrastructures, establish channels for people’s voices and concerns, and alleviate threats to individual privacy deriving from commercialisation. Activist networks

- usually lack explicit hierarchies or dense structures
- are typically organised as grassroots projects, thus they do not have the financial and structural background of a well-resourced non-governmental organisation
- prioritize direct action rather than advocacy, thus ‘doing’ rather than ‘demanding’
- cultural and political roots often include anarchist thought, do-it-yourself culture and cyber-libertarianism, thus tending towards a minimum degree of state regulation and a maximum of freedom for civil society actors to develop infrastructures according to their needs
In the field of communication and media activism, a further crucial characteristic concerns the individual dimension. Informal online movements, temporary 'tactical media' (Garcia & Lovink 1999), individualised online campaigning and the emergence of technological developer-activists have all changed the face of civil society and have diversified the latter beyond the classical formally-established organisation. The internet, particularly, has created links between individual 'users', rather than organisations and social movements. Those actively developing infrastructure and applications, for example as part of the free software 'movement', have mostly done so in their own individual capacity and on their own accord. Personal reputation has been more relevant than representing the interests of a particular organisation.

Connecting engaged individuals and informal groups, activist networks thus express a change in civil society structures that concerns the increasing relevance of loose collaborations in addition to established formalised organisations and which amounts to a “shift in social formations” (Bennett 2003, 21). Activist networks are an analytical tool which allows us to elaborate on participation by loose groups and temporary coalitions. With 'networks' we refer to an informal approach to collective action; the attribute ‘activist’ highlights the strong idealistic/ideological leverage of such groups and their tendency to embody non-negotiable (value-based) positions.

Within networks, policy preferences are being discussed and are taking shape. Such networks might take advantage of open ‘policy windows’ (Kingdon 1995) to advance their claims, or brand-new networks might be set up to interact with institutions on particular occasions. However the characteristics of informality and temporariness challenge established models representation within institutions, which are typically based on membership and official accreditation.

Within the literature on collective action, activist networks share some characteristics with the “critical communities” proposed by Rochon (1998): they embed expertise, but such expertise comes from grounded-knowledge rather than from theoretical and conceptual work. Although networks often transcend national borders, they differ from “advocacy coalitions” as defined by Keck and Sikkink (1998), which are an institutionalised alternative to collective action.

5. Inside, outside and beyond governance processes

When looking at collective actors engaged in political processes, a classical distinction in social movement research is between ‘insiders’ (actors pursuing a cooperative strategy of active engagement in institutional processes) and ‘outsiders’ (actors adopting confrontational forms of protest against institutions). However activist networks are not easily subsumed under this binary scheme. We will briefly re-visit ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ tactics, and propose a third category that encompasses activities which take place “beyond” policy processes.

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4 We are aware that the term ‘network’ has been extensively used in the study of social movements. According to Mario Diani, a network can be defined as "a set of nodes, linked by some form of relationship, and delimited by some specific criteria". Typically we can identify in a network some nodes, and ties between them, which are reproduced over time (Diani 2003: 6). Our use of the term network is detached from this extensive tradition.

Inside. The WSIS provided an opportunity for advocacy-oriented groups to engage in a transnational arena on communication policy. Civil society coalitions such as Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) attended WSIS, attracted by the promise to participate ‘on equal footing’ with governments and business actors. Created for and around the summit, CRIS was formed in reaction to the presence of a policy window, with the specific aim of interacting with institutions, and its repertoire was ‘defined and constrained by the United Nations process, which relies on verbal interventions in negotiations among governments and the production of statements or declarations (...) [it] was thus largely normative, relying on persuasion and discussion’ (Mueller et al. 2007: 279). CRIS activists a) accepted the rule of the game, thus recognizing institutions as legitimate power-holders, and b) interacted with power-holders in order to foster change ‘from the inside’. Institutions and policy arenas were perceived as a potential gain. Several umbrella organisations that represent grassroots media activists, such as the World Association of Community Broadcaster (AMARC), and the Association for Progressive Communication (APC) equally interpreted WSIS as a ‘potential gain’ - an opportunity for change and innovation, and a chance to get involved, get legitimized and get their issues recognized. A participant said that ‘as a place to spread the word about new ideas, even if you can’t get anything officially passed, this kind of conferences are really significant’ (Interviewee 3 2006). Actors who decide to go ‘inside’ thus believe that policy may create ‘possibilities for something new’.

Outside. Rather than through collaboration, civil society activists may also choose to interact with institutions ‘from the outside’ by adopting tactics of mass mobilization (rallies, demonstrations), disruption (blockades, cultural resistance), or norm change (campaigning). They address policy-makers, but they express fundamental opposition to either a particular policy piece or to the policy process as such. Both tend to be seen as a ‘threat’, not a potential gain. Some choose this tactic because they do not have access to the institution or the policy arena, others because they reject the rules of the game and do not accept the institution as legitimate interlocutor, and others because they seek to apply public pressure as a complementary approach to ‘inside’ involvement.

Whereas the recent movement against neoliberal globalisation has created very strong ‘outside’ activities and has focused on disruption and mass protest, there are fewer examples of ‘outsider’ tactics within the realm of media and communication governance. The processes governing communication are generally difficult to frame for mobilization and often distant from the everyday experience of a non-expert public. The international protests against communications surveillance in the European Union (EU) constitute an exception: ‘Freedom Not Fear’ was a series of protests that took place in October 2008 all over Europe, with its epicentre in Germany, to oppose the surveillance measures enacted by the European Union directive on Data Retention and similar policies (collection of telecommunications data, surveillance of air travellers, biometric registration of citizens,
Beyond. Rather than addressing policy-makers through advocacy or protest, many media activists choose not to address them at all and focus instead on the creation of alternative infrastructure – both technological and social. One member of a grassroots tech group told us: ‘I don’t think we need to focus on ‘asking’ or ‘having a voice’. I think we have ‘to do’, ‘keep doing’ and keep building working structures and alternatives that are diametrically opposed to the ways capitalism forces us to function in our everyday lives. Our job, as activists, is to create self-managed infrastructures that work regardless of ‘their’ regulation, laws or any other form of governance’ (Intervieewee 1 2007). ‘Regardless of’ suggests independence from institutional arenas and rejects the latter’s relevance. The ‘beyond’ is an autonomous zone in dialectical conflict with its surrounding social system, and the creation of an alternative to hegemonic structures and procedures.

WSIS? We Seize! is a typical example of a “beyond” strategy. While heads of states and of international institutions were meeting inside the official WSIS summit compound at the outskirts of Geneva, accompanied by many civil society ‘insiders’, media activists and members of activist networks created a ‘PolyMediaLab’ in the city centre, where some hundred radical techies, hackers and communication experts gathered to share technical skills, develop independent media, and promote alternative ways of production and social relation. They took the opportunity of a UN gathering to meet and discuss their own agenda for the ‘information society’, but they did not make any demands to the global leaders who met in the same city, nor did they embark on mass protests. Instead they put their ideas directly into practice by developing alternative media infrastructure, file-sharing, creating new affinity groups and using ‘free’ goods, and thus created an ‘information society’ from the bottom up.

‘Beyond’ strategies focus on prefigurative action: by envisioning and creating a different system, both at the ‘material’ and ‘symbolic’ level, media activists dismiss a mainstream system that they consider governed by distorted values and illegitimate actors. The creation of prefigurative realities takes the shape of alternative communication infrastructures, and alternative sets of values. Like many ‘outsiders’, ‘beyond-ers’ criticise institutional policy processes as illegitimate and undemocratic top-down interventions. Yet they go further by refusing to stay within the logics and rules of the game of the known social system. Creating parallel prefigurative realities, they generate a ‘new world’ and redefine social structures from scratch. Rather than interacting with power-holders like the ‘insiders’, or dancing around power arenas as ‘outsiders’ do, they engage in a ‘redefinition or explosion of power’ as we know it (Jordan 2002: 33). As the Indymedia slogan goes: ‘Don’t hate the media, be the media’. This approach is linked particularly to anarchist currents in contemporary social movements, and it is at the basis of many social centers but also neighbourhood assemblies and other experiences of self-organisation. Day (2005) calls this strategy “beyond reform”.

‘Beyond-ers’ do not usually interact with institutions and policy arenas, but they react when their activities and values are threatened by laws, regulations, forms of control, police repression. The tactical repertoire that they prefer in these cases includes control circumvention, creation of technical ‘bypasses’ to evade regulation, ‘hacking’ of norms and
conventions. As one activist puts it: ‘Our main tactic is just avoid all the laws, just sneak a way around it’ (Interviewee 24 2008). For that they use their technical skills, create encryption, move servers to other countries, and generally develop creative solutions that allow them to be one step ahead of regulatory efforts. As institutions and regulation are seen as potential interference and danger to their prefigurative autonomous zones, beyond-ers seek to find unregulated spaces and to expand them.

Whereas social movements in other thematic fields often have a predominant focus on the distinction – and sometimes connection – between inside and outside activities, media activists are particularly strong in the ‘beyond’ sphere, as the very core of media activism is to produce and construct new and alternative communication infrastructure, from newsletters to community radio to websites, and thus forms of communication and interaction. The table below summarizes the three approaches.

| ‘INSIDE’ | • cooperative attitude: active engagement in policy-making processes through advocacy and participation in multi-stakeholder processes  
• institutions and policy arenas are perceived as a potential gain  
• members accept the rules of the game, thus recognize institutions as legitimate power-holders |
| ‘OUTSIDE’ | • confrontational action: ‘interaction’ with institutions through protest, disruption, campaigning and public pressure from ‘outside’  
• either because they do not have access to the institution  
• or because they reject the rules of the institution-related game and do not accept institution as legitimate interlocutor |
| ‘BEYOND’ | • no interaction with policy processes, no dialogue with institutions  
• ‘by-passing’ regulation and expanding unregulated spaces  
• focus on prefigurative action: envisioning and creating a different system, both at the ‘material’ and ‘symbolic’ level, setting up alternative infrastructures and generating alternative sets of rules |

Table 1. Inside, outside and beyond: a summary table (an expanded version can be found in Milan 2009)

6. Towards participatory governance?

Lowering access barriers
If a policy process is to be fully legitimate, the preferences of a broad range of actors would need to be included into policy agendas. Our discussion of civil society participation at WSIS has unveiled a number of shortcomings, particularly with regards to the participation of non-formally established organisations, loose networks, and activist groups. We argue that possibilities of their involvement as well as recognition of their specific practices need to be improved if there is a will to continue the road towards greater participation in global decision-making. Channels should exist by which activist groups can have their objectives represented in policy debate. In short, the question is “how to shift (..) from closed and inter-locking compacts – however tripartite they may appear – into the broader, more inclusive, even ‘wilder’ reaches of democracy and inclusive and participatory decision making” (Gurstein 2005b).

The first and most basic step to achieve this would be to lower the access barriers for civil society actors to global governance arenas. Rules for registration and accreditation will have to consider the specific structural characteristics of grassroots groups and loose networks and allow non-formally established organisations to participate. Funding needs to
be provided to these groups and networks (and decisions as to who should represent a
group or constituency must be the responsibility of the latter rather than of founders and
institutions). In their WSIS evaluation “Much more could have been achieved”, civil society
participants of the WSIS process reflected on these issues as they expressed the urgent
need to develop “clearer and less bureaucratic rules of recognition for accrediting Civil
Society organisations in the UN system, for instance in obtaining ECOSOC status and
summit accreditation, and to ensure that national governmental recognition of Civil Society
entities is not the basis for official recognition in the UN system.”

Rethinking participation and inclusion

However, as our discussion of activist networks and of the 'beyond' sphere suggests,
these rather straightforward recipes may not be sufficient for involving a broader set of
actors. The different groups that we have put under the umbrella of ‘informal’ civil society
challenge the very foundations of multi-stakeholder decision-making. They offer a
perspective on innovative forms of accountability and collectivity, and thus allow us to re-
think concepts of representation. Differing from ‘traditional’ civil society, rejecting centralist
decision-making and focusing on setting up practical alternatives to mainstream content,
infrastructure and organisational models, they question both the democratic quality and the
sheer relevance of established governance institutions.

A growing number of social movements, civil society groups and citizen initiatives are
structured in a way that is incompatible with current institutional processes. As collective
enterprises they regard consensus decision-making and consultation of all members as a
foundation of their work, and they therefore reject traditional forms of representation –both
political representation through election and organisational representation through leaders,
chairs or CEOs. Assigning decision-making power to a representative, for example to one
member participating in a policy forum, conflicts with collective organizing principles.
Moreover, time-consuming collective decision processes make it difficult to rapidly respond
to policy deliberations and to quickly-evolving document drafts at, e.g., UN summits. The
latter therefore offer no suitable space for non-representational collectives.

Some media developers and activists have proposed to transform the NGO-oriented civil
society participation models at summits such as WSIS into “a free assembly of women and
men, each equal to each other” (Bertola 2005) that allow “people to speak for themselves
in the forums in which decisions (…) are made and not require that they act through
artificial proxies” (Auerbach 2005). Even though this may be in conflict with the collective
approach favoured by grassroots tech groups, its non-representational perspective is
common to both. Both approaches point to the disintegration of traditional forms of formal
organisation, which affects both organised civil society and inter-national (inter-state)
policy-making.

A new logics of politics?

Developing a response may require “a new logics of politics” (Lovink & Rossiter 2005)
characterised by “non-representational democratic models of decision making” (ibid.).
Network theorists Lovink and Rossiter urge us to “abandon the illusion that the myths of
representational democracy might somehow be transferred” (ibid.) to the emerging era of
post-geographical forms of human organisation. They propose instead the concept of
“organised networks” – “temporary and voluntary forms of collaboration” (ibid.), which link

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the informality of virtual networks and the formality of institutions. Similarly, the category of ‘constituency’ moves beyond established political forms as it identifies members not according to citizenship and geographical territory, but according to common interest, a common history, and common language. ‘Constituencies’ thus take note of the “reconfiguration of social space” towards “relative deterritorialization” and growing “supraterritoriality” (Scholte 2000: 46, 50).7 Kleinwächter has proposed to create the ‘United Constituencies’, complementing the United Nations and highlighting the need for “a new co-regulatory model, where nations and constituencies, that is different stakeholders, can interact in a way that human rights and cultural diversity, economic growth and social development is promoted on a global level” (Kleinwächter 2005).

A more prominent focus on networks and constituencies in global multi-stakeholder governance may accommodate more loosely organised entities, policy-sceptical actors and those preferring ‘beyond’ strategies by not requiring their direct participation, As a civil society approach to a policy arena such as, networks could position themselves in different locations – some closer, some more distant – around that arena, connected but not necessarily ‘included’. From ‘inside’ to ‘outside’ to ‘beyond’, loose linkages and channels of communication may ensure that information and policy preferences are flowing from one to the next. Allowing for fluidity recognises the contributions that grassroots actors and activist networks can make and structures their input by creating spaces for exchange between different civil society actors and stakeholders. It opens up a rigid structure of one forum with strict boundaries to a variety of different inputs on different levels.

WSIS has shown some evidence of increased collaboration, with channels of communication sporadically emerging between WSIS?WeSeize! and the civil society groups inside the process. A number of civil society actors interpreted the different approaches between ‘inside’, ‘outside’ and ‘beyond’ not as fundamental ideological dividing lines but as complementary strategies. A more participatory policy process would allow different voices and approaches of civil society to connect and intervene – those focusing on policy advocacy, lobbying and monitoring of negotiations inside the official process; those engaging in public pressure from outside the official process, and those developing policy/governance alternatives and self-organised alternative infrastructure.

A ‘new logics of politics’, however, may not stop at the ‘United Constituencies’ replacing or complementing the United Nations. The concept of ‘unity’, and thus centralist regulatory measures, may be equally out-dated. The practices of media activist networks and the critiques launched at WSIS?WeSeize! challenge centralist approaches and require deep justification for any regulatory measures which may intervene with civil society-based communication systems. From the perspective of activist networks, a united global summit or forum increasingly looks like a dinosaur that belongs to another era. Rather, these groups speak to a radical decentralisation of global governance and to a bottom-up approach to policy-making, which places those that are directly affected by policy measures at the centre of governance efforts. This may not just imply an increased involvement of civil society actors but a restructuring towards a more decentralised network of interrelated policy clusters.

7 Using similar terminology, but leaving the ‘territory’ of national concepts further behind, the Indymedia UK network which consists of several local groups all over the United Kingdom uses the abbreviation ‘UK’ for ‘United Kollectives’.
7. Conclusion

Current governance processes may embrace ‘multi-stakeholder’ principles, but they only allow certain types of civil society actors to participate in policy deliberations. There is a mismatch between the formal requirements of a civil society 'stakeholder' and the spread of informal networks, individualised activism and loose coalitions. What we call 'activist networks' exemplifies this disconnect, as it includes significant parts of civil society which, however, do not have a place in governance processes. They serve as an expression of new forms of organisation which differ from the formalised NGO, and they often favour a praxis-focused approach over policy advocacy. Developing alternative infrastructure and technological 'by-passes' around policy challenges is valued more than participating in policy dialogue with governments and the private sector. They often operate 'beyond' policy processes, i.e. they do not interact directly and thus provide a new perspective that differs from cooperative engagement 'inside' or opposition 'outside'.

Activist networks provide us with a view on the deficiencies of current multi-stakeholder global governance. They highlight the importance of considering broader parts of civil society, in addition to established NGOs, if transnational policy-making is to be democratic, participatory and thus legitimate. At the same time they show that it would be insufficient to just invite those broader sets of actors to existing policy debates. The concept of 'inclusion', which has been so prominent at WSIS and elsewhere, is a double-edged sword. An ‘inclusive’ process that continues to be led by the ‘old’ powers of the governmental and inter-governmental realm or the ‘new’ powers of the business realm will remain unacceptable for many of “those working directly at the grass roots in initiating and implementing ICTs” (Gurstein 2005a, see above). 'Inclusion' is not the only – and, arguably, not the main – challenge for participatory and legitimate governance; but ‘creation’ of new governance mechanisms that reflect the aspirations, skills, roles and organisational structures of all actors that make a relevant contribution to the further development of, or are affected by, the issues that are at stake.

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