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The WSIS as a Political Space in Global Media Governance

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We are firmly convinced that we are collectively entering a new era of enormous potential, that of the Information Society and expanded human communication. In this emerging society, information and knowledge can be produced, exchanged, shared and communicated through all the networks of the world. All individuals can soon, if we take the necessary actions, together build a new Information Society based on shared knowledge and founded on global solidarity and a better mutual understanding between peoples and nations. We trust that these measures will open the way to the future development of a true knowledge society. (WSIS, 2003a, art. 67)

Well, maybe not quite, but this extract from the final declaration of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) does indicate something about the flights of rhetoric that have accompanied that event.

The first phase of the WSIS, which concluded in Geneva in December 2003, highlighted a range of questions about issues and process that will characterize communication governance well into the twenty-first century. Without having resolved them, it indicates a new paradigm for global governance, in which information and communication issues are central, and in which new actors, particularly those that can be characterized under a general rubric of global civil society, will be increasingly involved.[1] This is good news for democracy even if it must be taken with a large pinch of salt.

The WSIS has opened a new phase in global communication governance and global governance generally. Through a particular mix of official and parallel activities, the process identified the problematic issues in global communication, indicated the range of views on how to deal with them, provided various blueprints of what should and could be possible in the way of solutions, and gingerly explored ways of dealing with these questions in the future. This is typical of the emerging new paradigm in communication governance.

What authorizes such an upbeat assessment? Basically this: the global governance

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environment in communication (as in much everything else) is based on the interaction and interdependence of a wide array of actors and policy venues. Needless to say, power is not equally distributed among actors, and some sites of decision making are more important than others. National governments still wield tremendous leverage both on the territories they govern and as the only legally authorized participants in international deliberations. Here again, the disparities are enormous but in all cases national sovereignty is no longer absolute. Multilateral bodies, transnational corporations, and international treaties powerfully constrain the role of every nation-state. Global governance is increasingly referred to as a multi-stakeholder process. The WSIS experience has transformed this framework most notably by sanctifying the place of global civil society as an organized force in this process.

The WSIS is the third attempt within the UN system to deal with information and communication issues on a global scale. In the optimistic climate of the post-war era, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights spelled out, in 1948, what the great democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century had struggled to achieve: that the capacity to seek, receive and impart information is a basic human right. In the 1970s, in the post-colonial climate of the Cold War, the non-aligned nations sparked a debate on a 'new world information and communication order' (NWICO), drawing attention to such questions as the inequalities in North–South information flow, the cultural and economic bias of technology and the lack of communication infrastructure in the so-called Third World. The year 1948 was a moment of consensus, but the debates of the 1970s were fraught with conflict. Both had in common, however, an exclusive reliance on states and governments as the only legitimate political actors.

The WSIS promised to be different. Conceived and launched in 1998, the WSIS arrived in a context marked by buzzwords such as technological convergence and globalization. The politics of the WSIS was marked not only by consensus and conflict among the world's governments but also by a larger politics of definition, pitting governments against non-governmental actors, namely NGOs and other civil society associations. In the immediate wake of the Geneva phase of the WSIS, it is a commonplace among most observers that it was civil society that kept the debate on track, re-introduced the crucial elements left unresolved or unrealized in 1948 and the 1970s, and organized itself responsibly to put forward a vision truly reflective of the interests of the world community. If civil society had not reared its difficult head at the WSIS, it would have had to be invented.

The end of the first phase of the WSIS in Geneva on 12 December 2003 marked the end of a long process that began five years earlier, at a plenipotentiary conference of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Huge efforts were invested in this undertaking. The different parties—civil society, private sector, governments and intergovernmental organizations—all battled to influence the results according to their own respective visions and, especially, interests.

With more than 11,000 registered participants, the WSIS fit into the mould of recent UN summits. But this was the first world summit to tackle issues of communication policy and governance. The spread of digital technologies—which summit organizers characterized as a 'revolution'[2]—and its social, political, economic

and cultural impacts, were sufficiently important for the ITU to plunge into organizing the summit on a grand scale.

Certain governments found themselves in the midst of controversies. Hostile to the participation of civil society, countries such as Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China found themselves at odds with the liberal democracies. China notably struggled (ultimately in vain) to exclude any reference to media and human rights from the official texts. Attempts were made to subordinate the accepted universal right to freedom of expression to that of national governments to exercise sovereignty in this area. The United States insisted on making information security a central point.

Intellectual property rights pitted certain developing countries such as Brazil and India against the leading industrial economies. So did the question of funding the bridging of the digital divide. Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade vigorously promoted the idea of a 'Digital Solidarity Fund' which captured the imagination of participants (aided by a slick television advertising campaign on CNN Europe during the week of the summit) but did not convince the governments that would be called upon to pay. The Senegalese plan for a fund based on an automatic check-off on sales of ICT products rebuffed the governments of the United States, the European Union, Canada and Japan. A compromise emerged in favour of a voluntary plan, and the issue was referred to the second phase of the summit slated for Tunis in 2005.[3]

In general, then, there is no clear funding mechanism provided for the proposals contained in the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. This is clearly a failure and evidence of a flagrant lack of political will on the part of governments to take the necessary steps towards a genuine implantation of the principles adopted by the summit. With the president of the summit Preparatory Committee, Adama Samassékou, having himself declared that 'the funding of concrete actions will be the first measure of success of the Summit' (ATS, 2003), this reversal is even more significant with respect to the expectations raised by the WSIS agenda.

The current regime of Internet governance was another issue seriously challenged by countries concerned about the US government's role as overseer of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). This complex question was also referred to Tunis. The summit mandated UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

> to set up a working group on Internet governance, in an open and inclusive process that ensures a mechanism for the full and active participation of governments, the private sector and civil society from both developing and developed countries, involving relevant intergovernmental and international organizations and forums, to investigate and make proposals for action, as appropriate, on the governance of Internet by 2005. (WSIS, 2003b, art. C6)

The first point of the task force's mandate is to come up with a working definition of Internet governance …[4]

Considering that the two issues considered critical by governments—Internet governance and the funding of the information society—were pushed off to Tunis, then clearly little was accomplished from a governmental point of view. But the summit seems nonetheless to have provided international diplomacy with a lexicon

for speaking about the information society and a shopping list of issues it encompasses.

Beyond general principles and a minimalist Plan of Action, the official documents produced by the WSIS reflect a highly contested worldview. According to authors Marita Moll and Leslie Regan Shade (2004):

> The Draft Principles and Agenda for Action are extraordinarily ICT focused thus 'resuscitating a ruse reminiscent of the heights of the "dot com" folly: addition of prefix "e-" to any given area of human activity to cast it as an "ICT issue" (e-administration, e-learning and so on)'. This technocratic discourse, although not unusual given its predominance in other policy discussions on ICTs for development, lends itself to top-down decision making rather than collaborative processes. And, the focus on the digital divide supports industry imperatives that market forces are the only way to provide technological resources. This emphasis obscures important issues related to the social infrastructure, such as increasing educational resources in support of literacy, and even to providing viable physical resources in communities.
>
> Absent from the WSIS discourse are debates about whether or not ICTs are appropriate tools for development, a contemporary debate that has been rehashed with the activities surrounding the DOT Force (Digital Opportunities Task Force), the G8 initiative to 'ameliorate the digital divide' in developing countries. As with the DOT Force, official WSIS discourse is relatively uncritical; as in previous debates on strengthening communication systems for developing countries, current discussions are concerned with the 'how and when to "connect" communities in the South instead of with the why, who, under what conditions, and with what implications'. And, similar to the DOT Force pronouncements, WSIS reveals its allegiance to the modernization paradigm, wherein technology is equated with development.

Steve Buckley (2003), president of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), picks up this critique of a technocentric utopia that is at the core of WSIS official discourse:

> It should be obvious to anyone living outside a fictional Internet utopia that the poor people need clean water more than they need fast connectivity even though access to good information can help make water clean.
>
> Others have argued compellingly that giving universal access to the Internet will cost a lot and accomplish little. Bill Gates, speaking in October 2000 at a Seattle conference on the 'digital dividend', famously argued that investment in health and literacy is more important for poor people than providing access to PCs and the Internet.
>
> Charles Kenny, an economist with the World Bank, has estimated that the worldwide subsidy needed for everyone living on $1 a day to get one hour of access a week might reach $75 billion—considerably more than the global total aid flows each year.

At this rate, the bridging of the digital divide seems unlikely, to say the least, in a world where global aid flow is dropping dramatically.[5]

Thus the WSIS does not provide the means for its ambitions; its principal official output is a text (composed of two documents, actually) destined to remain essentially unapplied. The second phase of the WSIS, in Tunis in November 2005, will be the occasion for noting the progress made since Geneva. Tunis will likely be for the WSIS

what Johannesburg 2002 was for the Rio Summit on the environment: a moment to underscore the lack of concrete measures taken to move towards agreed-upon goals.

The real interest in the summit from a governance perspective lies in the result of civil society participation:

> Participation in WSIS has meant an enormous effort for civil society organizations, both in terms of human and financial resources, and many have not been able to participate, especially those from less developed countries. Despite these difficulties, we have produced numerous contributions, we have come up with concrete and diverse proposals. (Marzouki, 2003)[6]

The WSIS is the first UN summit where civil society was officially invited to be a participating partner—although understanding of what such 'partnership' might mean was highly contentious. Many saw this as a fabulous opportunity, and they were disappointed. But the rules and parameters of global governance have shifted as a result of the WSIS. Obviously, official decisions continue to be negotiated in intergovernmental structures, but the gains made by civil society will resonate. For the first time since the creation of the United Nations, a formal structure was created for inclusion of civil society; the establishment of an official 'Civil Society Bureau' made up of representatives of civil society organizations participating in the summit creates a precedent in international relations. Figure 1 shows the organizational structure of the WSIS.

The autonomous structures created by civil society participants themselves, meanwhile, form the basis of a new model of representation and legitimation of non-governmental input to global affairs. Importantly, civil society maintained a high degree of cohesiveness throughout the preparatory process and was able to mobilize and gather together disparate resources in order to produce strong and high-quality input reflecting a wide consensus. Culminating in the Civil Society Declaration entitled *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs* (WSIS, 2003), the collaboration of dozens of disparate groups in this process remains one of the key successes of the WSIS. Figure 2 shows the organization of civil society participation in the WSIS.

Civil society had to struggle hard to maintain a minimally acceptable degree of participation. Official meetings were open or closed according to the unilateral decision of government delegates, and the real impact of the numerous contributions of civil society remained weak. An informal study undertaken in September 2003 by a volunteer group of researchers showed that 60 per cent of the proposals of civil society up to that time had been completely rejected, 15 per cent were sort of taken into account, and 25 per cent had made it in to the then-current working documents.[7]

As the summit approached, Bruce Girard and Seán Ó Siochrú (2003), of the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) campaign, made a rather severe assessment of the relative success of civil society participation. The promise of inclusion, loudly proclaimed by the event's organizers, was for the most part not realized:

> So while promises of a new type of summit were undoubtedly sincerely meant, the reality falls far short of these. Most of the hopes expressed at the Paris meetings were unfilled.

Official bodies

"High Level Summit Organizing Committee"
Chaired by the secretary-general of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), coordinates UN input into the Summit.

Government Division	UN Agencies' Division	Private Sector Division	Civil Society Division
Secretariats for the respective partner groups taking part in the Summit, in charge of communication, facilitating participation, circulating position papers and ensuring that each partner's input is reflected in the Summit's official documents.			

Bureaus	
Intergovernment Bureau (created at Prepcom1)	Civil Society Bureau (created at Prepcom2)
Look after the logistics of participation and communication for the parties concerned.	

Unofficial bodies
(Entry points for non-government actors)

Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (created prior to WSIS)	Civil Society Plenary (created at Prepcom1)
Gather input from members and produce common positions; spaces for discussion and exchange.	

Figure 1 The Organizational Structure of the WSIS.

There is little or nothing in the way of new modalities for participation for civil society, and indeed existing modalities have not been optimised. The future holds, at best, further uncertainty.

No protocol has ever been issued outlining and confirming the transparency of the entire WSIS process, from Bureau to accreditation procedures.

Civil society has been offered no representation on the Bureau, though the creation of a Civil Society Bureau might yet facilitate more meaningful interaction.

There is no concerted process to stimulate civil society interaction and participation in the Summit, beyond the minimum implemented by the poorly funded CSD; ideas such as civil society 'animators' have not been realised for want of resources.

Funding for civil society has also remained sporadic and arbitrary, and a dedicated fund has yet to be established, though this might improve as the Summit approaches.
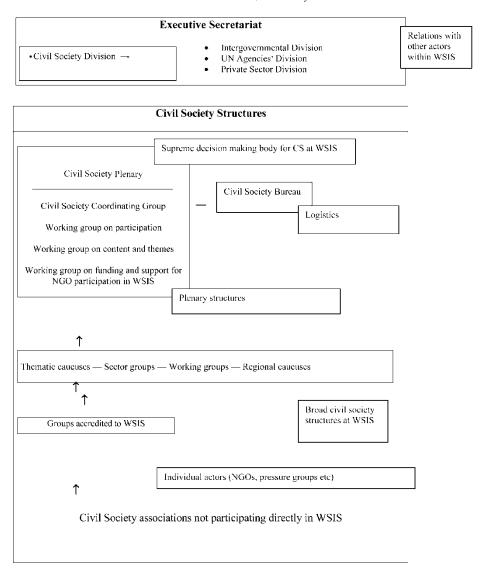
Figure 2 Organization of Civil Society Participation in the WSIS.

Civil society sought to influence the negotiations through both official intervention and informal lobbying. Formally, civil society intervened through official declarations, participation in roundtables and presentation of short structured statements upon invitation to official meetings of the official government plenary. Its best results were obtained around informal lobbying, however. Thematic intergovernmental working groups, for example, relied on the informal input of civil society expertise in order to achieve consensus between conflicting government positions—despite the formal exclusion of non-government participants from these working groups.

In order to achieve such results, civil society had to develop a sophisticated series of networking activities. Alongside the activities within its own autonomous structures, necessary for establishing positions and achieving consensus, civil society lobbied friendly government delegations and was thus able to influence the outcome in certain targeted areas. It also organized its own side events in Geneva, including the World Forum on Communication Rights, the Community Media Forum, Media Liberties in the Information Society, as well as participating in several events of the World Electronic Media Forum[8] and the ICT for Development platform.[9] Finally, an entirely parallel set of activities was organized under the heading of *WSIS? WE SEIZE!*,[10] an alternative event organized outside the summit complex, thus marking not only a geographic but also an ideological distance from the summit proper. Put simply, the organizers of *WE SEIZE!* rejected the social, political and economic premises on which the debates and discussions surrounding the WSIS were based. They proposed instead to re-imagine the role of communication in the organization of society.

All told, civil society maintained a high degree of presence within, alongside and outside the WSIS, through a series of structured and unstructured activities which led to a credible body of output as well as inclusion of many of its key ideas in the official texts.[11]

Nonetheless, through its critical engagement in the process, civil society actors maintained a critical distance from the official outcomes. As a collective entity, it ultimately ceased contributing to the official texts and concentrated instead on producing its own declaration.

Sally Burch (2004), who co-chaired the civil society working group on Content and Themes, summed up the view of an active participant observer in an article in *Media Development*, the journal of the World Association for Christian Communication, shortly following the summit:

> Most CSOs (Civil society organizations) concur, nonetheless, that overall the official Declaration and Action Plan express tepid commitments and show feeble political will of governments to address the fundamental issues …

> It took over a year for governments to agree to mention even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a basis for the Information Society. The full quote of Article 19, on freedom of expression, was also hotly debated, and only accepted by some countries when accompanied by a qualifying clause that could open the door to national exceptions.

> The reference to 'the right to communicate', included in initial drafts of the Declaration, was subsequently eliminated from the official documents, as there was no consensus on its interpretation. For some, it implies universal access to telecommunications (and as such, interestingly, was supported by both ITU Secretary-General Yoshiu Utsumi and by Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General). For others, such as the CRIS Campaign, it embraces the full range of existing rights associated with communication, but also implies the need to consecrate new rights, that are becoming necessary in the present communications context.

> Some small advances were achieved by civil society at the WSIS in relation to a number of such issues, although many of them might be more accurately described as 'damage

control', that is, avoiding inclusion of the most unacceptable language, which even so could not always be averted.

[…]

In summary, most actors in the WSIS process will be able to find language in the final documents that they can use as support for their agendas, and to leverage support from governments and international institutions. But many other issues are absent or inadequately dealt with and overall there is little coherence. The Civil Society Declaration is a much more coherent document that—while there is room for further development and refinement of the proposals—will be a reference point, not only for the next phase of the WSIS but also for many organizations concerned with these issues in other spheres.

So, despite its disappointment in the tangible outcomes—to be expected—civil society has already moved towards a new paradigm and has begun to articulate a new conception of society based on communication between human beings. It is not a question of building a more equitable information society, but of developing a communication society, reviewing structures of power and domination that are expressed and sustained through information and media structures.

Independently of the official outcome of the summit, the great achievement of civil society remains the great degree of coordination between the entities making it up, the development of networks, expertise and common projects, exchange of ideas and particular ways of doing things, as well as articulation of an alternative discourse within the respectable and visible framework of a high-level UN meeting.

The Civil Society Declaration adopted unanimously at the plenary session on 8 December 2003 is thus more than a political document outlining a set of principles; it is the concrete manifestation of a long process that could lead to a profound change in the ways in which non-government actors can influence international relations. It is an accomplishment that can reassure civil society in its quest for a more effective role in the sea changes currently taking place in global governance.

Governance is a polysemic concept which its users tend to adapt to the context in which they are speaking. There is no wholesale agreement on what the term might mean (and this article is not the place to go into that discussion). That said, international institutions tend to invent definitions of governance that suit them. For the World Bank (1992), for example: 'Governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development.' The World Bank thus sees three fundamental aspects to governance: (1) the form of political regime; (2) the process through which authority is exercised over social and economic resources for national development; and (3) the capacity of governments to design, formulate and implant policies and carry out their functions.

As described, this process is unquestionably vertical and hierarchical. Governance, in this view, belongs to governments. There is no room for interaction or interrelations between structures and different levels of application. The governed are not included in the process. Such a definition actually makes it difficult to capture the many facets of the reality that it purports to describe. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, n.d., p. 33), on the other hand, proposes a substantially different definition of governance:

> Governance—the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. Governance is a neutral concept comprising the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences.

Far more dynamic, this definition takes account of the broad political, economic and administrative aspects of governance. It takes account of the plurality of actors involved in the process of governance and of the complex nature of the multi-layered environment in which they are involved. All are expected to articulate their interests and exercise their rights and obligations while negotiating their differences.

These two definitions present an interesting contrast between a traditional, hierarchical vision of global governance and a process of dynamic integration that is open to new actors participating at different levels.

Many authors see the WSIS as exemplifying the deep changes taking place in global governance. For Padovani and Tuzzi (2003):

> We assume that new forms of politics are possibly emerging, with new actors being more and more recognized as legitimate on the global scene; international intergovernmental organizations, private entities and civil society organizations.
>
> We think of the Summit as a 'shift in the location of authority' both for the fact that there is a recognized need to face challenges posed by and to societal transformation at the highest political level and for the fact that a number of supra-national political instances […] involved in the attempt to regulate such changes converge in this process; (2) we see the 'emerging transnational civil society' mastering its capacity to become part of a high level political process building on former experiences, not only acting as an observer or submitting contributions, but also influencing in different ways the development of the process and suggesting ways for a better involvement of non-governmental actors; (3) we can see the WSIS as an opportunity for the 'intellectual, political, and economics elites' to debate respective orientations relating to the transformation of information economies and knowledge societies; (4) finally we witness a gathering around such process, precisely of members of that epistemic elite defined by Roseau as the 'technicians, experts in knowledge', trying to bring their perspectives and contribution of a 'common vision of the Information Society'.

For Padovani and Tuzzi, the concept of governance can no longer be applied exclusively to the intergovernmental sphere; we are witnessing the emergence of an embryonic global public sphere, in which new actors and new modes of decision making are being put in place.

The inclusion of non-traditional actors in the WSIS, foreseen by the organizers from the start, is an illustration of the changes taking place in the sphere of global politics. That said, while it is important not to be too hasty to idealize the role of civil society in the WSIS, there can be no question that the creation of an autonomous, open and inclusive structure, the WSIS Civil Society Plenary, and its production of the Civil Society Declaration—despite their shortcomings—provide a model for the blending of issues and process which should inspire all those who are thinking about possibilities for a new global politics, not only in communication but in global affairs (Raboy, 2004).

The WSIS can thus be seen as a meeting place of various tendencies currently jockeying with one another to influence the changing structures of global communication. The general decision-making models in international relations, as well as policy-making mechanisms, procedures and modes of participation, are all in the process of being reshaped. The WSIS is seen by many observers as an arena where the transformations affecting global governance are being played out. It is a kind of laboratory where the initial steps of a new form of governance are being tested. A number of factors support this thesis: the UN precedent of a summit with a multi-stakeholder executive secretariat, the insistence on private-sector and civil society inclusion in the official process, the creation of a Civil Society Bureau, the credibility and legitimacy achieved by civil society through its own self-governing collective action—all of these require serious consideration post-WSIS. This consideration goes beyond whatever one might think about the issues raised by the summit and how they have been dealt with. The WSIS process has shaken the status quo of global governance. It should be seen as a laboratory experimenting with a new distribution of power involving emerging as well as established social forces.

The WSIS is also interesting as an encounter between diverse analytical frameworks in global communication; between opposing views of how to define the information society, and what that might mean. The stakes of the WSIS were conceptual, philosophical and discursive as well as political in the narrow sense. The WSIS reconstructed positions that had already been debated in other international fora; it also deconstructed definitions and framed new struggles over meaning. Among other things—and not the least—it brought back to the table many of the key points of the NWICO debate left unresolved a quarter of a century earlier.

Thirty years ago, in the NWICO debate, the governments of developing countries challenged the premises on which international information flow was based, contesting the then-dominant paradigm of global communication (Najar, 2001). The NWICO vision eventually pulled back and left its place to an essentially Western, capitalist model of an international communication order. The explosion of globalization, deregulation and the rise of neo-liberalism have all contributed to a utopian mercantile vision of information and communication, in which ICTs pave the way for a grand and generous information society, generating wealth and good things for all to consume, distributing its benefits across all sectors of society.

This ideology was generally assumed by the ITU—which typically sees no need for access to civil society in its structures, preferring to build 'public–private' partnerships with the private sector. Many civil society actors were thus dismayed to see the lead role for the WSIS accorded to the ITU rather than, say, UNESCO. These fears were for the most part justified. Questions of hardware dominated over questions of culture, education, equity and knowledge. The summit itself contravened established ECOSOC procedures in accrediting, for the first time in a UN meeting, individual commercial entities as well as their collective associations. Civil society had to back-pedal quickly to include issues of copyright, concentration of media ownership and cultural diversity in the WSIS agenda.

Nonetheless, these and other themes left behind in the wake of the NWICO debate surfaced in the positions defended by civil society. The Civil Society Declaration *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs* addresses these issues and revitalized a conception of information and communication that had seemed buried for good in the rarefied atmosphere of international diplomacy. As noted by Seán Ó Siochrú (2004), international spokesperson for the CRIS campaign:

> First, its [the Civil Society Declaration's] use of language was markedly different: it does not refer to the 'information society' but to 'information and communication societies'. The plural form is used to indicate that there are many possible such societies, not just one; and the term 'communication' is there to ensure that the wider agenda is to the fore, encompassing media more broadly, issues around knowledge ownership and public domain, cultural diversity, concentration and commercialization of media—indeed almost all the issues that were debated so hotly two decades before in UNESCO.

> Initiated and forcibly terminated between governments in the compromised setting of the Cold War, followed by a decade or more in the wilderness, it has now shaken off its Cold War cobwebs and taken a decisive move towards rejuvenation in the hands of civil society. If this process continues, the broader issues of the 'communication society' may now begin to generate the alternative paradigms needed, not simply to address the 'digital divide' but to take on the wider issues of the growing role of communication and knowledge in our society.

The notion of 'information and communication societies', a key conceptual feature for civil society, signals the semantic divide with the official Declaration of Principles; it crystallizes the rejection of the intergovernmental vision, its limits and biases, and proposes to go further and break down barriers, address fundamental issues, and put forward a new order:

> There is no single information, communication or knowledge society: there are, at the local, national and global levels, possible future societies; moreover, considering communication is a critical aspect of any information society, we use in this document the phrase 'information and communication societies.' For consistency with previous WSIS language, we retain the use of the phrase 'Information Society' when directly referencing WSIS. (WSIS Civil Society Plenary, 2003)

In thus opposing the approach articulated in the official documents (all buried under a single notion of an information society) this simple footnote to the Civil Society Declaration expresses and consecrates the split between two visions of social life and human relations. The WSIS Civil Society Declaration proposes above all a plural vision of information and communication societies.

Contrary to the NWICO debate, sustained essentially by a number of governments in the total absence of civil society, the WSIS presented a thoroughly different quality precisely because of civil society's presence. But the NWICO spectre haunted the WSIS and particularly civil society within it, to a certain extent. Once promoted by the MacBride Commission, the idea of a 'right to communicate' provoked a controversy separating the CRIS campaign and its supporters such as (ALAI, ALER, APC, AMARC, CAMECO, IPS, PANOS, etc.) from the partisans of 'freedom of expression' (such as Reporters sans frontières, the International Federation of Journalists and the World Press Freedom Committee). The right to communicate and freedom of

information appeared to represent alternative social choices when they were indeed discursive positions.

To the extent that 'communication rights' develop and encompass new issues (such as intellectual property rights and Internet governance), the WSIS has updated old debates, situated them in new arenas of action, and provided a platform for new players.

The WSIS is therefore above all a space of confrontation between opposing communicational paradigms. The opposition to the current dominant model has been reorganized in a new political space where civil society is called upon to be increasingly present. The WSIS exemplifies, therefore, the important trends emerging in global governance, encouraging civil society to participate more actively in defining a new global public sphere and to integrate more deeply to developing transnational public policy.

Websites

Heinrich Böll Foundation, http://www.worldsummit2003.de/en/nav/14.htm

ICT 4 Development Platform, http://www.ict-4d.org/Marketplace/en/default.htm?languageId=en

World Electronic Media Forum, http://www.wemfmedia.org/

World Summit on the Information Society, official Website, http://www.itu.int/wsis/

WSIS? WE SEIZE!, http://www.geneva03.org/

Notes

[1]   There is no simple definition of 'civil society'. For the purposes of this article, we shall use that of the United Nations Development Program: 'individuals and groups, organized or unorganized, who interact in the social, political and economic domains and who are regulated by formal and informal rules and laws'. The UNDP also provides a useful definition of 'civil society organizations': 'the multitude of associations around which society voluntarily organizes itself and which can represent a wide range of interests and ties, from ethnicity and religion, through shared professional, developmental and leisure pursuits, to issues such as environmental protection or human rights' (UNDP, n.d., p. 32).

[2]   'We are indeed in the midst of a revolution, perhaps the greatest that humanity has ever experienced' (Official WSIS Website, http://www.itu.int/wsis/); reference deleted in February 2004.

[3]   The Senegalese president did not leave empty-handed, however. Following up on the generally more progressive tone set at the Summit on Cities in the Information Society (World Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society, 2003), the municipalities of Lyon and Geneva pledged a total of €600,000 to launch the fund, and numerous NGOs also committed themselves to support the plan.

[4]   The full mandate of the working group is to: 'develop a working definition of Internet governance; identify the public policy issues that are relevant to Internet governance; develop a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, existing intergovernmental and international organisations and other forums as well as the private sector and civil society from both developing and developed countries; [and] prepare a report

on the results of this activity to be presented for consideration and appropriate action for the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in 2005' (WSIS, 2003b, art. C6).

[5]   'OECD countries spent a miserly 0.23% of GDP on aid in 1998, compared to 0.37% in 1980 and 0.48% in 1965. There was a drop of $4 billion in aid to the poorest 48 countries between 1998 and 1992' (Martin, 2002).

[6]   Author's translation from the original French.

[7]   'Does input lead to impact? How governments treated civil society proposals in drafting the 19 September 2003 Draft Plan of Action', 24 Sep. 2003, Available at: http://www.worldsummit2003.de/en/web/467.htm

[8]   See http://www.wemfmedia.org/

[9]   See http://www.ict-4d.org/Marketplace/en/default.htm?languageId=en

[10]   See http://www.geneva03.org/

[11]   All major documents produced by civil society during the first phase of the WSIS are available on the Heinrich Böll Foundation Website at: http://www.worldsummit2003.de/en/nav/14.htm

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