

## **Chapter Eleven**

# Civil Society Media at the WSIS: a new actor in global communication governance?

**Arne Hintz**

### **Introduction**

Community, alternative, citizens, and other civil society-based media are increasingly recognized in media and communication theory. Even though major mass media systems and organizations still represent the core object of media studies, a growing body of case studies highlights the importance of community radios, activist websites, and alternative news chapters, to name just a few examples [1]. However, often presented as small media, local alternatives, and fringe actors, their connection with global policy and regulation processes has so far been neglected in most research.

With interdependence between states, regions, and social actors increasing, these global policy processes are no longer the exclusive domain of governments. In the age of global governance, channels are opening to include business and civil society in global decision-making. A growing number of civil society-based media actors are recognizing the effects which the global political sphere is having on their work and are starting to make their voices heard on the policy level. Yet, as a deeply fragmented set of actors, ranging from grassroots media activists to professionalized transnational news organizations, and often having little or no policy experience, they face serious challenges. In this chapter, emerging practices by these media of intervening in global communication governance will be highlighted. As such, an attempt will be made to draw links between civil society-based media projects and the global political arena.

The arena that will be discussed here is the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) [2]. As a major United Nations conference on information and communication issues, the WSIS provided a prominent platform for civil society actors to discuss proposals for an alternative vision of communication governance and to test their proposals in a global policy forum. It offered a major occasion to participate in global political processes and influence their outcomes. In this chapter, the interventions into, and activities around, the WSIS summit by civil society-based media actors will be analyzed. In doing so, their thematic inputs and objectives, as well as the spaces, particularities, and effects of participating in the WSIS process will be assessed. The perspective will be that of an active participant in the WSIS. For 4 years (2002–2005) I took part in the summit process, including the spaces that will be highlighted in this chapter. The assessment will be based

on participatory observation, content analysis of summit documents and mailing list discussions, and interviews with key actors [3].

In defining the ‘subject’ of this analysis, the umbrella concept of Civil Society Media will be introduced first. An overview of current trends in global communication governance as well as the WSIS itself will follow, to then illustrate the structures and spaces which these media have used to participate and intervene in summit processes, and look at the policy proposals they have submitted to the thematic debates. From that conclusions will be drawn as to the extent, the strategies, the successes and failures, and the future perspectives of the involvement of Civil Society Media in global governance.

## **Civil Society Media**

### **A synthesis of Civil Society Media**

The model of Civil Society (CS) Media proposed here is based on a structural understanding of the term ‘civil society’, which encompasses the non-state and non-business sector and is typically formed by non-governmental and non-profit initiatives – from neighborhood associations to labor unions, and from eco-activists to consumer lobbies. This definition has increasingly replaced the older tradition of integrating civil society and the private sector into one category (Calabrese, 2004; Hadl, 2004). Most UN processes have adopted a model, which excludes business from the civil society sphere.

Civil society is characterized by a diversity of approaches and objectives. The structural model, which is applied here, embraces actors focusing on stability and service provision, as well as those aiming at radical change. It contains both what Mary Kaldor calls the ‘activist’/‘Post-Marxist’ and the ‘neo-liberal’ versions of civil society (Kaldor, 2003). However, there is a set of normative aspects common to most of these organizations, associations, and movements. They often share an opposition to the overwhelming power (and power abuses) of large institutions, a tendency towards self-organization, citizen empowerment, horizontality, voluntary association, and a concern for civil and human rights and the ‘common goods’. They also tend to agree on the need for participatory social and political organization and for an extension of democracy (Dawkins, 2003). These normative tendencies draw a clear dividing line towards reactionary and right-wing movements which may be formally non-state and non-commercial but advocate for the concentration of power, subordination and exclusion.

The concept of CS Media encompasses media organizations, groups, and projects, which fit into the basic non-state non-commercial model and share the structural and thematic tendencies of civil society. Generally, it comprises all ‘third sector’ media and, therefore, excludes the two biggest sectors, namely commercial and public service media. There is a fragmented web of concepts to describe the types of media that concern us here. Some of the most widely used examples are community, autonomous, alternative, radical, and tactical media.

'Community Media' are 'developed in response to local needs and under community control' (CMWG, 2003). They focus on issues which are directly relevant to a specific community and involve that community in all aspects of media production. 'Autonomous media' put even more focus on participation and openness, often showing the ability of 'non-professionals' to organize media production themselves (Langlois and Dubois, 2005). 'Alternative-' and 'Radical Media' combine a structural 'alternative', based on collective production and a non-hierarchical organizational model, with 'alternative' content and counter-information. They seek to break hegemonic discourses, uncover and criticize power and domination, as well as highlight social struggles and the activities of social movements (Downing, 2001). 'Tactical Media', in contrast, attempt to transcend the bipolar world of counter-information and create a 'repertoire of dirty little practices' (Garcia and Lovink, 1999), encompassing critical media actions, campaigns and interventions which are temporary, pragmatic and flexible, and which are often initiated by smaller groups or individuals, rather than wider social movements.

Each of these concepts has its specific historical, ideological, geographical, and political contexts. Each category focuses on particular approaches and thus only represents a certain section of the vast range of non-state non-commercial media. The concept of CS Media seeks to combine these different aspects towards a common frame of reference. It embraces a wide range of media actors, from small grassroots media projects to large media organizations, from a photocopied newsletter, to an activist website, to satellite distribution of film material. In a broad concept, there can be vast differences between individual entities, but they all share a distinct set of common features and a commitment towards a similar framework of values.

### **Characteristics of CS Media**

Questions of ownership, control, and organization are at the heart of what constitutes non-governmental and non-commercial media. A basic definition would be 'a media organization owned/controlled by members of civil society' (Hadl, 2004: 10). Control is ultimately in the hands of self-organized and independent citizens' groups, associations, or organizations. CS Media are non-profit or not-for-profit entities, and they are typically designed as small-scale groups or organizations, favoring collective decision-making over hierarchical command structures and relying to a larger extent (or entirely) on voluntary work. Participation, emancipation, and empowerment represent crucial features [4]. Whereas traditional commercial and public service media are operating according to a one-way flow of information from sender to receiver, CS Media try to break the boundaries between active producers and passive consumers. Most of them offer low-level access for media non-professionals to get involved in media production, sharing skills and know-how. The use and development of free and open source software are widespread, and

knowledge is understood as a global common good, rather than an ‘intellectual property’.

CS Media serve as the main access channels to information for large parts of the world population. For many people in the Global South, community radios offer the only channel to receive news, while for many marginalized communities, CS Media represent the only channel to hear about their culture and to make their voices heard [5]. Criticizing mainstream media content, addressing worrying trends such as poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, while at the same time expressing ‘an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives’ (Downing, 2001: v), represents a general tendency in CS Media content. Many of them explicitly bring forward subjective accounts of events and thereby break with traditional journalistic values of impartial and objective reporting (Hintz, 2003).

Opening spaces for participatory communication, CS Media create fractures in the domination of, and reclaim public space from, the large mass media. While the latter is operating in increasingly concentrated structures, CS Media are usually organized as decentralized networks of local groups, based on common values of diversity, autonomy, decentralization, and horizontality. They challenge the vision of a single all-inclusive ‘global village’, suggesting instead a diversity of smaller ‘villages’ (Dowmunt, 1993). In the rapidly changing global political, economic, and cultural landscape, they, thus, represent a counterpart to forces of centralization and homogenization. Many of them explicitly participate in struggles against the centralization and expansion of authority and influence, for example in the protests against the G8 and the World Bank in recent years, and thereby transform into social movement media (Notes from Nowhere, 2003).

## **Global communication governance**

### **Global governance**

In the state-centred world of the past two centuries, international relations were an intergovernmental affair. Sovereign states represented the basic units in the international system, and ‘international governance’ was based on inter-state diplomacy. However, from the late 1980s, an accelerating increase in cross-border flows and global integration has changed the global political landscape considerably. The environmental crisis has shown the unavoidable interconnectedness of the world, as well as the permeability of national borders. In the economic sphere, international division of labor has deepened, and globally integrated production chains have emerged. Symbolic forms, languages, and cultural patterns are equally spreading around the globe, greatly aided by new information technologies, the Internet, and the spread of transnational media corporations. Similar forms of (sub-)cultural expressions in different and previously unconnected parts of the world have emerged, while global migration streams are increasingly overcoming the persistent barriers of national borders [6].

With ‘globalization’ – as these developments have been termed – the world has experienced a(nother) ‘time-space compression’ (Held and McGrew, 2003: 3). The constraints of distance and time on social organization and interaction have been eroded, and actions in one locale increasingly have consequences for ‘distant others’. In terms of political organization, interconnectedness is restricting the choices made by states. The actual control most states possess over their territory becomes limited, and some authors are already recognizing an end of the Westphalian system of states (Messner, 2003: 3). The question is how to govern the world under the condition of globalization.

The concept of ‘global governance’ has emerged as a response to this challenge. It differs from a notion of ‘government’ which implies the direct capacity of political leaders to steer society and focuses instead on systems of rules and interdependent problem solving by a diversity of actors on a diversity of policy levels. It encompasses self-organizing networks and webs of policy-making forums, in which control is dispersed and capacity for decision-making and implementation is widely distributed, and which have thus ‘transformed sovereignty into the shared exercise of power’ (Held and McGrew, 2003: 11). The specific characteristics of global governance are:

- The participation of new actors, particularly from business and civil society
- The re-distribution of spaces and policy layers between local and global and
- The interaction and cooperation between different actors and layers

Even though the concept is based on a ‘global’ approach, it does not just transfer policy-making from one level (nation-state) to the next (global), but it involves ‘systems of rule at all levels of humanity’ (Rosenau, 1995: 13).

Yet a network policy structure is only emerging step-by-step. In 1995, the Commission on Global Governance still regarded states as the main actors and the United Nations as the ‘central mechanism’ for facing the challenges of the future (Commission on Global Governance, 1995: 8). The world conferences of the past decade, starting with the Rio summit on environment and development in 1992 and representing the most prominent approach to global governance, took place within the UN framework and were, thus, still based on state-organized ‘inter-national’ multilateralism. For the time being, states are retaining their dominant position in global policy processes, even though their role is changing from a sovereign ruler to an ‘interdependency manager’ (Messner, 2003: 17). Held and McGrew (2003: 13) argue that nation states are increasingly ‘embedded’ in webs of global interconnectedness and of new emerging players.

### **Civil Society participation**

One of the main challenges of global governance processes is how to achieve legitimacy. In a confined state-centred world, legitimacy was based on elected national parliaments. However, with global multilateral decision-making

structures increasing, the corridors of power are wriggling out of the embrace of democratic accountability. The share of decisions taken externally, beyond the space of democratic legitimization, is increasing, and so the concept of democratic self-determination is seriously compromised.

As traditional representative democracy is put into question, there are calls for an increase in public participation in global decision-making to develop forms of 'global' or 'cosmopolitan democracy' (Held, 2003; Kjaer, 2004). At their centre is the recognition of the crucial role of civil society in developing new forms of accountability. Since the 1992 Rio summit on the Environment and Development, when some fifty thousand activists participated in summit proceedings, civil society has become an integral part of global politics. Its increased involvement can be seen as an attempt to raise transparency and accountability of global decision-making processes, yet its role goes far beyond that of a passive watchdog. By influencing inter-governmental negotiations and setting policy agendas, it is 'altering the norm structure of global governance' (Sikkink, 2002: 302), occasionally instigating fundamental changes in the nature of international debate and international interactions. In some global policy forums, new forms of 'multi-stakeholder' governance are emerging as a collaborative process involving all 'stakeholders' – usually governments, business, and civil society.

However these forms of 'neo-corporatism' (Messner, 2003: 16) only involve certain sections of civil society – usually the large professionalized non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Grassroots groups, social movements, fluid networks, and many other civil society associations without hierarchical structure, legal status, and sufficient funding, are left out of the governance equation [7]. Repeatedly, splits have occurred between those (large NGOs) who engage with global institutions in an effort to trigger reform, and those (grassroots activists) that fundamentally oppose elite-driven policy processes in large unaccountable organizations [8]. Being 'inside' or 'outside' has represented a dividing line for civil society actors and social movements – sometimes only a strategic one, but often one that generates identity and excludes other approaches. This fault line has been the most visible constraint to the efforts to foster a more coordinated and homogenous civil society 'stakeholder'. It thus challenges the development of 'network density', i.e. a high level of connection between actors, which is deemed to be a major precondition for successful interventions in policy arenas (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

### **Communication Governance**

The distinction in 'old' and 'new' governance models (Kjaer, 2004: 10) also fits the communication sphere. For several decades, UN organizations, such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), played a leading role in regulating cross-border communication flows.

Yet in the past decade, business and, to a lesser extent, civil society have entered the arena, for example as ‘sector members’ of the ITU and as prime movers in the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). With increasing interventions by these actors, communication governance, too, has moved beyond pure inter-governmental processes and towards an interdependent network of multiple actors and venues (Raboy, 2004).

Large civil society networks, such as the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC), have begun to intervene in global policy processes and to participate in new multi-actor governance. However, many smaller actors, including many CS Media, continue to lack channels of intervention, as they struggle with precarious legal status, funding, organizing, and the day-to-day work of media production. Suspicion towards elite-driven governance processes and a focus on technical bypasses around political challenges add to their exclusion.

This does not mean they are ignored on the policy level. During the UNESCO debate around a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), the role of ‘group and local media’ (MacBride *et al.*, 1980: 55–7), as well as the importance of alternative communications for social movements were recognized. UNESCO and other international organizations have also funded numerous community media projects. Yet the ideological shift of the past two decades towards the neo-liberal trade paradigm, assigning a central policy role to trade-/business-institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), strengthening a globalizing media industry, and favoring market- and industry-dominated regulatory mechanisms, has brought new challenges (Ó Siochrú and Girard, 2002). In this free-trade environment, global regulation limiting media ownership concentration and ensuring public service and support for community-based media alternatives seems to be beyond realistic expectation.

However, cracks in the neo-liberal paradigm have recently emerged, and one may speculate just how long this paradigm will persist. Economic breakdowns in East Asia and Latin America, the anti-/alter-globalization protests, and calls for robust global commons and global public goods by international organizations all question neo-liberal policies, and have opened spaces for alternative concepts. We may be entering a vacuum in which neo-liberalism has been demystified, while a new paradigm is not yet in reach. In this situation, the global discussion space of a world summit can set discourses, create moral obligations, and set the framework within which future governance can be ‘thought’.

## **World Summit on the Information Society**

### **Structure, discourses, outcomes**

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) has been the first UN summit dealing exclusively with information and communication. Its objective

has been to develop a common understanding of the information society and a common response to challenges such as the digital divide. The 2-year preparatory process for the first WSIS summit in Geneva 2003 led to the adoption of two official summit documents: the Declaration of Principles (WSIS, 2003a) and the Plan of Action (WSIS, 2003b). The thematic framework ranged from Internet governance to education, from cultural diversity to security aspects. The main conflicts revolved around financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, frameworks for and approaches to Internet governance, intellectual property rights (IPR) and free/open source software, human rights, media governance, and information security. The regulatory framework emphasized market-friendly, liberalized environments, with public-private partnerships as a primary strategy, though several sections (e.g. WSIS, 2003a, paragraphs 23 and 26) also argued the importance of public services and the public domain.

The second phase, leading to WSIS2 in Tunis, focused on the two issues unresolved at WSIS1: funding and Internet governance. A ‘Task Force on Financial Mechanisms’ (TFFM) reviewed financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, while a ‘Working Group on Internet Governance’ (WGIG) developed proposals for enhanced administration and regulation of the Internet. Both debates uncovered deep divides between Northern governments – proposing an intensification of market-led approaches and a central role for the business sector – and Southern governments – favoring stronger state interventions. The Tunis summit nevertheless led to the creation of a voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund and an Internet Governance Forum.

### **Media debate**

Organized by the ITU, a UN specialized organization concerned primarily with technology and infrastructure, the WSIS focused on an ‘information society’-discourse, which left little room for traditional media and content aspects. Media appear only towards the end of the Geneva Declaration (Article 55 of 67) and the Plan of Action (Article 24 of 29). Yet the media debate represented one of the major points of conflict during the WSIS negotiations. A prominent emphasis on the right to freedom of expression and the role of media as independent, un-controlled actors were opposed by governments interested in media control – particularly China, but defended by the Swiss delegation and a vocal media and journalistic lobby. Governments with strong ties to national media corporations, led by El Salvador, opposed measures limiting media concentration and refused any mention of community media [9].

The final version of the Declaration reaffirms freedom of the press and information and calls for pluralism and diversity in media. However, it does not support these aims with concrete measures such as limiting ownership concentration or supporting non-commercial media. The control interests of

some governments even led to opening backdoors for censorship by calling for ‘appropriate measures (...) to combat illegal and harmful content’. Any mention of community and other non-commercial/non-governmental media was deleted at the final stages, except for a vague call to ‘give support to media based in local communities’ (WSIS, 2003b, Article 23j).

### **Civil society participation**

Based on a declared ‘multi-stakeholder’ approach, civil society and business were invited to participate fully in summit processes [10]. However the reality of this supposedly ‘new kind of summit’ looked rather conservative (see also Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2005). Those sections of civil society not formally set up as NGOs (and not generating sufficient funding) had difficulties overcoming even the hurdles of registration, let alone full participation, and those civil society actors that made it to the preparatory conferences were often excluded from the negotiation process and saw themselves relegated to the role of ‘observers’.

Yet the civil society actors participating in summit processes initiated a vibrant culture of debates around the WSIS themes, set up administrative and lobbying mechanisms and organized a variety of side-events at the summit itself [11]. Thematic caucuses and working groups were formed and developed input statements for the negotiation process [12]. Shortly before the WSIS1 summit, the civil society network responded to its continued exclusion and to the thematic deficiencies of the summit by withdrawing from the lobbying process and instead drafting the alternative summit declaration ‘*Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs*’ [13]. This declaration criticizes privatization and monopolization of knowledge and emphasizes the need for community media, the global commons, free software, human rights, privacy, and participatory communication. It thus calls for a people-centred ‘communication society’ rather than a technology-focused and business-oriented ‘information society’ (Ó Siochrú, 2004). In a concluding statement, presented after the Tunis summit and appropriately named ‘*Much more could be achieved*’ [14], the civil society caucus welcomes the progress that the WSIS made on internet governance, but expresses disappointment and strong critique the summit’s shortcoming to adequately address the financing and development needs of the South, human and civil rights, free software, cultural diversity, the public domain and traditional knowledge, community and civil society-based media.

Within the network of civil society caucuses, the Media Caucus was the main body for advancing media interests. In addition, several CS Media established the Community Media Working Group (CMWG), while others joined different caucuses and working groups. Others, especially those from the more ‘activist’ and ‘autonomous’ sections of CS Media, refused to participate in summit processes and, instead, organized events around the summit.

## Participation of CS Media

### Media Caucus

Established as a follow-up structure to previous collaborations between large broadcasting unions, the Media Caucus went beyond the more narrowly defined understanding of ‘civil society’ which I used above and which was largely adhered to by other caucuses and the WSIS generally. The Media Caucus was composed of public service broadcasters, commercial TV and radio networks, media associations, such as the World Association of Newspapers, media-related NGOs, such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa, press freedom organizations, such as Article 19 and the World Press Freedom Committee, professional associations, such as the International Federation of Journalists and individual media researchers. Delegates from AMARC brought a community media voice into the caucus debates, complemented by a few activists from Indymedia and other CS Media groups.

Thematically, the caucus highlighted the role of content, attempting to balance the dominant focus on technology and called for a worldwide implementation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) on freedom of expression. It emphasized the rights and freedoms of media organizations and journalists as the primary producers and distributors of content, and it had some success in strengthening these points in the summit documents. Further objectives included media pluralism, universal and affordable access, cultural diversity, and the protection of the rights of online media workers. Yet criticism of media concentration was vague, failing to advance specific anti-monopoly laws. Community media were recognized in principle, but were confined to the edges and niches of the media sphere, ‘serving traditionally disadvantaged groups’ and requiring ‘legally established (...) non-profit’ status [15]. Concrete proposals for supporting community media, as well as other CS Media, were blocked, particularly by the representatives of commercial media.

In light of the human rights violations in the WSIS2 host country Tunisia, community media representatives accepted the narrow agenda of the Media Caucus, opting to participate in a strong alliance to advance freedom of expression and to establish community media as an accepted partner in the international media environment. Others were less prepared to agree to the shortcomings of the caucus. After all, its thematic vision was at odds with the media reform agenda developed by a large network of civil society-based media at the World Social Forum and elsewhere. This vision emphasizes limits to media concentration, opening up traditional media for public participation, making media more responsive to society at large, and advancing interactive communication by everyone. It also opposes the safeguarding of the information monopoly of media organizations and professional journalists (Hintz and Milan, 2006).

Furthermore, the caucus' 'multi-stakeholder' arrangement allowed commercial interests to use designated civil society space to further their interests [16].

### **Community Media Working Group**

With the Media Caucus being dominated by the interests of bigger, mainstream media, and with CS Media being marginalized in numbers and in content, the latter created the Community Media Working Group (CMWG). The group produced separate lobby documents and position papers, yet many of its members continued to engage inside the Media Caucus, positioning the CMWG rather as a sub- than a counter-group.

The concept of 'community media' was used partly because of the relative acceptance of the term in previous policy forums, and partly because of the composition of the group. Initiated and led by AMARC, the CMWG was largely composed of representatives of community radios and of NGOs working with community media. At times, a small, but active, contingent of representatives from radical activist media organizations, such as Indymedia, MediAct, and Deep Dish TV, attended. This diversified the otherwise mostly community-oriented structure and agenda.

Within the ICT-focused policy environment of the WSIS, the CMWG served as a strong advocate for traditional media, such as radio and print, which continue to be the main channels of information for the vast majority of the world population. It had less to say, though, about 'new media' and Internet governance, even though for many CS Media web-based distribution of content increasingly plays a significant role. CMWG statements did reflect further important objectives of CS Media, such as interactive information exchange, non-hierarchical structures, and the participation of non-professionals in media production, but its focus was on highlighting the development-oriented function of community media in giving access to information and communication for the large parts of the world population that continue to live on the 'other side' of the 'digital divide'.

This focus tapped into the predominant discourses of WSIS and, thus, was a strategic choice. Operating within the dynamics and necessities of a UN policy process, the CMWG's main practice was to intervene strategically into the negotiation process to get community media recognized in the WSIS documents. At the summit, the development/access angle with a focus on the digital divide represented the most promising way to achieve result. On the downside, this approach failed to generate a more elaborate policy framework for developing CS Media. Particularly, critique of the mainstream media system was largely absent from CMWG statements so that the latter lacked a deeper connection with the wider media-reform movement.

Just as other civil society working groups seeking to advance human rights and citizen participation and following a potentially oppositional agenda, the

CMWG meetings during the second WSIS phase were heavily attended by Tunisian delegates ‘who can be reliably expected to report back (...) to the host country government’ [17] and who regularly interrupted discussions. Strategic debates and consensus building were rendered difficult in this obstructive and intimidating environment.

### **Outside WSIS**

For many grassroots activist media, participation in summit processes was neither a practical possibility nor a particularly attractive option. Following the process actively required the time to take part in long preparatory meetings, the financial means (or the support from a large organization) to pay for travel and accommodation, and the patience and particular skills to deal with the complexities of UN diplomacy. Furthermore, many of them reject global summits and other international institutions as illegitimate bodies to regulate (and thus to control, repress, and appropriate) communication processes which have often been developed bottom-up by members of civil society. Participation, according to that view, means to legitimize an otherwise illegitimate process.

Around the WSIS1 summit in Geneva, a number of spaces were set up by civil society actors to discuss WSIS themes and intervene in summit processes from outside. Media activists were at the heart of these efforts. The most distinct space was ‘*WSIS?WeSeize!*’ – a series of events in the city centre of Geneva, including a conference, a video stream, a media laboratory, and protest actions, all organized by a loose network of autonomous media groups, Indymedia activists, hackers, free software developers, and grassroots campaigners, called the ‘Geneva03 Collective’. *WSIS?WeSeize!* served as a space to voice radical critique of neo-liberal global governance and business-led information/communication policies. Participants celebrated a culture of non-hierarchical association, non-commercial creativity, experimenting and skill-sharing. Geneva03 rejected the WSIS’ ‘rhetoric of inclusion’ as a ‘smokescreen’ to ‘mystify the continuing use of information to protect and advance the interests of global capital’ [18]. Rather than influencing the official process, they opted for autonomously developing communication concepts ‘from below’.

At the edges between inside and outside, further side-events assembled activists and advocates and provided public spaces to discuss their experiences and propagate their views. The ‘World Forum on Communication Rights’ and the ‘Community Media Forum’ were organized by civil society groups participating in the summit, yet they served as platforms to criticize the summit’s shortcomings and to focus on its blind spots. *WSIS?WeSeize!* participants interacted through these events with NGO representatives ‘inside’ the summit process, while some of the ‘insiders’ came ‘out’ to, for example, join the media lab, and acted in solidarity with those ‘outside’ through press releases. The embryonic stages of a multi-level strategy emerged, in which fundamental criticism, public

pressure and protest ‘outside’ linked up with strategic policy interventions ‘inside’ [19].

The actual degree of exchange was limited, due to organizational problems of WSIS?WeSeize!; the busy schedule of those inside the WSIS compound, and the persistent political and cultural differences between grassroots media activists, on the one hand, and policy advocates, on the other. Representatives of ‘community media’ and major NGOs largely remained ‘inside’, while those identifying as ‘autonomous’, ‘alternative’, and ‘tactical’ media remained mostly ‘outside’. Activities were not sufficiently linked up so that, for example, the radio stream set-up by community radio activists in the summit building had no connection with the video stream from WSIS?WeSeize!. Many possibilities for cooperation were not seized, but a few first steps towards collaboration were taken.

Tunis saw a further increase in overlaps and underpasses between the different spheres. The media activist delegation from the US organization Third World Majority offered a whole series of events inside the summit compound, while NGO delegates from AMARC and APC were confronted by Tunisian police in the city centre. A ‘Citizens Summit’, organized in part by the latter organizations, was largely and – in some instances – violently prevented by Tunisian authorities. Yet the Tunisian case was special; a wider range of protest and ‘outside’ activities was never an option there and caused many media activists to stay away in the first place. Whether the traditional boundaries between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ have suffered sustained damage remains to be seen.

## **A future policy framework – proposals and approaches**

### **CMWG: interventions in the negotiation process**

Despite the pragmatic and strategic approach of the CMWG, it is possible to extract elements that constitute a policy framework from its various statements and lobby documents [20]. An important foundation of such a framework is the right to freedom of expression, enshrined in Article 19 of the UDHR. However, while traditional mainstream media (implicitly or explicitly) apply this right primarily to ‘content providers’, thus focusing on press freedom (on the producer side) and the right to information access (on the consumer side), many CS Media embed freedom of expression in a wider set of ‘communication rights’, including participatory production and interactive distribution of content, as well as seeking to prevent a monopolization of information rights by mainstream media and/or global media conglomerates.

Media pluralism has thus been at the heart of CMWG concerns, but again there is a significant difference in interpretation. The Media Caucus’ narrow notion of ‘pluralism’ is extended to include not just a variety of outlets and content providers, but a diversity of actual content, opinions and societal groups represented in the media. Strengthening the role of a third media sector alongside the existing dichotomy between public service and commercial media is advocated as the

prime means to add diversity to the media sphere. This third sector is to be participatory, self-organized, and under community control. Typically using traditional technologies, it serves as the main channel for large parts of the world population to access information.

These media, urges the CMWG, need to be supported and promoted by establishing a secure legal basis in both national and international law, by opening broadcast licenses and allocating radio and satellite spectrum to non-commercial media and by offering public funding schemes. A reform of both the allocation and the governance model of communication channels should involve reserving a fixed percentage of radio frequencies and satellite channels for community and non-profit broadcasting. Airwaves and orbital paths should be recognized as a public resource to be allocated in the public interest. Spectrum should be publicly owned, governed in a transparent way, and thereby secured as a global commons.

Regarding possible financing schemes for community/non-profit media, the CMWG called for the establishment of a Community Media Fund 'to support new community radio development and community media content', particularly in the Global South and for disadvantaged communities, as a targeted way to bridge the digital divide. With the theme of finance at the centre of the second WSIS phase, the establishment of such Community Media fund became central to the CMWG interventions during the preparation for WSIS2.

### **WSIS?WeSeize! and beyond: a different 'information society'**

In contrast to the strategic interventions of the CMWG into the ongoing negotiation process, those media activists outside the official summit process cared less about the exact wording of the official documents. They challenged both the structure and the content of the summit. The structural challenge questioned the very approach to governance on which the WSIS was based. The 'information society' is, according to the WSIS?WeSeize! organizers, the result of collaborative experiments by activists, social movements, researchers, and technological experts. The media laboratory and the video stream were to exemplify how committed citizen are continuously developing what those inside the summit compound are merely discussed. From their perspective, the communities generating information societies should be the protagonists of governance debates, rather than government, business, and NGO officials [21].

The second challenge was thematic. WSIS?WeSeize! served as a space for debates on critical issues that were left off the WSIS agenda but that, according to the Geneva03 collective, were crucial to understanding the further development of the information society, namely information wars and propaganda, surveillance and information control, the privatization of ideas through trademarks and copyrights, autonomous media infrastructure, citizen-based peer2peer and wireless networks, openness as strategy and methodology, hacking techniques, and the links between freedom of communication and freedom of movement [22].

In preparation of the second WSIS summit, a loose network of Indymedia activists, led by Indymedia Beirut, discussed a similar list of issues that they thought should be at the heart of any debate about the ‘information society’. The list included the issues of censorship and freedom of expression, repression of media activists, precarious working conditions and exploitation of information workers, support for locally appropriate technology, and, again, the inevitable connection between free communication and free cross-border movement of all people. The DVD ‘Datafighters’, presented by the media group EclécticaDV at the Tunis summit, deals with similar issues, focusing on copy-left culture and knowledge commons, casualized information work, and threats by surveillance and info-war techniques [23]. Meanwhile the ‘Third World Majority’ delegation presented a variety of grassroots and autonomous media practices.

None of these initiatives seeks a place at the negotiation table in current governance processes, but all of them attempt to influence the discourses around the ‘information society’. With a recurring list of themes and debates, CS Media suggested an agenda for an alternative thematic and structural framework of communication governance. For the time being, these agenda proposals are only addressed at other civil society entities. Statements discussed at WSIS?WeSeize! were submitted for inclusion in the civil society alternative declaration [24] but not in the official summit documents. However, the discussion and consensus-building process on policy issues within the wider civil society networks will certainly be influenced by these interventions.

### **A new actor in global governance?**

WSIS represented a laboratory of new modes of governance, struggling between, on the one hand, the promise of a multi-stakeholder environment, in which all actors can participate on equal footing and, on the other hand, the attempts by many governments to retain a dominant role for state actors. It sent mixed signals to civil society – sometimes offering unprecedented levels of participation, but then again pushing it out of the negotiation spaces. Some CS Media organizations used the temporary openings to advance their inclusion in global governance, while others could enter the level of global decision-making for the first time. Civil society groups praised the ‘innovative rules and practices of participation’ established in some areas of the WSIS process, which they see ‘as an experience to be learned from for the overall UN system and related processes’ [25]. Yet even the instances of successful implementation of the multi-stakeholder principle uncovered the need to create mechanisms for the less-organized, less-resourced and less policy-fluent parts of civil society, such as activist and grassroots groups, to participate in governance processes, as well as the necessity to transform these processes into an attractive environment for such groups. If legitimacy and accountability are a serious objective, multi-stakeholder governance will have to move far beyond the steps taken at WSIS.

The experiences of CS Media underline these challenges, but also the potentials. Divides between different types of CS Media persisted, with those organized as 'community media' and as NGOs tending to participate in summit processes and those identifying themselves as 'autonomous', 'alternative', 'tactical', and 'activist' media largely choosing to remain outside. While the former were consumed by the 'realpolitik' of UN processes and strategic negotiations, many of the latter refused to see any value or necessity in following the summit process. Yet a significant achievement of these various approaches to the WSIS was that the rather predictable divisions were sometimes crossed and constituencies sometimes overlapped. Indymedia activists participated in the CMWG, small and radical community radio groups appeared at the NGO-led Community Media Forum, while the Venezuelan media organization Aporrea participated in WSIS?WeSeize!. A small but increasing number of participants from both camps understood the differences between, for example, the CMWG and WSIS?WeSeize! not as fundamental dividing lines, but as complementary approaches. Where the CMWG focused on traditional technologies, developed relations with the mainstream media, and drafted specific proposals for influencing the ongoing government-led negotiation process, WSIS?WeSeize! could add expertise on new technologies, serve as a space to develop radical reform agendas, promote a bottom-up governance framework, and organize public pressure to support CS Media interventions.

At WSIS itself, this combination of approaches and expertise did not yet fully develop, and as such it remains a potential rather than a reality. Yet the common use of WSIS as a platform has fostered new coalitions across traditional boundaries, leading, for example, to post-WSIS projects such as the European Forum on Communication Rights in London 2004, which was commonly organized by major media NGOs and by Indymedia activists. Bridging the boundaries between media actors with different strategies and thematic focuses, the WSIS highlighted the potential of a complementary multi-layered strategy connecting 'inside' and 'outside' – and thus of transcending the 'predictable spheres of influence' (Calabrese, 2004: 323).

A common set of proposals, setting out a coherent alternative governance structure, is not quite in reach yet. The CMWG programme was geared towards particular stages of the WSIS negotiations and did not evolve into a clearly defined and systematically developed agenda. Demands changed with the changing composition of the group, the life-span of proposals sometimes lasted only for their use in a particular document, and the proposals of the CMWG rarely fitted the far-reaching media-reform agenda developed at the Social Fora and other civil society networks and spaces. The absence of a generally agreed framework of proposals hampered the continuous and successful work of the group. The connection with the – even more heterogeneous – agenda of the media activists of Geneva03, *et al.* still has to be developed.

So Civil Society Media are not a singular actor, it is rather a theoretical umbrella covering a diversity of actors with very different approaches and objectives. Yet this fragmented arena of actors is weaving the first ties of a loose network by developing communication channels, testing collaboration, discussing objectives and strategies, and thus approaching a common discourse. Different perspectives on policy issues are slowly converging, forming a basis for future involvement in communication governance. Clusters on specific issues or activities have emerged, with some even developing temporary or issue-based campaigns, yet linkages between those are still weak. To form a sustained network, a deeper coalition, or a proper social movement, CS Media will need to develop denser information exchanges, a greater level of co-ordination, build a sense of shared values, and eventually a collective identity (Khagram *et al.*, 2002). A common conceptual frame of reference, such as CS Media, may be able to offer some of the necessary linkages.

Without those, the internal preconditions for successful policy interventions, as proposed by social movement theory [26], were hardly met at WSIS. External factors were even more worrying. The predominant policy paradigm favored information technology over communication media, and furthermore most states and business-actors were uninterested, at best, or hostile, at worst, towards the grassroots-based bottom-up approach of CS Media, which goes beyond the state-market nexus and challenges prevalent capitalist modes of control by the powerful players. So it may not be surprising that the results of the interventions by the CMWG and other activist media networks into the WSIS negotiation process were rather limited. Commitments to freedom of expression and media diversity were confirmed both after long struggles with hostile governments, and these represented the only small gains derived from these efforts. Communication rights had been temporarily accepted in the drafts of the WSIS documents, but were later reduced significantly, and the CMWG proposals to enable and promote country-level legislation for community media, a reform of spectrum allocation, and the establishment of a community media fund were all ignored. On the issue of IPRs and free software, the Brazilian government managed to balance the US agenda of expanding IPR, but a fundamental review of IPR, as the media activists at WSIS?WeSeize! had propagated, was beyond reach. Unsurprisingly, support for privacy rights and for citizen-/community-based communication networks was not widespread amongst governments either.

However, the defeat in the official WSIS negotiation process contrasted with the events and public discourses around the summit. Numerous side-events including even the parallel mainstream media summit, the World Electronic Media Forum, celebrated the practices of grassroots/citizens/activist media. 'Create your own media – make your own voice heard' was repeated in many summit-related debates as a prime strategy to bridge the information divide. Other issues, such as IPR and financial mechanisms, were equally discussed widely. So if CS Media failed to leave their mark in the official documents, they raised their profile in the discourses

around the summit and influenced the agendas of future debates. These ‘indirect’ effects, although more elusive, should not be underestimated. The WSIS achieved few binding agreements, instead it could be characterized as a platform to discuss the priorities and guiding principles of communication governance – and as such it structured the discourse on information and communication and set the parameters of future policy processes. Intervening into this policy discourse represents a starting-point for influencing the policy framework within which CS Media operate and for developing a common understanding of that framework, as well as its possible alternatives.

## Notes for Chapter Eleven

- [1] See, for example, Rodriguez (2001), Downing (2001), Couldry and Curran (2003), Carpentier *et al.*, (2003), Atton (2002). The Civil Society Media model, which I will develop on the following pages, will draw from the work of these and other authors.
- [2] The first half of this two-part summit took place 10–12 December 2003 in Geneva, the second half 16–18 November 2005 in Tunis.
- [3] Some of the ideas and arguments presented in this chapter have been developed together with my colleagues Stefania Milan (European University Institute, Florence) and Gabriele Hadl (Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto). See, e.g., Hintz and Milan, 2006, and Hadl and Hintz, 2006.
- [4] Milan (2004) regards participation as the most central aspect of CS Media.
- [5] For an elaboration on the democratic character of CS Media see Sreberny-Mohammadi (1997), Rodriguez (2001).
- [6] There has been a wide variety of literature on each of these dimensions. For an overview Held and McGrew (2003) offer a starting-point.
- [7] ...even though they may be as fully ‘globalized’ as, for example, the network People’s Global Action which has initiated several global days of action.
- [8] See, e.g., Wilkinson (2002), Nelson (2002).
- [9] The information presented here about the WSIS negotiation process (and about the civil society processes presented later) is based on my participation in working groups and meetings, and on interviews with key participants, in this case Wolf Ludwig, note-taker in the inter-governmental negotiation group on media issues, and Steve Buckley, President of AMARC.
- [10] UN General Resolution 56/183 of December 2001
- [11] At the initial stages, the CRIS campaign – an NGO platform on communication rights – served as the main force to mobilize civil society interventions and to facilitate self-organizing; <http://www.crisinfo.org>.

- [12] <http://www.wsis-cs.org/caucuses/html>.
- [13] <http://www.worldsummit2003.de/en/web/573.htm>.
- [14] [http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download\\_en/WSIS-CS-summit-statement-rev1-23-12-2005-en.pdf](http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/WSIS-CS-summit-statement-rev1-23-12-2005-en.pdf).
- [15] <http://www.worldsummit2003.de/en/web/231.htm>.
- [16] Media giants, such as Time-Warner, Sony and Vivendi, are members of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – the leading actor of the business sector which represented a further separate ‘stakeholder’ in addition to civil society. Through the separate channels of the Media Caucus and the ICC, commercial media achieved double representation in the summit process.
- [17] Report on CMWG meetings by Steve Buckley, 2 October 2005.
- [18] <http://www.geneva03.org>.
- [19] Servaes and Carpentier (2005: 10) have termed this the ‘Janus-head strategy’ of activism, ‘combining strategic and partial incorporation with continued resistance and independent critique’.
- [20] I refer here to the many statements which have been drafted during the four-year WSIS process but which, in many cases, have not been publicly archived.
- [21] This claim was supported by the fact that the only free public wireless network at or around the Geneva summit was set up by media activists at WSIS?WeSeize!, and the latter’s use of online methods to support and document activities was generally far advanced compared to those used at the summit.
- [22] <http://www.geneva03.org>.
- [23] <http://www.eclecticadv.net>.
- [24] The section on Infowar, particularly, was drafted by members of Geneva03.
- [25] See the civil society statement ‘Much more could have been achieved’, [http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download\\_en/WSIS-CS-summit-statement-rev1-23-12-2005-en.pdf](http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/WSIS-CS-summit-statement-rev1-23-12-2005-en.pdf).
- [26] See, e.g., Khagram *et al.* (2002); Keck and Sikkink (1998).

## References for Chapter Eleven

Atton, C. (2002), *Alternative Media*, London: Sage.

Calabrese, A. (2004), ‘The Promise of Civil Society: a Global Movement for Communication Rights’, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 18: 3, pp. 317–29.

- Cammaerts, B., Carpentier, N. (2005), 'The Unbearable Lightness of Full Participation in a Global Context: WSIS and Civil Society Participation', in J. Servaes and N. Carpentier (eds.), *Towards a Sustainable Information Society. Deconstructing WSIS*, London: Intellect, pp. 17–50.
- Carpentier, N., Lie, R., Servaes, J. (2003), 'Making Community Media Work', in J. Servaes (ed.), *Approaches to Development: Studies on Communication for Development*, Paris: UNESCO Communication and Information Sector, pp. Chapter 15-1–Chapter 15-44.
- CMWG (2003), 'Contribution by the Community Media Initiative to the Drafting Process', <http://www.worldsummit2003.de/en/web/229.htm>. Downloaded on 29 August 2005.
- Commission on Global Governance (1995), *Our Global Neighbourhood*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Couldry, N., Curran, J. (2003), *Contesting Media Power. Alternative Media in a Networked World*, Lanman: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Dawkins, K. (2003), *Global Governance: The Battle Over Planetary Power*, New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Dowmunt, T. (1993), *Channels of Resistance: Global Television and Local Empowerment*, London: BFI Publishing.
- Downing, J. D. H. (2001), *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*, London: Sage.
- Garcia, D., Lovink, G. (1999), 'The ABC of Tactical Media', [www.sarai.net/events/tml/tml\\_pdf/abc\\_tactical.PDF](http://www.sarai.net/events/tml/tml_pdf/abc_tactical.PDF). Downloaded on 5 October 2005.
- Hadl, G. (2004), *Civil Society Media Theory: Tools for Decolonizing the Lifeworld*, Paper for the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), Porto Alegre, 28 July 2004.
- Hadl, G., Hintz, A. (2006), 'Framing Our Media for Transnational Policy: The World Summit on the Information Society and beyond', in D. Kidd, C. Rodriguez, and L. Stein (eds.), *Making Our Media*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Forthcoming.
- Held, D., McGrew, A. (2003), 'The Great Globalization Debate: An Introduction', in D. Held and A. McGrew (eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 1–50.
- Held, D. (2003), 'Cosmopolitanism: Taming Globalization', in D. Held and A. McGrew (eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 514–29.
- Hintz, A. (2003), 'Indymedia Germany: A Local Node of the Global Network', *Media Development*, XLX: 4, pp. 21–5.

- Hintz, A., Milan, S. (2006), 'Towards a New Vision for Communication Governance? Civil Society Media at the World Social Forum and the World Summit on the Information Society', *Communication for Development and Social Change: A Global Journal*, Forthcoming.
- Kaldor, M. (2003), *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Keck, M. E., Sikkink, K. (1998), *Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Khagram, S., Riker, J. V., Sikkink, K. (2002), 'From Santiago to Seattle: Transnational Advocacy Groups Restructuring World Politics', in S. Khagram, J. V. Riker, and K. Sikkink (eds.), *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 3–23.
- Kjaer, A. M. (2004), *Governance*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Langlois, A., Dubois, F. (2005), *Autonomous Media: Activating Resistance and Dissent*, Montréal: Cumulus Press.
- MacBride, S., Abel, E., International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (1980), *Many Voices, One World. Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow. Towards a New More Just and More Efficient Information and Communication order*, Ibandan and Paris: Ibandan University Press and UNESCO Press.
- Messner, D., Nuscheler, F. (2003), 'Das Konzept Global Governance: Stand und Perspektiven', *INEF-Report 67*, Duisburg: Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden.
- Milan, S. (2004), *Communicating Civil Society: Participation as the Main Benchmark of Civil Society Media. The Case of the Third World Social Forum*, Paper for the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), Porto Alegre, 27 July.
- Nelson, P. J. (2002), 'Agendas, Accountability, and Legitimacy Among Transnational Networks Lobbying the World Bank', in S. Khagram, J. V. Riker, and K. Sikkink (eds.), *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 131–54.
- Notes from Nowhere (2003), *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism*, London/New York: Verso.
- Ó Siochrú, S., Girard, B. (2002), *Global Media Governance*, New York/Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ó Siochrú, S. (2004), 'Will the Real WSIS Please Stand Up? The Historic Encounter of the Information Society and the Communication Society', *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 66: 3–4, pp. 203–24.

- Raboy, M. (2004), 'The WSIS as a Political Space in Global Media Governance', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 18: 3, pp. 345–59.
- Rodríguez, C. (2001), *Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizens' Media*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Rosenau, J. N. (1995), 'Governance in the Twenty-First Century', *Global Governance*, 1: 1, pp. 13–43.
- Servaes, J., Carpentier, N. (2005), 'Introduction: Steps to Achieve a Sustainable Information Society', in J. Servaes and N. Carpentier (eds.), *Deconstructing WSIS: Towards a Sustainable Agenda for the Future Information Society*, Bristol, UK and Portland, OR, USA: Intellect, pp. 5–16.
- Sikkink, K. (2002), 'Restructuring World Politics: The Limits and Asymmetries of Soft Power', in S. Khagram, J. V. Riker, and K. Sikkink (eds.), *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 301–17.
- Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. (1997), 'Small Media and Revolutionary Change: a New Model', in A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, D. Winseck, J. McKenna, et al. (eds.), *Media in Global Context*, London: Arnold, pp. 220–35.
- Wilkinson, R. (2002), 'The Contours of Courtship: The WTO and Civil Society', in R. Wilkinson and S. Hughes (eds.), *Global Governance: Critical Perspectives*, London: Routledge, pp. 193–211.
- WSIS (2003a), 'Declaration of Principles. Building the Information Society: a Global Challenge in the New Millenium'. [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/doc/s03-wsis-doc-0004!!msw-e.doc](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/doc/s03-wsis-doc-0004!!msw-e.doc). Downloaded on 5 October 2005.
- (2003b), 'Plan of Action'. [http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/doc/s03-wsis-doc-0005!!msw-e.doc](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsis/doc/s03-wsis-doc-0005!!msw-e.doc). Downloaded on 5 October 2005.