

Conceptualising power in multistakeholder collaboration: The Internet Global Governance case

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Abstract

In the last decade, there has been powershift in global communications regulation linked to the commercialisation of the Internet. Governments and intergovernmental organisations have been compelled to share policymaking and regulatory power with private businesses, experts, service providers, and nongovernmental organisations. With the advancement of multistakeholder collaboration as a governance principle in the global Internet Governance, how to investigate the political process in a “shared power” environment emerges as a challenging methodological issue.

In this paper, a synergetic theoretical approach is proposed to the study of Internet governance political process, which focuses on the concept of power, and crosses the boundaries of three academic fields, namely, Political Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, and Organisation Studies. This approach aggregates, in a descending analytical manner, concepts intrinsically linked to the contemporary shifting-power governance paradigm (i.e. governmentality, global governance, global public-policy networks, shared power, multistakeholder collaboration). In addition, such an approach brings the collaborative process into focus (rather than the decisions it leads to) by accentuating the productive potential of a collaboration based on the “shared power” formula.

Each of those theoretical reflections on shifting power relations provides building elements for a synergetic theoretical framework that can be, and has been, applied to the investigation of the emergent Internet governance regime. As a result, stakeholder alliances can be mapped, instances of power dynamics can be discerned, and some longitudinal tangible and intangible outcomes of the multistakeholder collaboration can be envisioned.

Introduction

With the Internet becoming the 21st century global infrastructure for commerce and communication, a new regime of governance is emerging in the international communications field. This regime is sensitive to the medium's architectural characteristics, the users' norms of behaviour in Cyberspace, and the regulator's (namely, the US government's) potential to exert 'soft power'. In this regime's normative code, for the first time in international relations, *authority* is defined in terms of inclusiveness, openness, transparency, and accountability. In this regime's lexicon, 'multistakeholderism' is identified as the only legitimate way to develop the Internet regulatory environment, and 'shared power' is the metaphor for the, admittedly, awfully messy and frustratingly slow deliberations. Moreover, the supranational policy-making process, through which this regime is designed, empowers previously marginalised voices and allows the stakeholders to build coalitions of a global scale.

The proliferation of fora discussing Internet governance issues makes it difficult to study this unconventional political process.¹ There are several expert bodies involved in the development and management of the Internet technical infrastructure and standards.² The coordination of Internet-related policies is discussed by a number of international organisations.³ In addition, the UN World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) (2003-2005) and the first and second Internet Governance Forums (IGF) (2006 and 2007, respectively) provided fora for the consolidation of stakeholder interests and the evolution of the normative environment for Internet governance. There are also regional and national bodies concerned with the creation and implementation of Internet policies. The large number of stakeholders participating in all these entities – governments, international organisations, business corporations,

¹ In the literature on Internet governance, only a handful of scholars have explored the multistakeholder consensus process (for analyses focused on the ICANN process, for instance, see Johnson, Post and Crawford, 2003; Palfrey, 2003; Frankel, 2002; Weinberg, 2001; Johnson and Crawford, 2000 - three articles; Post et al., 1999; Post, 1998). Moreover, the power dynamics of the multistakeholder collaboration have rarely been the focus of a systematic investigation. Hence, the significance of the theoretical framework developed in this paper.

² Among them are the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Internet Society (ISOC), and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

³ The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) have been heavily involved in this area.

non-governmental organisations, experts and individual activists⁴ – have already reached consensus on establishing multistakeholder collaboration as the operational principle of Internet governance.

How, as researchers, do we approach the multitude of network-like multistakeholder formations in Internet governance? By definition, in such settings, stakeholders meet as equals and share decision-making power. Yet, for participants and observers alike, the tension in deliberations is palpable, as some stakeholders succeed in presenting their interests more effectively than others. How, then, do we account for power in such “egalitarian” formations? How do we detect power dynamics in a process of decision-making where legitimacy is vested in the ability to reach consensus? How do we account for the generated transformative energy in open deliberations on Internet development issues? The common denominator of all these questions, I propose, is *the way we conceive power* in a multistakeholder collaborative political process. Do we see power as anchored in structures and institutions (hence, *power as domination and oppression*), or as emanating from interactions in relational networks (hence, *power as a “productive” social environment*)?

This paper reviews theories of power and develops a multilayered theoretical framework specifically for the study of the innovative multistakeholder collaborative process in Internet governance.⁵ Power and power dynamics are the focal variables of the investigation. This approach is based on the fundamental Foucauldian understanding that social practices are constructed in and by historically specific matrices of power relations. This leads us to the principal premise of the paper – as a pervasive social dynamic, power animates the relationship of communication technologies and society. The communicative process in general, as well as each of its constitutive elements (communication technology and policy among others), cannot and should not be studied apart from the historically-specific power matrix.

⁴ Consider, for instance, the second Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Rio de Janeiro (November 2007), where the number of participants who represented stakeholder organisations from 109 countries exceeded 1,300 people (see http://www.intgovforum.org/Rio_Meeting/IGF2-Closing-15NOV07.txt, accessed April 10, 2008). For comparison, in the first four years of the ICANN existence (1998-2002), there were only three-to-four hundred active participants worldwide.

⁵ This theoretical framework was successfully applied to the study of the multistakeholder collaborative process in ICANN (see Antonova, 2006).

Hence, it is imperative that the deepest mechanisms of the political process are accounted for when the emerging Internet both governance strategies and fluid practices are investigated.

For this paper, power is conceptualised by employing three frameworks from Political Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, and Organisation Studies. Each of these perspectives provides key ideas for conceptualising and studying power in a multistakeholder collaborative formation. Thus, the *postmodern ontology of power* (Political Philosophy) directs our attention to the shifting governmentality - from government-centered rationalities of governance to experimenting with multistakeholder collaboration. By reflecting analytically on real-world social trends, the *globalisation perspective on power* (International Relations Studies) recognises both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of a regime of “shared power” global governance (national governments, businesses, and civil society advocates participate as equal in the policymaking process). Finally, the *organisational approach to power* in multistakeholder formations, where the dynamics of consensus-reaching practices are investigated, allows for the “instrumentalisation” of power and for the mapping of the elusive power dynamics.

By initiating a dialogue among concepts from those three perspectives, this paper contributes to the studies of power in multistakeholder collaboration. Instead of focusing exclusively on the most powerful stakeholders and their ability to influence the collaborative process, the suggested synergetic approach unfolds the process of consensus-building through mapping power dynamics and exploring the practices of learning and sharing of expertise and experiences. As an experiment in global governance through multistakeholder collaboration, the Internet governance constitutes a rich empirical field for applying the constructed power dynamics theoretical framework.

Defining Internet governance

Internet governance is a contested terrain in the contemporary global politics, as the UN World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS) (2002 – 2005) demonstrated. The principal stakeholders - national governments and international organisations, private corporations, civil society representatives, and Internet developers and operators - compete for reformulating the existing balance of power. Currently, the US government retains the unilateral control over the content of the Internet root zone that is at the core of the global Net, and a private corporation - ICANN – is mandated with the creation of a property rights regime in cyberspace.

Yet, what is Internet Governance? Let's begin with the observation that there is not a consensus on the definition of the term. The WSIS Working Group on Internet Governance's (WGIG) formulation, developed after seven months of difficult negotiations⁶, was deliberately simple and descriptive. Internet governance was defined as

the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet. (WGIG, 2005)

It was coupled with four issue-area clusters, ranging from infrastructural issues and the management of critical Internet resources (admittedly, the most controversial area, because it pertains to the Internet addresses property rights in cyberspace), to the use of the Internet, and to the developmental aspects such as capacity building in developing countries.

One could argue that this first attempt to identify and define a new field of regulatory issues on a global level was more concerned with both making “multistakeholderism” work and experimenting with consensus-reaching political process than with including all diverse perspectives on Internet governance. Indeed, at the inaugural IGF (2006), some participants confided that the definition had not grasped the multitude of stakeholder expectations and they felt uncomfortable with what governance meant when applied to Internet.⁷ Yet, the very opportunity for

⁶ For insider views on the WGIG “bumpy” road to developing the Internet Governance definition and recommendations, see Drake (2005).

⁷ At the inaugural IGF “Summing up” Session (November 1, 2006), a participant from Malaysia, for instance, stated that “the word “governance” is one of the difficulties. We are struggling with the

participation in the process of creating a global commons regime, and, potentially, influencing it, was a decisive advancement in global politics. The consensus reached on stakeholders sharing power in developing the Internet governance regime constitutes itself a precedent in developing regimes of international relations in the 21st century.

In light of those developments, investigating power in collaborative formations and the power dynamics of the consensus process emerges as a challenging methodological issue.

Postmodern ontology of power: rationalities of government

Modern theories of power (i.e. the liberal, or judicial, theory, and Marxist theory) share a common epistemology. On the one hand, power is perceived as the capacity to impose one's will on other persons, based on the possession of certain resources (i.e. wealth, military power, knowledge/expertise) (see Hindess, 1996, p. 96). On the other hand, there is a common focus on the State as being endowed with power and exercising power for particular economic gains, and, more generally, on institutions and the people who rule them.

Michel Foucault (1978) revolutionised the conventional view of power by defining a political power (sovereign) that rules on the basis of consent as simply one among a number of "rationalities of government", and "therefore needing to be accorded no special analytical privilege" (Hindess, 1996, p. 98). As one of Foucault's critics stated, he "almost single-handedly... moved the discussion of that most elusive and illusive concept from its modern or state-centered understanding to a postmodern or decentered version" (Wolin, 1988, p. 179). Along with shifting the ontology of power, Foucault introduced a liberating imagery of flowing interactions, productive networks of force relations, and endless possibilities of resistance and productive outcomes.

For Foucault, power is omnipresent and pervasive. He hypothesised that power is "co-extensive with the social body"; that "relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality)"; that "one should not

definition. We all have different definitions.... Every one of us has a different understanding, and therefore coming here with a different expectation" (IGF, 2006).

assume a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with “dominators” on one side and “dominated” on the other, but rather a multiform production of relations of domination which are partially susceptible to integration into overall strategies”; and that “there are no relations of power without resistances” which are “multiple and can be integrated in global strategies” (Foucault, 1980, p. 142).

Foucault’s philosophical reflections on power contain as well implicit methodological suggestions. In his words, power should be understood as a “multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their organisation...and...as the strategies in which they take effect” (Foucault, 1978, pp. 92-93). Thus, this particular interpretation of power directs one’s attention to the possibility of “mapping” power dynamics through identifying actors (stakeholders) and their strategies; detecting force relations in coalitions and confrontations; and, finally, grasping the productive potential of the “multiplicity of force relations” in organisational and policy outcomes, and in constantly shifting governance practices.

In an even more explicit attempt to account for the elusive power relations, Foucault invented the neologism “governmentality”, initially in relation to the distinctly new approach to governing, emerging in Europe from the sixteenth century, “which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy” (Foucault, 1991, p. 102). Epistemologically, though, “governmentality” refers to the way governing is conceived in a particular historical context – who governs and who/what is governed (see Gordon, 1991, p. 3). To study “governmentality”, hence, is to get involved in “analytics of government” as Mitchell Dean (1999) names this approach. This requires one to scrutinise the dominant “regimes of practices” and uncover the way in which thought both “operates within our organised ways of doing things” and “is embedded within programs for the direction and reform of conduct” (Dean, 1999, p. 18). In other words, the “analytics of government” approach calls for analysing thought in its operational and productive incarnations, in a particular sphere of governance, where multiple actors and agencies are involved in a mesh of power relations.

From the “analytics of government” perspective, to grasp the logic of a particular “regime of government” is to map its governmentality; that is, to detect and identify the rationalities of government, which are embedded in dominant discursive and non-discursive practices. When applied to the Internet governance experiment in multistakeholder collaboration, this approach cuts through the thicket of fora, participants and their strategies, and documents produced. It allows us to reveal the real competing stakes behind the rhetoric of “Internet for development” and “freedom of expression on the Net”. What we are likely to discover is that the global Internet governance “regime of practices” exemplifies the neo-liberal governmental rationalities and newly-invented techniques of governance.

A number of authors in Political Science and Sociology support the view that the neo-liberal governmentality, which rose to prominence under conservative governments in the 1980s, places emphasis upon the lives and decisions of individuals. Dean, for instance, suggests that “the government through processes is increasingly displaced by a government of government, a ‘reflexive government’” (Dean, 1999, p. 149), whose imperative is “to render governmental institutions and mechanisms, including those of the social itself, efficient, accountable, transparent and democratic by the employment of technologies of performance” (Dean, 1999, p. 193).

The governmentality school of research has been criticised, though, for its exclusively “programmatically orientation”, its emphasis on the rationalities of government rather than on specific policy projects. Yet, it has been recognised that the perspective of governmentality helps us understand that the “end of politics” thesis is itself a political programme. As Lemke (2000, p. 11) comments,

the so-called “retreat of the state” is in fact a prolongation of government, neo-liberalism is not the end but a transformation of politics, that restructures the power relations in society. What we observe today is not a diminishment or a reduction of state sovereignty and planning capacities but a displacement from formal to informal techniques of government and the appearance of new actors on the scene of government (e.g. NGOs), that indicate fundamental transformations in statehood and a new relation between state and civil society actors. This encompasses on the one hand the displacement of forms of practices that were formerly defined in terms of nation state to supranational levels, and on the other hand the development of forms of sub-politics “beneath” politics in its traditional meaning.

As it is argued in the next section, contemporary globalisation can be seen, indeed, as a well-guided governmental project exemplifying the neo-liberal governmentality in the late 20th century. Coinciding with the commercialisation of the Internet, this project is benefiting from both the global communication connectivity and the democratic instincts and aspirations of the so-called “civil society”. As a result, locally created forms of community self-regulation are transplanted to the global level, and forums are inaugurated for collaboration on contentious issues in a diversity of problem-domains (Internet governance is one of them) with the participation of stakeholders from governments, businesses and non-governmental organisations.

International relations perspective: power in global governance

The Internet governance controversies are evocative of the 1990s’ “great globalisation debate”⁸. This debate was concerned with the shifting matrix of power relations and the rearranging of the Industrial-age social organisation in unstable hybrid configurations.⁹

Through the “globalists” optics, the contemporary globalisation refers to the “entrenched and enduring patterns of worldwide interconnectedness”, and “represents a significant shift in the spatial reach of social action and organisation” (see Held & McGrew, 2000, p. 3) towards supranational scale.

To this interpretation of the contemporary trends, the “sceptics” oppose the view that “the discourse on globalisation... is... an ideological construction” (Held & McGrew, 2000, p. 5) and argue that it provides “a convenient myth which, in part, helps justify and legitimise the neoliberal global project, that is, the creation of a global free market and the consolidation of Anglo-American capitalism within the world’s major economic regimes” (Held & McGrew, 2000, p. 5).

⁸ See Held & McGrew, 2000.

⁹ See, for instance, Castells., 1996/1998; Falk, 1995; Strange, 1996; Offe, 1998.

Although exhibiting differing interpretations of contemporary social dynamics, the globalisation debate correctly detects the changing paradigm of structural power relations on the supranational level. It has been broadly accepted, for instance, that the centre of gravity in world politics has shifted, during the last quarter century, from the public agencies of the state to private bodies of various kinds, and from states to markets and market operators. Thus, escaping the state-centered concept, the academic discourse is entering the broader, and largely still in flux, field of global governance.

In many respects, the notion of global governance draws upon the postmodern imagery of networks and flows as implying decentralisation of power, proliferating connectivity, reconfiguration of relationships, and localisation of resistance and empowerment (Manuel Castells' theory of Network Society is a prime example here; see Castells, 1996-1998).

In this imagery, global information networks are seen as a species of the networks of power relations in three significant ways. First, according to Castells (2001), in a network society, access to essential social networks (the Internet among them) equals enfranchisement in the society. Second, information networks replace earlier organisational forms.¹⁰ They are seen as changing both the quality of human experiences¹¹, and “the way power is exercised and governance is organised in global politics” (Rosenau & Singh, 2002, p. 2). Third, because of their interactive nature, information networks “reconfigure, constitute, or reconstitute identities, interests, and institutions” (Rosenau & Singh, 2002, p. 13).

In the publications focused on the concept of global governance, the predominant concern is, though, with formal, established global institutions, and the challenges to their effectiveness and accountability mechanisms.¹² Drawing on cases of functioning *global public-policy (GPP) networks*, Reinicke and Deng (2000) propose that global governance via mobilising networks on a sectorial/functional basis is the only

¹⁰ Castells postulates that “the Internet is the technological basis for the organisational form of the Information Age: the network” (Castells, 2001, p. 1).

¹¹ See Barney, 2004, pp. 60-68.

¹² See Rittberger, 2001; Reinicke & Deng, 2000.

effective governance alternative in overcoming the tension between globalisation and the state's ability to govern,. In their view, GPP networks are “effective, often remarkably so, in bringing together diverse and sometimes opposing groups to discuss common problems that no one of them can resolve by itself” (Reinicke & Deng, 2000, p. xi), and they “represent a unique opportunity for governments to regain the initiative in the debate over the future of global governance” (Reinicke & Deng, 2000, p. xxi).

To elaborate upon the global public-policy network model, Reinicke introduced the principle of horizontal subsidiarity (Reinicke, 1998, p. 89). As a political instrument, this principle helps to transfer part of policymaking responsibility to non-state actors, usually business representatives and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The rationale is that these actors, whose range of activity is not bound by a particular territory, are, in fact, directly affected by the outcomes of a particular public policy. In addition, they possess better knowledge and understanding of the complex, technology-driven public-policy issues, which, in turn, impact on the acceptability and legitimacy of the global public policy. As a characteristic feature, stakeholder inclusiveness lends legitimacy to the process and increases the chances of successful implementation of the policy outcomes.

Reinicke and Deng trace the potential long-term contribution of these entities to the formation of social capital and the constitution of a global public space. They notice that, by enabling shared knowledge and learning, these networks, in fact, engage in “capacity building” for local communities, especially in developing countries, “to take democratic control over their destinies” (Reinicke & Deng, 2000, p. 64)

For Reinicke and Deng, though, networks only complement the existing global governance institutions, and do not contribute to a “power shift” away from governments and international organisations toward civil society and the private sector. They have emerged “to address cutting-edge global challenges” and help the formal institutions to manage risk (Reinicke & Deng, 2000, p. 51). In this light, national governments, international organisations, and especially the UN agencies are advised to take the leadership in supporting this “quiet revolution”.

Reinicke's model provides valuable analytical support to the argument that the emerging Internet governance formations constitute an alternative policy response, which is compatible with both, the globalisation scope and complexity, and the mechanics of the powerful global trend towards redistribution of power. Nonetheless, the global public policy network model does not account for the "shared power" dynamics *in* a multistakeholder collaborative process.

As discussed next, the possibility of an inclusive, deliberative mode of policymaking in a problem domain, from the local and national to the global level, requires both a more insightful understanding of the power dynamics in a collaboration, and skilful managing of the consensus-oriented negotiations. A number of conceptual constructs developed by Organisation Studies scholars have already been probing the incentives and the outcomes of collaboration, mainly in business settings, but in hybrid multistakeholder alliances, as well.

Organisational perspective: collaboration as a mode of shared power

So far, we have developed two layers of the conceptual model of power that the investigation of Internet Governance requires. First, *in ontological terms*, power emerges as a relational and ubiquitous phenomenon that is capable of producing effects/outcomes (i.e. discourses, institutions, knowledge, policies, structures, etc.). It is discernible in the webs of force relationships, where it produces both negative and positive outcomes. Second, *in political terms*, new socio-economic dynamics, grasped by such metaphors as Globalisation and Information/Knowledge/Network Society, have induced a significant shift in the perceived balance of power on both national and global levels, and between national governments (and international organisations) and private actors (the "shared power" formula). In response, new alternative forms of policymaking have emerged, which are designated as "global public policy networks", in Political Science, and "collaborative formations", in Organisation Studies.

Since the 1970s, a multitude of collaborative formations, functioning on the principle of “shared power”, have been convened mainly in the USA, on local, regional, and national levels. Consequently, the phenomenon of “collaborations” or “collaborative alliances”¹³, or multistakeholder collaborative roundtables, in Canada¹⁴ has been an object of vigorous investigation by Organisation Studies theorists.

In the process, conceptual constructs have been redefined or invented, all pertaining to the realisation of organisational interdependencies and collaborative advantages.¹⁵

In response to the need for a more dynamic process-oriented mode of investigation in inter-organisational relations, Gray (1989) developed an empirical theory of (multistakeholder) collaboration. It combined perspectives of organisational behavior and political science, and departed from the traditional model of inter-organisational relations that had hitherto dominated the literature. Gray suggested that collaboration was enabling organisations to manage their increasing interconnectedness (Gray, 1989, p. 226). In a collaboration, stakeholders “constructively explore their differences”. The aim is “to create a richer, more comprehensive appreciation [common understanding] of the problem... than any one of them could construct alone”, and resolve conflicts, or advance shared visions on the collective good (Gray, 1989, p. 5).¹⁶

As Gray noticed, dissatisfaction with the status quo, and the desire to avert unwanted costs that it induces, constitute a major motivation for the principal stakeholders to turn to collaboration. There are stakeholders, though, who would be prompted to join a collaboration because of the attractive cultural norms it embodies (consensus decision-making vs. top-down governmental regulation), or the credibility of the convening party(ies). Thus, the expectation that through collaborative efforts some

¹³ See Gray (1989); Gray & Wood (1991); Wood & Gray (1991).

¹⁴ See Pasquero (1991); Turcotte & Pasquero (2001).

¹⁵ Important conceptual steps in this process were the theory of inter-organisational relations (Evan, 1966); the concept of “organisational ecology” (Trist, 1977); the notion of turbulence as a “pervasive quality” of the “contextual environment” of organisations (Emery & Trist, 1965); the stakeholder theory of the firm (Mitroff, 1983); and the notion of “shared power” in collaboration (in the early 1990s). “Shared power” was defined, (after Giddens) as “*shared transformative capacity* exercised in interaction between or among actors to further achievement of their separate and joint aims” (emphasis in the original) (Bryson & Einsweiler, 1991, p.3).

¹⁶ Finn states, for instance, that collaboration is perceived in Organisation Studies as a “fundamentally new public policy approach to understanding and dealing with issues that are larger than the capacity of any one actor or organisation is able... to comprehend or deal with” (Finn, 1996, p. 152).

positive outcomes would be produced is a powerful incentive for participation in a collaboration.

In a “comprehensive theory of collaboration” (Wood & Gray, 1991), “collaboration” was defined exclusively as a self-governance process:

Collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain. (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 146)

The comprehensive theory of collaboration links success with the participation of “those stakeholders... that are most interested in working collaboratively to solve a problem”; “the most powerful or influential stakeholders”; “the best organised networks of stakeholders... so that social pressure may be brought to bear on nonparticipants”, and, in principle, “the majority of stakeholders in a problem domain so that social norms can be established that pressure others to participate eventually” (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 155). This theory is based on the assumption that collaboration, as a strategy for managing interdependencies, evokes political dynamics (stakeholders are anxious to advance their own interests), but operates in the mode of “shared power” as accepted by all the participants.

Power dynamics are observable in each phase of collaboration in multistakeholder deliberative formations. Still in the problem-setting stage, power dynamics are conditioned by the conveners, for they “define the nature of the problem” (Gray, 1989, p. 121), decide how to address it, “what actions will be taken with respect of solving it”, and even who will participate and in what forum the deliberations will occur. Conveners, themselves, derive power from both their ability to influence outcomes in the domain (through their expertise, resources, and links to legitimate authorities) and the credibility they have with other stakeholders (“perception of objectivity or bias”) (Gray, 1989, p. 126). As Gray infers, “[i]dentifying and selecting stakeholders to collaborate, in effect, circumscribes the boundaries of the domain and empowers a specific group to address the problem. The power of conveners, then, is the *power to organise*” (emphasis in the original) (Gray, 1989, p. 124).

During the direction-setting phase, power dynamics emanate from control over both defining an agenda for the domain and determining the range of mutually acceptable solutions (power to strategise). The success of the consensus-building process in this stage depends exclusively on reaching agreement on how the stakeholders will

interact with each other. This must be achieved in advance to the discussion of substantive issues in order to create trust among the stakeholders, and foster the sense of efficiency and effectiveness.

Consensus is recognised as the primary objective of a collaborative formation. In fact, the ability to achieve consensus justifies the multistakeholder collaborative process as a valuable power-sharing policy mechanism. Along with programs, regulative decisions or regimes (tangible outcomes), the multistakeholder collaborative process produces consensus, learning and innovation, which constitute its intangible outcomes. This realisation suggests, I would argue, that collaborations can be interpreted not only as power-sharing forums, but as power-generating entities as well. Indeed, outcomes are deposits of transformative social energy, since the aim of a collaboration is to reconstitute a number of social relations in a particular problem domain.

I would argue further that, when cast as a power-generating process, multistakeholder collaboration exhibits long-term and large-scale societal implications. Thus, the cumulative effect of a collaboration radiates on a number of levels (e.g., individual participants, constituencies, participating organisations, the domain, global interdependencies). It induces new structural relationships among a multitude of players (e.g., contractual and unofficial alliances), while stabilising existing force relationships or engendering a network of new dependencies in a particular domain. In addition, learning and innovation enhance an organisation's capability to adapt to constantly shifting power networks.¹⁷

As these outcomes are undefined and unstable, I contend that we can gain a better understanding of their transformative capacity by mobilising the elements of the above-presented theoretical framework. From the neoliberal governmentality of self-governance to the convener's strategising power in a collaboration – all these concepts can be fused in a coherent framework despite the fact that they greatly differ in analytical abstractness and belong to diverse fields of Social Sciences. This

¹⁷ Huxham and Vangen define this as “collaborative advantage”, a term that refers to the potential of inter-organisational collaborations “to achieve outcomes that could not be reached by any of the organisations acting alone” (Huxham & Vangen, 2000, p. 1; see also Huxham.& MacDonald, 1992; Huxham, 1996).

possibility arises when their focus on power is understood as being about interactive networks of power, which allows for identifying both instances of power dynamics and strategies of influencing the process.

Towards a synergetic theoretical framework

From the presented overview of contemporary interpretations of power, it can be inferred that the adoption of perspectives foregrounding decentralised and fractured authority offers analytical possibilities for those interested in theorising Internet governance. Sharing a common concern with the contemporary shifting dynamics in governance (at global or inter-organisational levels), the presented theories offer significant explanatory power when the focus of Internet governance is on metaphors of networks, flows, shared power, interdependencies, and collaboration.

Firstly, through Foucault's optics of omnipresent power and government as action, the contemporary political rationalities and practices emerge as exemplifying a distinct trend towards *fundamental redefining of statehood, of the relation between state, civil society, and the private sector*. The shift in governance practices from an emphasis on the nation-state to broadening civil-society participation is conceived as a mechanism of globalising local techniques of government, because their effectiveness is appreciated. The neoliberal rationality of self-governance in local settings (e.g. resolving environmental contingencies at local, national, and supranational levels) is now transplanted to the field of global governance.

Secondly, according to scholars using Foucault's perspective on power and government, *contemporary globalisation*, which represents a shift in social action and organisation towards the supranational level, *is a governance project, and not simply an outcome of technological development*. The neoliberal rationalities of government that espoused this project are characterised by a concern with performance and efficiency in governance, which substitutes for a concern with legitimacy. In Castells' Network Society theory, government shares decision-making power with a number of players who bring their distinct expertise to the process.

Thirdly, the invention of new organisational and institutional forms (i.e. global public policy networks) in response to these dynamics exemplifies the *emerging "global*

governance” mentality and order, which are based on a shared realisation of the increasing level of interconnectedness and interdependencies of the world community. Nonetheless, this constitutes a particular challenge for political scientists. Besides the novelty of these phenomena, there is not a suitable conceptual apparatus for investigation of “shared power” dynamics, when governments are only one of the policymaking authorities.

Fourthly, in this regard, Organisation Studies marks a significant advancement in *comprehending the collaborative nature of such formations and scrutinising the power dynamics in a multistakeholder consensus process.* Dealing with real-life inter-organisational initiatives, scholars in this field have accumulated knowledge about stakeholder interdependencies in an organisational domain, the phases in a collaborative process, power positions of different stakeholders, strategies for influencing the process and the outcomes.

And, fifthly, the microanalysis of power dynamics in collaboration allows for *tangible and intangible outcomes to be detected and envisioned,* and, hence, an argument to be developed that *the accumulated transformative energy would lead to restructuring the relations in an organisational domain.*

It must be noted here, though, that not much evidence can be found that the above-outlined analytical and empirical results have been communicated across disciplinary borders, when collaborative governance processes are investigated at local (inter-organisational) or global (supra-organisational) levels. In this sense, the present article contributes to the initiation of such a cross-disciplinary dialogue. By combining the “government rationalities” perspective, which insists on contextualising the techniques of government, with power-dynamic patterns in multistakeholder collaborations that have been detected and raised in Organisation Studies, we can successfully apply this enriched, layered theoretical framework to the political process of Internet governance formations.

Conclusion

The present paper constitutes a journey through the territories of three social-science fields in order to investigate the conceptualisation of “power” in each of them and

consider the explicit and potential conjunctions, which provide for the creation of a theoretical framework for the investigation of the Internet governance field. It can be concluded that the above presented conceptual developments were inspired by a real shift in the public-policy regime - from the kind of unequal distribution of power associated with representative democracy to a more accessible, inclusive and collaborative decision-making process.

It has been argued that the creation of hybrid public/private or purely private authorities for Internet governance (for the latter, consider ICANN) is an experiment in advancing a public-policy alternative to the global level – multistakeholder collaborative formations functioning on a consensus basis.

To investigate this alternative form of governing global resource, a multidisciplinary conceptual matrix was presented, which allows for a sharper profile of the power dynamics of the process, for deeper insights into the transformative potential of the stakeholder collaboration, and, overall, for more conclusive results from the experiments in Internet governance.

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