

Chapter Four

Discourse Coalitions in Internet Governance

Shaping Global Policy by Narratives and Definitions

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DEFINITIONS OF INTERNET GOVERNANCE AS REGULATIVE RESOURCES

The more the Internet penetrates contemporary societies, the more Internet Governance emerges as an important and controversial global policy domain. Within this domain, a crucial cluster of issues is the object of multi-layered and networked processes of policymaking, which occur into different institutional settings and involve a messy galaxy of actors, actants and hybrids. This huge complexity challenges the effectiveness of policymaking at the domestic and international levels as well, and it is reflected by the lack of a consensual and well-defined idea about what Internet Governance is. As reported by Kleinwachter (2007, 14), in a 2004 speech the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has depicted this problematic situation as follows: ‘The issues are numerous and complex. Even the definition of what is meant by Internet governance is a subject of debate’. This uncertainty about the epistemic status of IG and its basic concepts and definitions is also well recognized in literature. For example, describing IG as ‘herding Schrödinger’s cats’, MacLean has underlined that: ‘There appears to be a lack of clarity and common understanding . . . on the meaning of the terms “Internet” and “governance”, when used either alone or in combination.’ (MacLean 2004, 3). Similarly, Drake has highlighted that ‘there is a total lack of consensus about how to define Internet governance, and about which issues and institutions are and should be involved in what manner’ (Drake 2004, 1). Similarly, Hofmann has underlined that: ‘Although the term Internet governance has been in use about ten years now, there is not yet general consensus on its

meaning. First of all, the concept ‘governance’ and its relationship to government is unclear; second, it is unclear what extent and form of authority Internet governance has and in future should have’ (Hofmann 2007, 75). More recently, Kurbalija (2014, 5) has pointed out that ‘the controversy surrounding Internet governance starts with its definition. It’s not merely linguistic pedantry. The way the Internet is defined reflects different perspectives, approaches, and policy interests’.

The thesis underlying this chapter is that these definitional uncertainties and ambiguous concepts are not due to the inability of scholars and policy-makers in grasping the essential contours of an emerging policy field, nor to the fast pace of technological innovations. Rather, they depend on the highly controversial nature of the issues at stake in Internet Governance. Since the early 1990s different actors have strategically been producing different definitions of Internet Governance, in order to mark off sets of legitimated issues, actors and fora. In other words, definitions have been used as regulative resources activated by actors in their struggle for the governance of the Internet. As noted by Hurwitz (2007, 2) ‘controlling Internet governance requires controlling the conversation about Internet governance’, and Saldias (2012, 3) has supported this point of view by stating that ‘the conversation about Internet might even have a greater influence in controlling the Internet than formal law-making process that are currently available in international public law or national constitutional law’.

This chapter investigates this definitional struggle as it unfolded during the World Summit on Information Society +10 (WSIS+10) review process in 2015, a focal point of conflict in the Internet Governance global arena. Combining Hajer’s methodology of discourse analysis with the narrative policy analysis approach, a content analysis of documents presented in five different stages of the WSIS+10 review process is applied in order to shed light on the process by which actors coalesce around common definitions and narratives, and eventually produce discursive orders.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditional policy studies based on a rational choice paradigm have usually been dealing with policy problems as if their meanings were clear and self-evident. This attitude has led social scientists to reify the dominant social groups’ point of view or their own implicit assumptions and value judgments about the phenomena they were researching. Since the linguistic and argumentative turn, many scholars have underlined the role of ideas, conceptualizations, and interpretations within the policy process (Fischer 1993, 2003).

From this perspective, policy problems are conceived of as social constructs produced by the interaction among social actors and lying on moral or ideological stances. These social constructs shape the perceived interests of the subjects, and at the same time, they are also a function of particular material and social conditions (Edelman 1988, 9). Accordingly, the policy process could be described as a struggle for the definitions of a problem and of its boundaries; for the establishment of categories used to describe the policy problem, its causes, and effects; for the setting of criteria used for their classification and assessment; for the adoption of symbols, meanings and ideals evoked to guide and legitimize particular actions (Maynard-Moody and Kelly 1993, Stone 1988). Several authors have studied these definitional struggles as social discursive interactions that shape policymaking. In particular, Hajer (1993, 1995) has adapted the foucauldian concept of 'order of discourse' to the policy studies field. According to him, a policy discourse refers to the tools and meanings through which actors produce and reproduce a policy problem as a social construct. Moreover, the discursive interaction also shapes the identities of actors, providing them with 'subject-positions' that define their social and power relationships. Concepts such as discourse structuration and discourse institutionalization play a central role in this perspective. Discourse structuration occurs 'when a discourse starts to dominate the way a society conceptualizes the world' (Hajer 1993, 46). Moreover, since policy discourses are deeply rooted in discursive practices and in historically determined institutional contexts, we can talk of 'discourse institutionalization' when a discourse 'solidifies into an institution, sometimes as organizational practices, sometimes as traditional ways of reasoning' (Ibid.). Therefore, a policy domain could be considered as a battlefield where different policy discourses compete to conquer hegemony over the conceptualization and the institutionalization of collective action. More precisely, in each policy domain we can detect processes of cooperation and conflict between different discourse coalitions, which deeply affect all the stages of policymaking, from problem definition to decision-making and implementation. Following Hajer, a discourse coalition is defined as an ensemble of actors sharing a set of storylines, that are 'generative sort[s] of narrative that allow actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena' (Hajer 1995, 56) and 'provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding' of the policy problem (ibid., 62). Storylines, for Hajer, are the discursive glue that keeps a discourse coalition together.

The concept of discourse coalition gave a significant contribution to policy studies allowing policy analysts to examine how different groups of actors confront each other to define and redefine collective problems, their

solutions, and their own positions in the discourse that structures the policy domain.

Differently from other approaches, such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework, which identifies coalitions on the basis of a common policy belief system, the discursive approach grounded on storylines helps to explain how actors with different backgrounds, interests, social and cognitive commitment can be part of the same coalition. Indeed, storylines ‘interpret events and courses of action in concrete social contexts . . . and symbolically reflect the concerns of core beliefs rather than the beliefs themselves’ (Fischer 2003, 102). Moreover, unlike policy belief systems, storylines are relatively flexible structures. They open up space for policy change, and for cooperation and compromise. Furthermore, while policy belief systems require a ‘non-trivial degree of coordinated activity’ (Sabatier 1993, 25) among members of an advocacy coalition, storylines allow consideration for a variety of actors that do not necessarily recognize each other as a part of the same discourse coalition. Put differently, actors belong to a discourse coalition if they resort to common discursive elements and contribute to reproduce the same policy discourse.

In this study we integrate Hajer’s discursive approach with the work of other scholars that have analytically described the structural elements of policy narratives. Jones, Shanahan, and McBeth (2014) have transposed some elements of the structuralist narrative approach from the field of literary theory to the field of policy studies in their Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). They assume that policy statements often present a narrative structure in order to persuade other actors, public opinion, and decision makers. Summarizing previous contributions (in particular Stone 2002, Ney 2006, Verweij and Thompson 2006), they claim that a policy narrative is characterized by the presence of:

- i. a setting or context (taken-for-granted facts and information about the problem and different kind of unmovable constraint to the policy action)
- ii. a plot that introduces a temporal element (beginning, middle, end)
- iii. characters such as fixers of the problem (heroes), causers of the problem (villains), and victims (those harmed by the problem)
- iv. a moral of the story, where a policy solution is normally offered.

In particular, characters have shown to play a very important role in this approach because of their strategic and persuasive function. Following Stone (2002, 2012) the NPF approach assumes that ‘villains’ and ‘victims’ are often employed for constructing different kinds of ‘causal mechanisms’, that are ‘types of strategies used in structuring policy narratives to describe

a relationship between a policy problem and its asserted cause' (Shanahan, Adams, Jones, and McBeth 2014, 70). Moreover, they underline actors' use of characters to strategically increase polarization and intensity of the conflict aiming at mobilizing support (Shanahan, McBeth, and Jones 2011).

Zittoun (2014) recalls very similar narrative elements in his conception of policy statements, which are distinguished in a policy problem and a policy solution conceived of as two, at least analytically, distinct constructs. Drawing on previous studies (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972; Kingdon 1995), Zittoun underlines how often actors' preferences for a certain policy solution precede the definition of the policy problem itself. Accordingly, policy problems and policy solutions need to be 'coupled' together, for example, linking the supposed cause of a problem with the supposed consequences of a policy. Policy problems and policy solutions are assembled together during discursive interactions in which actors give rise to what Lindblom (1990) called 'mutual adjustments'—that is, a system of reciprocal manipulation through persuasion and anticipation of criticisms. Differently from Zittoun we do not hold that actors belong to a discourse coalition only if they consciously adhere to a public, coded, policy statement. Rather, following Hajer, we consider that the sharing of some discursive elements is a sufficient condition to be considered as a member of a given discourse coalition. Nevertheless we retain that Zittoun's analytical framework, as well as his consideration on 'assembling' and 'mutual adjustment' processes, are very useful in order to understand how different discourse coalitions, and different actors within a discourse coalition, can reach an agreement and a common understanding within decision-making processes such as international summits or conferences, multistakeholder fora, and so on.

In addition to these structural narrative elements, we consider a further element of storylines that is able to grasp also their substantive content. As we have described before, in every policy field, and particularly in emerging complex fields such as Internet Governance, actors select and emphasize some aspects of the social phenomenon addressed by a policy initiative in order to promote particular definitions of policy problems and solutions. In our case, relevant definitions concern the Internet itself, and Internet governance as a policy domain.

Summarizing, in this chapter we will conceive of storylines as analytically distinguished in:

- a. a set of basic definitions, that in the Internet Governance case consists of:
 - i. conceptions about the nature of the Internet
 - ii. definitions of the boundaries of the Internet Governance as a policy domain

- b. a cluster of structural elements defining the policy problem, composed of:
 - i. the problematic, that is the reason why a particular situation is conceived of as a problem.
 - ii. the identification of a social group of victims damaged by the problem
 - iii. the designation of the causes of the problem
 - iv. the characterization of the 'guilty party', that is, the group which is to be blamed for producing the problem
- c. a cluster of structural elements defining the policy solution, such as:
 - i. the action to take to solve the problem, that is the concrete policy instrument that actors desire to implement
 - ii. the supposed consequences of those actions
 - iii. the public of beneficiaries
 - iv. a legitimized authority responsible for the solution (corresponding to the 'hero' in narrative policy approaches').

Using this conceptual framework, we analyzed 78 written contributions to the WSIS+10 review process from actors belonging to five stakeholder groups (governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, and international organizations). We chose the WSIS+10 review process because, as mentioned above, the institutional dimension plays a very important role within discourse analysis. Discursive struggles do not arise in a social vacuum but take place within an institutional context (Hajer 1995, 60). Discursive orders are produced and reproduced through institutional practices, and one discourse could be considered hegemonic in a given domain when it is translated into institutional arrangements. We opted for the World Summit on the Information Society, inasmuch as it is one of the most important arenas in the IG ecosystem. Moreover, we focused on WSIS+10, the overall review process about the implementation and outcomes of ten years of WSIS activities, because it constitutes the most profitable opportunity in recent years to observe what Hajer calls 'interpellation', that is one of those moments when routine proceedings are interrupted, a dominant order can be contested, and competing discourses can arise.

The coding procedure was performed as follows:

- i. authors have jointly hand-coded definitions and structural elements of storylines described in this section within the selected documents
- ii. four main different sets of definitions and storylines have been identified within the documents and assembled into coherent discourses through a hermeneutic process

- iii. finally, each actor has been assigned to an ideal-typical discourse coalition on the basis of distinctive discursive elements represented in its documents

Lastly, we analyzed discursive interactions and negotiations that led to the WSIS+10 outcome to identify definitions and narratives that were successful in gaining place in the final resolution (A/RES/70/125).

THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY AND MULTISTAKEHOLDERISM AS AN INSTITUTIONALIZED DISCURSIVE ORDER

Before we proceed with the empirical analysis of WSIS+10 documents, it is necessary to briefly address the origin of the overall process and the main controversies it faced during one decade. Subsequently, we identify the main coalitions of actors that struggled inside this arena, and the discursive order that finally arose from discursive interaction.

The World Summit in Information Society is a process launched in 1998 by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a UN agency, which led to two international conferences, the first one in Geneva in 2003 and the second one in Tunis in 2005. Almost all scholars acknowledge it as a pivotal point in the history of Internet Governance, which steered toward a new governance model, and we add to a new discursive order: multistakeholderism (Hofmann 2007, Mueller 2010). Even if the summit concerned the broader concept of Information Society, Internet governance issues soon became one of the most contested and controversial topics in the preparatory phase. Two points raised the most of discussions and disagreements. The first one concerned the most proper governance arrangement for the Internet: Who should define policy for the whole Internet? What is the role of nation states, or more in general, of public authorities, in this process? The second contested point related to the boundaries of Internet Governance as a policy domain: should it include only technical matters, or should it be extended to the political and social implications of ICT developments? These two points have marked out Internet Governance debate since the early stages and seem to be strictly interconnected to each other.

As Mueller noted, controversies in Internet Governance have been characterized by the opposition between those who believe that Internet rules should arise from spontaneous cooperation and free adoption, following a 'networking' governance model, and those who believe that 'governance emerges from adherence to rules enforced by an authority' (Mueller 2010,

257). This opposition first came forward during the nineties, in the so-called Domain Name System (DNS) war (Kurbalija 2014), a struggle over the control of domain names and addresses. In that case, a coalition including the US government and ICT corporations defeated the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and a group of national governments that supported this UN agency by calling for a traditional intergovernmental governance arrangement based on international treaties. At the end, DNS was entrusted to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a private nonprofit organization under the oversight of the US government. This solution meant the consecration of the so-called ‘self-governance regime’ (Hofmann 2007) and the affirmation of a hegemonic ‘neoliberal discourse’ (Chenou 2014). Neoliberalists rely on a narrative representing a bottom-up, market-driven coordination, with a leading role of the private sector, as the best possible mode of governance for the Internet. It is worth noting that one of the most relevant arguments of the US-led coalition was based on the assumption of the purely technical nature of the Internet. Indeed, self-governance supporters argued that whereas the Internet is a fundamentally technical matter—entailing the management of a transnational and decentralized architecture—State intervention should be avoided because governments’ slow moving, bureaucratic, centralized approach would threaten the functioning of the Internet (Drake 2004).

During the preparatory phase of WSIS, a coalition of governments, gathering the BRIC and developing countries, questioned both these points. They rejected the usual narrow conception of Internet governance as limited to domain names, addresses, and protocols, and demanded the inclusion of issues such as digital divide, Internet access, interconnection costs, and cultural diversity. Moreover, they criticized the governance structure presented by ICANN, considering the overseeing role of the United States as unacceptable. These countries, usually defined as ‘sovereignist’ or ‘realists’ (Mueller, 2010) demanded effective, legally-binding decision-making processes at the global level, the enforcement of the Westphalian principle that states are equal in international law, and a substantial leadership of national governments and intergovernmental organizations in developing and ruling the Internet at the domestic level. Finally, a third coalition composed of civil society and international organizations raised its voice over human rights violations and called for rules and principles able to limit power abuses both by states and corporations, and to assure a wider participation in IG decision-making processes.

Tensions among actors, especially between sovereignists and neoliberals from governmental delegations, were intense and endangered the continuation of the summit. In the end, participants found an agreement on

the multistakeholder model of governance. Multistakeholderism first arose within the context of environmental policy arenas to indicate a ‘participatory turn’ in the global governance (Bäckstrand 2006), leading to new forms of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors. In short, ‘multistakeholderism entails two or more classes of actors engaged in a common governance enterprise concerning issues they regard as public in nature’ (Raymond and DeNardis 2015, 3). As observed by many scholars, within the WSIS process, multistakeholder governance constituted a compromise between the opposing options for private or public regulation of the Internet (Mansell 2007, Raymond and DeNardis 2015, Hofmann 2016).

The main outcomes of the WSIS process—the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Geneva Plan of Actions, the Final Report of the Working Group on Internet Governance, the Tunis Agenda for Information Society, and the Tunis Commitment—clearly show how an emerging discourse on

Table 4.1. Multistakeholder Discursive Order

<i>Basic Definitions</i>			
Conception of the Internet		Global facility available to the public	
Boundaries of Internet Governance		Technical and public issues, especially access and digital divide	
<i>Policy Problem</i>		<i>Policy Solution</i>	
Problematic	Improve participation Improve ICT development Reduce digital divide	Action to take	Multilateral, transparent and democratic governance, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations
Victims	Developing countries, people excluded by the Internet	Authority	All stakeholders in their role and responsibilities
Causes		Consequences	Better development of the Internet, and better exploitation of the Internet for developmental purposes; inclusion of marginalized groups
Guilty		Beneficiaries	Developing countries, people excluded by the Internet

Internet Governance was developed through ‘assembling’ and ‘mutual adjustment’ processes.

In fact, as shown in Table 4.1, these documents define the Internet as a ‘global facility available to the public’ that is a way to keep together both the ideas of the Internet as a commercial service and as a public good. Moreover, they extend the boundaries of IG, acknowledging that it ‘encompasses both technical and public policy issues’. Also, the documents refer to the necessity to improve participation and to reduce digital divide as the main problematic of Internet Governance. Developing countries and marginalized groups are identified as the public of victims in the Information Society. The documents do not clearly identify the causes of the problem or the ‘party of guilt’, and this is a clear sign of the will to avoid politicization and further diplomatic disputes.

On the side of policy solutions, all these documents propose to develop forms of coordination among stakeholders. In so doing, they recognize governments, private sector, civil society, and international organizations as equally legitimate participants in the management of the Internet, each one in its respective ‘role and responsibilities’. WSIS outcomes assign a special role to governments in dealing with international public policy issues (as sovereignists had claimed), but not in the ‘day-to-day technical and operational matters, that do not impact on international public policy issues’ (as requested by neoliberals).

It is worth noting that, in WSIS’ multistakeholderism, participation is conceptualized as a principle for a purely informative model of policymaking, where there is no place for any form of binding decision. Par. 72 of the Tunis Agenda that called on the UN Secretary-General to establish an ad-hoc institution—the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)—is emblematic of this point. The Agenda in fact depicted IGF as a ‘forum for multi-stakeholder *policy dialogue*’, whose mandate is ‘to *identify* and *discuss* public policy issues, *facilitate* discourse and the exchange of information and best practices, advise stakeholders and enhance their engagement’ (emphasis in italics is ours).

It is a very ‘different approach compared to the more outcome-oriented notions [of multistakeholderism] common in other policy fields’ (Hofmann 2016, 35). Thus, although the outcomes of the WSIS process adopted most of the claims made by sovereignists and civil society groups; the concrete governance arrangements they designed did not put into question the neoliberal status quo. Moreover, the agreement between the two sides was favored by a high degree of ambiguity. As many scholars have underlined, ambiguity ‘blur or hide problematic implication of decisions’ and ‘allow participants to read themselves in collective programmes and actions’ (Fischer 2003, 63, see also Stone 1998, 2002; Zittoun 2014, Cobb and Elder 1983). In this case,

crucial elements as roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders were not well defined, and a pivotal expression such as ‘day-to-day technical and operational matters that do not impact on international public policy issues’ left ample room for interpretation.

Despite these limitations, or precisely because of them, the shift toward a multistakeholder model of governance received a broad consensus, it raised enthusiastic expectations and it rapidly spread in other important IG institutions, including ICANN itself (Hofmann 2016). Multistakeholderism became the dominant discursive order in WSIS environments (and more generally in the broader Internet governance ecosystem) fulfilling the criteria of structuration and institutionalization of a discourse within a policy domain as discussed above. Indeed, almost all actors accepted the categories of the multistakeholderist discourse to refer and give meaning to the ‘Internet Governance’ phenomena and those categories solidified in WSIS organizational practices.

Nevertheless, the wide consensus surrounding multistakeholderism does not mean that Internet Governance has turned into an appeased field.

Rather, it should be considered true what Hajer observed about environmentalism: when all parts declare to be ‘Green’ it means that the conflict has become fully discursive and based on interpretation and definitional struggles. Similarly, multistakeholderism is supposed to work as a discursive umbrella under which different discursive coalitions fight each other to impose their own definition of the basic terms of the matter. The ambiguity of the WSIS final statements, on the one hand, facilitated compromise, but on the other, it kept several points of contention still open (Palladino and Santaniello 2021).

In the next paragraph, we are going to observe how different discursive coalitions exploited the possibility offered by the WSIS+10 review process—which started ten years after the Tunis WSIS—to impose their own narratives in order to redefine the meaning of some pivotal elements of the multistakeholder discursive order.

WSIS+10: RECONSTRUCTING DISCOURSE COALITIONS

Paragraph 111 of the Tunis Agenda asked the UN General Assembly to undertake the overall review of the implementation of the WSIS outcomes in 2015. In response, the General Assembly with resolution n.68/302 decided that the overall review would be preceded by an intergovernmental process taking into account inputs from all relevant stakeholders of the World Summit on the Information Society. Its main output was a draft approved by the General Assembly as a resolution on 16 December 2015 (A/RES/70/125).

Table 4.2. Discourse Coalitions in WSIS+10

<i>Neoliberals</i>	United States(gov), Australia(gov), Canada(gov), European Union(gov), Japan(gov), Netherlands(gov), Poland (gov), ICC(ps), AfICTA(ps), IGC(ps), JBF(ps), JISA(ps), Telefonica (ps), Public Knowledge(cs), LIRNEasia(cs), WIPO(io), ICANN(ta), IEEE(ta), ISOC(ta), JPRS(ta), RIRS(ta)
<i>Sovereignists</i>	China(gov), G77(gov), Russian Federation(gov), Egypt(gov), India(gov), Saudi Arabia(gov), Brazil(gov), Indonesia(gov), Iran(gov), Cuba (gov), ACNU(cs),
<i>Constitutionalists</i>	Access(cs), APC(cs), APIG(cs), ASEBE(cs), CDT(cs), CIS(cs), GPD(cs), IDP(cs), IRCP(cs), Justnet(cs), UNESCO (io), 4s(ta), CST-FVG(ta)
<i>Developmentists</i>	Argentina(gov), ASIS(gov), Asabe Sheu Yar'Adua Foundation (cs), Republic of Korea(gov), Paraguay(gov), Mexico(gov), Sri Lanka(gov), Azerbaijan(gov), Columbia(gov), Kenya(gov), ASDF(cs), FESF(cs), Huan Health(cs), IFLA(cs), OCCAM(cs), SEMANTIS (cs), ELAC(io), FAO(io), CDEUNDP (io), UNWOMEN(io), INDIANINSTITUTE(ta)
<i>Not Assigned</i>	25th Century Tecnology Limited (ps), Ark Earth Foundation (ps), Ec-Medici Framework (cs), ESCWA(nd), FANCV (nd), GLOBALFUND (nd), JPNIC (ta), OCCAM (cs), Pasa (cs), Switzerland (gov), TKEB (ps), Turkey(gov), Worldview Mission (nd)

Stakeholder groups: Government (gov), Private Sector (ps), Civil Society (cs), International Organization (io), Technical-Academic Community (ta), Not Declared (nd)

The WSIS+10 review process was another opportunity for actors to dispute Internet Governance problems trying to persuade each other, and to reach their own favorite policy outcomes. In this paragraph, we are going to illustrate the discourse coalitions we traced back following the methodology described in section 2. In particular, we identified four discourse coalitions in the WSIS+10 review process (Table 4.2): Neoliberal, Sovereignist, Constitutional, Developmentist.

Only fourteen submissions out of 78 were not assigned to any discourse coalition, mainly due to either their high level of ambiguity or their scarce salience for IG. It should be noted that some relevant actors in the WSIS process, such as Switzerland and the ITU, are not assigned to any coalition as their storylines fully adhere to the multistakeholder discursive order presented in Table 4.1, and they avoid using definitions and narratives which are distinctive of one or another particular coalition.

Moreover, we reconstruct the way through which actors reached an agreement on the outcome in order to investigate mutual adjustments among actors and the elements upon which the agreement was built.²

The Neoliberal Coalition

The neoliberal discourse coalition (Table 4.3) includes the national governments of the United States and developed countries, private sector associations and technical communities, and some civil society associations. Its conception of the Internet interlaces technical and economic aspects, as testified by the contribution of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), according to which the Internet rests on ‘technical standards developed in an open, market-driven paradigm . . . these standards are voluntarily adopted and their success is determined in the marketplace’. Moreover, governments of the neoliberal coalition often recall the open, global and interoperable nature of the Internet, where the reference to these elements has the function to warn other actors against any attempt to create alternative DNS and root zones, which would lead to a detrimental fragmentation or balkanization of the Internet. They also stress the importance of the private sector in the development of the Internet and underline the role of the market in fostering technological innovation. It is worth noting that the neoliberal coalition identifies as its own public of victims marginalized groups, minorities, and developing countries excluded from the social and economic benefits of the Internet. That is the same ‘public of victim’ depicted by the BRIC and other developing countries in their criticism of the US unilateralism during the preparatory phase of the first WSIS in 2003.

Table 4.3. Neoliberal Discourse Coalition

<i>Basic Definitions</i>			
Conception of the Internet		Global facility with technical standards developed in an open, market-driven paradigm	
Boundaries of Internet Governance		Both technical and public policy issues	
<i>Policy Problem</i>		<i>Policy Solution</i>	
Problematic	Development of the Internet	Action to take	Liberalization, light regulatory frameworks, low taxation, intellectual property protection
Victims	People excluded by Internet access	Authority	Public Private Partnership
Causes	Regulatory bottlenecks, protectionist policies	Consequences	Spur innovation and access
Guilty	States, Intergovernmental organizations	Beneficiaries	People excluded by Internet access

Nevertheless, at the same time, neoliberals define governments as the 'guilty party' that restrains Internet penetration by establishing legal barriers for private investments and protectionist policies. Indeed, we can read in the US contribution: 'One impediment to the build out and expansion of ICT networks and technologies is the existence of national and local policies that stifle or outright prohibit innovation and investment, including policies that forfeit progress to protect outdated, twentieth-century technologies, increase the power of governments, and/or restrict the free flow of information'. The replacement of the problematic of Internet governance formulated by their opponents (access, digital divide, and development issues) with its supposed causes (protectionist policies and regulatory bottlenecks) allows this coalition to fully deploy a typical neoliberal agenda at the core of the WSIS+10 review process. Thus, the proposed solution to face these problems is to protect the leading role of non-governmental actors in existing governance structures and promote market-friendly policies. Moreover, such arguments are employed to redefine and limit the role and responsibilities of governments to the creation of an 'enabling environment' for ICT development, one of the tasks that the Geneva Action Plan assigned to them. From the neoliberal point of view, such an enabling environment consists in the public support for private investments and market competition. It includes a 'light touch', 'predictable' and 'non-discriminatory' regulatory framework, low taxation, intellectual property protection, and further privatizations. From the neoliberal perspective, such policies should let 'the private sector to continue to drive innovation to bring the Internet promise to more communities, and to help communities that are already online to take the better advantage of that access' (International Chamber of Commerce). Neoliberals firmly reject any form of internationalization and intergovernmental arrangements of Internet governance, recalling classic commonplaces on governmental inefficiency: 'the creation of new intergovernmental authorities or institutions to regulate the Internet would also result in rigid procedures, bureaucracy, political stalemate, and wasted time, which could stifle the innovation needed to develop solutions' (US). The coalition uses these arguments also to set some limits on the WSIS process itself. For example, the US government asserts that WSIS 'should avoid seeking to resolve ICT policy issues which are being addressed in other, more appropriate fora or re-opening issues concluded elsewhere'. That is a way to strengthen the status-quo and the leading position of ICANN in the management of Internet critical resources. Finally, neoliberals present the Internet development as a successful story based on private entrepreneurship and self-regulation that should be continued in the usual way.

The Sovereigntist Coalition

The sovereigntist coalition (Table 4.4) includes BRIC countries (Russian Federation, China, India, Brazil), the G77³, and some other developing countries. The coalition does not propose any specific conception of the Internet. Rather, they strategically refer to the broader definition of ‘people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society’. The emphasis on people, inclusion and development is useful to recall governments responsibilities, and to support the aim to bring back the Internet in the common field of other telecommunication systems, such as telephone, radio, and satellites, which are usually under intergovernmental regulation. Indeed, in

Table 4.4. Sovereigntist Discourse Coalition

<i>Basic Definitions</i>			
Conception of the Internet		People-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society; National strategic asset	
Boundaries of Internet Governance		Technical and public issues, especially security	
<i>Policy Problem</i>		<i>Policy Solution</i>	
Problematic	Inequalities, Exclusion, Impossibility for States to fulfill their responsibility in existing governance arrangements	Action to take	Intergovernmental management
Victims	Developing countries, population excluded by Internet access and benefits	Authority	Governments
Causes	Exclusion of governments by the technical management of the Internet	Consequences	Better development of the Internet, and better exploitation of the Internet for development purposes; inclusion of marginalized groups; strengthening of citizens and users' security
Guilty	Private sector management, US unilateralism, terrorists, and security breachers	Beneficiaries	Developing countries, people excluded by the Internet

their view, the Internet, as other telecommunication systems, is above all a national strategic asset that states must control to guarantee the wellness of their respective populations. For the same reason, this coalition particularly stresses security issues, much more than other coalitions. Sovereignists claim that states have the mandatory duty to safeguard the security of networks, of their citizens and the public order. The IG problematic is based on inequalities and exclusion, and the public of victims consists of all marginalized and disadvantaged groups excluded from the benefits of the Internet. However, they highlight that the ‘vast majority of people that remain as yet unconnected, including people with disabilities, to the Internet reside in developing countries’ (G77 and China). Thus, they tend to present the developing countries themselves as the main victims. The coalition identifies the cause of the problem in the exclusion or marginalization of national governments of developing countries in the existing governance mechanisms. Sovereignists complain that recommendations enshrined in the Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda—which called for full involvement of governments in Internet governance—had not been implemented yet, making it difficult to address Internet-related problems. The US unilateralism in Internet governance appears as the main ‘guilty party’. Indeed, several coalitions’ members recall that article 46 of the Geneva Declaration of Principles calls states to ‘the avoidance of, and refrain from, any unilateral measure not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impedes the full achievement of economic and social development by the population of the affected countries, and that hinders the well-being of their population’. However, the US government is never mentioned directly. Regarding the policy solutions proposed, we could observe two similar but different positions in this coalition. Both call for:

- i. effective acknowledgment of States’ sovereignty on Internet public policy and management
- ii. full respect of the principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter, particularly the political independence, territorial integrity and sovereign equality of states, and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other states
- iii. a leading role of the United Nation or its agencies (especially ITU) in the internationalization of Internet governance.

These two positions differ in relation to the conception of the role of states in multistakeholder governance. China and the G77 demand the strengthening of governments in multistakeholder institutions (above all ICANN), in order to ensure ‘equal participation’ of all stakeholders, ‘reasonable

allocation of Internet resources, and joint management of key Internet infrastructure'. According to the G77, 'multistakeholder model should not be lopsided, and any tendency to place sole emphasis on the role of businesses and non-governmental organizations while marginalizing governments should be avoided'. These governments are asking for a 'participation on an equal footing' with other stakeholders in the technical management of the Internet critical resources, as well as a leading role of governments and intergovernmental decision-making processes on some other public policy issues, especially security-related ones. Instead, the Russian Federation calls for a leading role of governments even in the management of Internet critical resources. Indeed, the Russian contribution refers to a 'process of gradual transfer of control over the domain names and IP addresses allocation functions towards the international control under the auspices of the United Nations (or its specialized organization)'. Moreover, Russia pushes for a full localization of Internet resources, even at cost of fragmentation, as in the case of data centers and hosting servers: 'we call upon States to implement the storage of personal data of their citizens inside the territory of their own countries, to place domestic servers serving national segments of the Internet and to develop other elements of the critical Internet infrastructure'.

The Constitutionalist Coalition

The constitutionalist coalition (Table 4.5) includes several civil society associations, UNESCO, and the academic community. It should be noted the absence of any governmental or private sector actors. The constitutionalist conception of the Internet recalls both the definition of Information Society as 'people-centered, development-oriented inclusive' and the definition of the Internet as a 'global resource which should be managed in the public interest'. Some members of the coalition propose a little variation: 'Internet is a global public good, which must be managed in the interests of all the world's peoples' (JustNet, Association for Progressive Communication). Even if the sovereigntist coalition adopted the same definition of Information Society and some sovereigntist governments referred to the Internet as a public resource, it should be noted that for constitutionalists these words have a different meaning. Sovereignists refer to people, public resources, and public interest to legitimize national and intergovernmental public authorities. Instead, constitutionalists, through these words, refer to net-citizenry, net-citizens' rights, and true democratic processes. Indeed, constitutionalists identify the main problem of Internet governance in 'a lack of democracy; an absence of legitimacy, accountability and transparency; excessive corporate influence and regulatory capture; and too few opportunities for effective participation

Table 4.5. Constitutional Discourse Coalition Storyline

<i>Basic Definitions</i>			
Conception of the Internet		Global public good, which must be managed in the interests of all the world's peoples	
Boundaries of Internet Governance		Technical and public issues, especially fundamental rights	
<i>Policy Problem</i>		<i>Policy Solution</i>	
Problematic	Net-Citizenship and power abuses	Action to take	Constitutionalize the internet; participatory policy-making to promote people's control of social technologies
Victims	People, citizens or net-citizens	Authority	International Human Rights Law; UN; Ad hoc independent authorities.
Causes	Lack of democracy and participation; absence of legitimacy, accountability and transparency; excessive corporate influence and regulatory capture	Consequences	Limits to power concentration and abuses, empowerment of citizens
Guilty	Private corporations and national governments	Beneficiaries	People, citizens or net-citizens

by people' (Association for Proper Internet Governance). According to them, such distortions in governance arrangements have led to an unacceptable concentration of power in the hands of corporations and governments that has amplified pre-existing inequalities and allowed systemic human rights violations. For instance, the Internet Democracy Project denounces that the 'development of the information society has by default served first and foremost the interests of big corporations and governments, rather than those of users and people in general'. Constitutionalists point at 'commercial exploitation of personal data' and at an expansive use of intellectual property laws and policies that led 'to an unjust allocation of information goods', thus restraining innovation and development (Centre for Internet and Society). APC adds: 'states and businesses around the world are complicit in acts of communications surveillance that constitute violations of the right to privacy and other rights, including through legal frameworks, businesses practices,

and even the provision of public services'. In this storyline, thus, governments and private sectors clearly act as the 'guilty party' whereas the public of victims consists of 'people', 'citizens' or 'net-citizens'. Nevertheless, among the victims we can also find developing countries, marginalized and disadvantaged groups just like in other coalitions, but in the constitutionalist discourse coalition a special attention is paid to the situation of journalists, bloggers, political oppositions, and rights defenders threatened by surveillance and censorship. To solve these problems, the members of this coalition propose a series of provisions that, conceived as a whole, could represent an attempt to constitutionalize the Internet. Indeed, their claims reflect the main principles of the classic doctrine of constitutionalism, even if the concept is never explicitly mentioned in their contributions: i) to limit power concentration ii) to safeguard people from power abuses iii) to empower citizens (Sartori 2000). Most of this coalition's members use their submissions in order to call for:

- i. the implementation and enforcement of international human rights law
- ii. the full respect of the rule of law
- iii. inclusive, democratic, transparent and accountable Internet governance processes and participatory policymaking to promote people's control of social technologies.

Anyway, in most of the contributions by constitutionalists, such proposals remained as unspecified as mere declarations of principles. Nevertheless, some members advanced more detailed and applicable measures. The association Access Now suggested the inclusion of the net neutrality principle in national legislations. The Association for Progressive Communication called for the establishment of an independent judicial body responsible for decisions on limitations of the freedom of expression online. The Association for Proper Internet Governance (APIG) and JustNet called for treaty-level provisions, under the oversight of the UN and the ITU, that should bind states to the respect of fundamental rights, especially in the field of cybersecurity. JustNet, moreover, proposed to resort to international treaties also to reform ICANN, strengthening its political accountability and adherence to internationally agreed norms and policies.

The Developmentist Coalition

This coalition (Table 4.6) consists of governments of developing and least developed countries, civil society associations and international organizations concerned with developmental issues and programs. This coalition appears

Table 4.6. Developmentist Discourse Coalition

<i>Basic Definitions</i>			
Conception of the Internet		Driver for social and economic development	
Boundaries of Internet Governance		Technical and public issues	
<i>Policy Problem</i>		<i>Policy Solution</i>	
Problematic	ICT for developmental purposes; Reduction of technological gaps	Action to take	Aid, funding, technological transfer, capacity building programs
Victims	Developing Countries	Authority	UN, International community
Causes	Lack of resources and capability	Consequences	Fill the gap with developed countries
Guilty		Beneficiaries	Developing countries

as the least sophisticated one within the WSIS process. Its discourse is not fully developed. The coalition members share a common understanding of the Internet as a ‘leverage’ or ‘driver’ for social and economic development. They focus on ICT development policies in addition to access and digital divide issues, but they do not address the question of Internet governance, neither to legitimize current arrangements, nor to criticize them. When some members pay attention to Internet governance, they reveal a very narrow and uncritical view, just claiming for a wider inclusion of developing countries in current governance mechanisms but without calling into question governance structures, outcomes, or efficiency. Rather, developmentists certify their digital gap with the developed world and blame their insufficient resources and expertise as the causes. Consequently, they appeal to the international community, especially UN agencies, for support and cooperation, and particularly for funding, technological transfers, and capacity-building programs.

The WSIS+10 Outcome: Toward A New Discursive Order?

In this last paragraph, we analyze the discursive interactions and negotiations that led to the WSIS+10 outcome—the resolution A/RES/70/125. What kind of mutual adjustments among discourse coalitions took place? Which discourse coalition was the most successful in imposing its own points of view? Did this final statement bring forth a new discursive order as Geneva and Tunis outputs did ten years ago? Unfortunately, we cannot answer these questions by resorting to written documents that could give testimony of changes in actors’ positions during the drafting process, since transcripts and

Table 4.7. Outcome Storyline (United Nations Resolution 70/125)

<i>Basic Definitions</i>			
Conception of the Internet		Global Facility Driver for social and economic development	
Boundaries of Internet Governance		Technical and public issues	
<i>Policy Problem</i>		<i>Policy Solution</i>	
Problematic	Improve cooperation to face challenges	Action to take	Improve cooperation in respective roles and responsibilities
Victims	Developing countries, marginalized groups, users confidence and security	Authority	Private Sector (for technical management) States (for cybersecurity)
Causes		Consequences	Inclusive information society, building confidence and security
Guilty	Terrorists	Beneficiaries	Developing countries, marginalized groups, users' confidence and security

minutes of the last meetings—where the drafts have been negotiated—were not disclosed⁴. However, we can observe how draft content has changed until the approved resolution, to trace which contributions were embedded in the outcomes at each stage of the review process.

During the first steps of the drafting process, sovereigntist and constitutionalist claims seemed to meet a growing acceptance. The former obtained some acknowledgements about the idea of Internet Governance as a ‘multi-lateral’ process and about the need to preserve the main principles of international law, such as political independence, territorial integrity, sovereign equality of states, and non-interference in domestic affairs of other states. The constitutionalist coalition gained a clear stance in favor of the protection of the net neutrality principle, and a call for an international convention on cybercrime that should bind states to the respect of human rights. All these points disappeared from the final text, and the outcome turned decisively toward neoliberal positions.

Moreover, if we consider the storyline of the final resolution (Table 4.7), we can observe how the Internet is defined as a ‘global facility’. Compared with the definition of the Internet contained in the outcomes of WSIS

2003-2005, the absence of any reference to the ‘public’ testifies the success of the neoliberal discourse coalition in the definition setting.

The public of victims includes once again developing countries, their population and marginalized groups excluded by the benefits of the Information Society, but also users threatened in their confidence and security. As ten years before, the statement avoids identifying a specific problematic for the Internet Governance, or causes and guilty parties, with the notable exception of ‘terrorist’ and ‘cyber-criminal’ that are explicitly blamed and condemned. Rather, the resolution prefers to talk about ‘challenges’ that require an improvement of cooperation among stakeholders. Put in these terms, the Internet Governance problematic is functional to describe the current multi-stakeholder governance arrangements and the last ten years of WSIS activity as a story of success, which then must be confirmed and improved in order to achieve old and new goals. Indeed, the final statement repeatedly reaffirms the support for the principles of multistakeholderism, for the cooperation among stakeholders in their respective roles and responsibilities as established in the Tunis Agenda. The excerpt where governments were explicitly excluded by the day-to-day technical and operational matters is absent, but paragraph 55, just at the beginning of the section dedicated to Internet Governance, states: ‘We recognize that the existing arrangements have worked effectively to make the Internet the highly robust, dynamic and geographically diverse medium that it is today, with the private sector taking the lead in day-to-day operations and with innovation and value creation at the edges.’ Furthermore, the emphasis on security concerns represents the major innovation of the WSIS+10 compared with previous WSIS outcomes, and also the field where national governments gained a prominent role. Par.50, for example, assigns to governments the leading role in cybersecurity. Par.53 calls upon ‘Member States to intensify efforts to build robust domestic security in information and communications technologies and the use thereof, consistent with their international obligations and domestic law . . . in combating the criminal misuse of the technologies and preventing the use of technology, communications and resources for criminal or terrorist purposes’.

Despite appearances, the acknowledgment of an important role for governments in security matters does not constitute a concession to sovereigntists. Rather, it could be considered as a meeting point between the two most important discourse coalitions of the WSIS+10—the neoliberal and the sovereigntist one—whose leading governments have always been asserting their own sovereignty on security issues, with no substantial difference between the US and China or Russia. The other two alternative discourse coalitions—the constitutionalist and the developmentist ones—have instead obtained nothing more than some symbolic acknowledgements in the final

outcome. Constitutionalists gained just a generic commitment toward the respect of international human rights law and the condemnation of surveillance practices, but without the provision of any implementing mechanisms. Furthermore any arrangements intended to make the governance system more democratic and accountable to people were never really considered during the drafting process. Developmentists obtained just a generic commitment to support ICT development in developing countries, but no concrete financial or fiscal mechanism.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study we have addressed global Internet governance from the point of view of discursive struggles engaged by several coalitions around controversial issues. We have identified four discourse coalitions through an analysis of contributions submitted to the preparatory phase of the 2015 WSIS+10 review process. Our analysis testifies how actually several actors belonging to different stakeholder groups (governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, international organizations), even in absence of previous and structured forms of coordination, could be traced back to a limited number of discourse coalitions. Indeed, almost all actors shared some discursive elements that can be attributed to a specific discourse among the neoliberal, sovereigntist, constitutionalist or developmentist ones. This means that Internet Governance domain and controversies are structured by the tension between these discourses, and that actors reproduce these tensions in their discursive interactions. Moreover, although the Internet Governance domain appears to be dominated by a widely accepted multistakeholder discursive order, we observed how the four discourse coalitions tenaciously struggled to redefine the meaning of some basic terms of the multistakeholderist discourse. Each coalition developed narrative strategies in order to legitimize its favored policy output and to define power positions by blaming their opponents and affirming its own authority or legitimacy. One of the most intense definitional struggles concerned the role and responsibility of different stakeholders. This point seems to make evident that the Internet multistakeholder governance model has not soothed conflicts regarding the role of public authorities, which has been one of the most debated controversies in Internet Governance since its very beginning. Furthermore, our study leads to the conclusion that not all discourse coalitions have equal political weight within the multistakeholder order. The neoliberal coalition appears to be more proficient than others in advancing its own policy solutions within the process, even in a process led by intergovernmental organizations as the one

we are analyzing. Of course, extra-discursive power resources play a relevant role in this scenario, but we can affirm that neoliberals exerted a discursive hegemony in the WSIS +10 review process. This hegemony can be detected in a discursive mechanism through which the neoliberal discourse coalition was capable of co-opting discursive elements from other coalitions, integrating them within its own narratives. Examples of this mechanism, as we have noticed in our analysis, are those of access and digital divide, that were used to bridge the neoliberal and the developmentist discourses in the attempt of providing neoliberal solutions to a developmental problem, i.e., removing protectionist policies and regulatory bottlenecks.

Concluding, this study highlights the crucial role of definitions and narratives in shaping global policy processes. The case of the WSIS+10 review process demonstrates that discourse coalitions tend to emerge in policy arenas where different kinds of actors are involved and that processes of meaning-making are valuable resources used by actors in their policy and diplomatic struggles.

NOTES

1. The structural elements composing policy problems and policy solutions are largely drawn by Zittoun, 2014.

2. All actors' submissions for the WSIS+10 preparatory phase are available at <https://publicadministration.un.org/ws10/nonpapersubmissions> (Accessed June 11, 2021)

3. The Group of 77 (G77) at the United Nations is a coalition of non-aligned developing countries founded in 1964, to promote its members' collective economic interests and create an enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the United Nations.

4. The preparatory process roadmap can be found here: <https://publicadministration.un.org/ws10/roadmap/ws10/roadmap>