ICTs for a Global Civil Society

Spring 2011, markus.sabadello@gmail.com

> *"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."*
> *-- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Abstract

Having always been closely linked to the ideal of peace, the concept of civil society has a long history as a third actor besides the state and the economy. It is a nonviolent "zone of civility" that can debate and address war and other problems. In today's interconnected world we see the emergence of a "global civil society", which transcends national borders and attempts to solve global challenges that established political and economic structures fail to address. This global civil society is organized like a network, just like the global communication systems that produced it are also organized like a network. However, while popular social network services such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are often said to be powerful tools for peace and democracy, they are in fact highly centralized services operated by for-profit companies. For a global civil society to truly work, both the architectural structure and the governance mechanisms of its communication channels must themselves be based on civil society principles.

Contents

1. Introduction

The widespread availability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has led to the globalization process and continues to have a large influence on social, economic, political and cultural structures around the world. Much work has been done in the academia to get to a good scientific understanding of the causes, nature and consequences of today's interconnected world[1], and to analyze both opportunities and threats that ICTs pose to humankind. The Internet and related technologies have often been described as neutral tools, which can be used for either good or evil (following Freud's concepts of *Eros* and *Thanatos* as the two opposing driving factors within the human soul). We should of course always be optimistic and primarily see the positive potential of ICTs and how they can be used to promote a better and more peaceful world. During the opening ceremony of the World Summit on the Information Society's second phase in 2005 in Tunis, the then Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan articulated the desire to use ICTs for working toward the ideal of peace.

He declared that

> *"While most other conferences focus on global threats, this one will tell us how to best use a new global asset".*

In a similar manner, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated in her "Remarks on Internet Freedom"[2] in 2010 that

> *"Once you're on the internet, you don't need to be a tycoon or a rock star to have a huge impact on society."*

And during the LeWeb'09 in Paris, Queen Rania Al Abdullah of the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan said that

> *"Digitizing ourselves has heightened our instinct to be selfless."*

Indeed, ICTs can be used in numerous ways to promote a more just, democratic and peaceful world. They can be used by governments, international organizations and NGOs to perform their important work more effectively. They can be used as organizational

---

[1] For example, see (Castells, 2000)

[2] See http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm

tools by nonviolent, popular movements to overcome authoritarian regimes. They can be used to provide education and specialized knowledge in underprivileged regions and parts of society. They can be used for economic opportunities and for development, in order to improve living conditions and the overall well-being of humans.

But besides the above rather obvious ideas, most importantly, ICTs also empower individuals all around the world to connect to each other, to engage in dialogue, to learn from each other and about each other, to build peace in the minds of individuals, to overcome cultural differences and to discuss and solve global challenges. In short, ICTs are the key enabling factor for a global civil society which transcends national borders.

2. The Prince, the Merchant and the Citizen

The concept of civil society refers to the social space in which individuals and groups of individuals who are unaffiliated with hierarchical state structures and market-based economic structures take collective action in order to advocate their shared values and interests. In doing so, they act not because they seek political power or profit, but because they care enough about something. They legitimize themselves purely out of their values and actions. This idea may be best described using the metaphors of the Prince (representing the state), the Merchant (representing the economy) and the Citizen, who represents the ideas and actions of citizens outside of either state or economy. Civil society can consist of individuals or it can manifest in informal groups of people or social movements, but also in a large variety of concrete institutional forms such as registered charities, NGOs, churches, independent media, sports organizations, trade unions or self-help groups. Those entities interact with each other in many different ways, and they vary in their degree of formality, interconnectedness and influence.

There is no universally accepted definition of civil society. Often, definitions are formulated based on structural or behavioral aspects of civil society, rather than in a normative way. (Nerfin, 1987) calls it a "third system", which in an "endless effort for emancipation in history" does not seek governmental or economic power, but rather its own autonomous power vis-à-vis both the state and the economy. According to (Kaldor, 2003, pp. 3, 7), civil society has always been linked to peace, being a "societas civilis", a zone of civility in which violence has been minimized, in contrast to states which

3

historically have often had a war-making function. In this sense, civil society may not be a solution for the problem of war, but it is a way of debating and addressing the issues leading to this problem. For Hegel, civil society was the "achievement of the modern age", for Marx, it was the "theatre of history", and for Vaclav Havel, it was the "universality of human rights to allow us to fulfill our potential in all our roles".

The emergence of civil society has deep roots in the desire to establish a context of autonomy and a private sphere beyond the reach of an overly powerful state[3]. Out of this desire, a public sphere emerges, which (Habermas, 1962) describes as having the role of mediating between the private sphere (the family) and a public authority (the state). This public space in which the actors of civil society operate is an arena which is open to anyone, a place where diverse interests collide and compete for attention, and engage in discourse and consensus-building processes. This concept of a public sphere goes back to emancipatory ideas from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as well as early civil rights documents such as the American *Bill of Rights* and the French *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*.

The relationships between the state, economy and civil society are complex. The boundaries are often blurred rather than sharply defined. There is competition within as well as between them. The three actors also have obligations toward each other. In the relationship between the Merchant and the Citizen, it can be argued that the role of the former is to provide economic freedom as a prerequisite of individual freedom, while the role of the latter is to ensure a fair distribution of goods and resources. The relationship between the Prince and the Citizen is also interesting. The role of the Prince is to provide a fertile public sphere by guaranteeing the basic human rights of freedom of expression and privacy, the rule of law, as well as an open discourse and the fair competition between ideas, and the role of the Citizen is to ensure the maintenance of a democratic society. This task consists of much more than just going to elections[4], it also includes making active contributions to democratic processes. Therefore, while the

---

[3] In the case of Eastern Europe, it was the experience of state activity penetrating into every aspect of social life, and the resulting non-existence of a private sphere, which has led to the rise of civil society and ultimately the 1989 revolutions.

[4] In fact, so-called "democratic states" can be very undemocratic, for example as seen by the rise of the Nazis during the Weimar Republic.

objective of civil society is not to take over state or economic power, it does have the important controlling function to ask questions, voice concerns and provide input to a state's political process and an economy's market practices, therefore sharing responsibility, and improving accountability and transparency.

The key requirement for the state, economy and civil society to work with each other in a beneficial way is balance. All three players in this system will in the ideal case be equally strong, mutually benefit from each other and guarantee a democratic and just society, however each one has their own special interests, and therefore care must be taken when any one of them becomes too dominant. The Prince seeks to maximize power, the Merchant seeks to maximize money, and the Citizen may seek to maximize citizenship rights which could lead to the undemocratic exclusion of non-citizens.

In the imperative quest to maintain balance between the three it is also important to mention that not all seemingly independent initiatives necessarily constitute civil society. For example, sometimes "fake" NGOs are intentionally set up by actors of the political or economic realm in order to create the illusion of civil society support for their respective intentions[5]. To identify such attempts, a critical discourse and a diverse set of communication channels can help. Also, it is important to note that even actors which are clearly placed outside of the state and the economy do not necessarily constitute civil society. They only qualify as long as their discourse is based on democratic values and rules, otherwise the proper term to apply would be non-civil society (e.g. terrorist organizations).

To summarize, the concept of civil society is characterized by self-organization, self-motivation, spontaneity, pluralism, by its independence from but interaction with state and economy, by its aspiration to freedom and democracy, and by the public sphere in which its discourse and nonviolent action take place.

3. Global Crisis

One reason for the contemporary popularity of the concept of civil society is that it is accompanied by hopes that it can address a perceived global crisis, the solution to which

---

[5] This practice of giving the appearance of a "grassroots" movement is sometimes called "astroturfing", in reference to the AstroTurf synthetic carpeting which looks like natural grass.

requires the establishment of new processes at the global level. Early well-known predictions and analyses hinting at this emerging global crisis include the Club of Rome's reports on the "limits of growth"[6] and on "mankind at the turning point"[7]. Since history is full of conflict and peace, problems and solutions, crises and recoveries, it might be debatable whether humankind at this particular time is indeed confronted with a global crisis that is of a significantly greater magnitude than others at other times in history. But issues such as global warming, transnational terrorism and the financial crisis do indicate that today, we as a species are for the first time confronted with highly threatening problems that we can only attempt to solve together.

According to (Nerfin, 1987), this "general crisis" can be traced back to a predominant "white, Western, Christian and elitist" world view at the founding of the United Nations in 1945, which is since being challenged by a "great awakening" of the Third World. He describes this crisis to be based on unequal exchange and hegemony, and argues that it is "at the same time economic, financial, environmental, social, cultural, ideological and political, as well as one of security".

There is a wide range of predictions and proposals on what will happen as a result of the global crisis, or what could be done to cope with it. Immanuel Wallerstein in (Miszlivetz, 2010) explains that "systems of any kind always move away from equilibrium, but there are usually elements that push it back to it", and that "if those elements are not strong enough, the system fluctuates and finds itself at a bifurcation". He goes on to predict social struggle from which either the "Spirit of Davos" or the "Spirit of Porto Alegre" will emerge as a new order.

(Held, Kaldor, & Quah, 2010) even speak of a "hydra-headed crisis", arguing that individual catastrophic events such as the Haiti earthquake, the famine in East Africa, the Taliban attack on Kabul, the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the Boxing Day Tsunami or Hurricane Katrina are brought to our attention at a such quick, successive way that it appears as if new ones pop up as soon as another disappears. To some extent, the evolution of modern ICTs has simply led to the fact that today we are more aware of such events than in the past. But ICTs have also resulted in a fundamental

---

[6] See (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & William, 1972)

[7] See (Mesarovic & Pestel, 1974)

transformation of our political, economic and social relations that may very well be the root cause of some of the individual crises that make up the global one.

One possible interpretation of the global crisis is that it is a crisis of values, that it is radical individualism and materialism in the Western world – reinforced by the widespread availability of ICTs – which are the root causes for many of today's global problems. Explanations like this resonate well with the teachings of religious and spiritual leaders, for example (Benedict XVI, 2009), who says that "ethical values are needed to overcome the current global economic crisis as well as to eradicate hunger and promote the real development of all the world's people".

This global crisis is argued to be accompanied by a decline in trust in the world's political and legal systems, which are based on the 1648 Westphalian concept of national sovereignty, which given today's advanced transportation and communication technologies may not accurately reflect social structures anymore, and which may not be able to address today's challenges. Especially when dealing with challenges of a transnational nature, individual governments and even international organizations may prove to not be able to adequately address these challenges, and in some cases, not even be trusted enough by their citizens[8].

4. Global Civil Society

In the face of unresolved global problems referred to as the global crisis, it might be the "third system" civil society which steps in to fill the void created by the inability of established governmental and economic structures to effectively deal with them. Today, this civil society is no longer confined to the territorial state. According to (Kaldor, 2003), the "global civil society" reflects a new reality enabled by the fusion of the terms "globalization" and "civil society", and it is accompanied by a "global public sphere", which is both an outcome and an agent of global interconnectedness. Individuals and groups of individuals communicate across borders, and their primary identifying factors are often no longer the nation-state[9], but the values and causes they share and care

[8] Jean Monnet in (Brinkley & Hackett, 1991) goes as far as considering nation-states an obstacle to peace.

[9] This process is known as deterritorialization, which means that location, distance, borders no longer have a determining influence. While globality has not taken over territoriality, territoriality no longer has the monopoly on social geography. See (Miszlivetz & Jensen, 2006)

about, which can have a wide range, for example peace, women's emancipation, human rights, economic inequalities, refugee and migrant solidarity, environmental concerns, and much more. A global civil society promises to apply a global, holistic approach to global challenges, unlike nation-states, which are mostly concerned with their own spheres of influence, and international organizations, which often turn out to be politically paralyzed by conflicting political interests of their members. Just like for the term "civil society", there is no single, universally accepted definition for "global civil society" either. In fact, even attempts to define "global civil society" and the academic discourse around this term are themselves processes of a global civil society.

According to (Keane, 2003, p. 1), the term was born in the 1990s out of seven overlapping streams of concern: The revival of the old language of civil society, after the military crushing of the Prague Spring; a rising influence and availability of modern ICTs; a new awareness of a fragile world system, stimulated by the peace and ecological movements; the perception that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new world order would emerge; the world-wide growth of neo-liberal and market-capitalist economies; the disillusionment with the broken and unfulfilled promises of post-colonial states; and the rising concern about dangerous vacuums opened up by the collapse of empires and states and the outbreak of uncivil wars.

When defining the concept of a global civil society, it is possible to distinguish between a "transnational civil society", "international social movements", and a "true global civil society". Whereas the first two terms simply describe the collaboration of individuals and organizations from different nation-states on common values and goals, a "global civil society" in its strictest interpretation assumes discourse and action to take place in the world as a single social space. Therefore, a true global civil society requires global citizenship[10].

Such global citizenship would imply the existence of a global governance structure (a "global state"), including global justice, global law enforcement, global rights and

---

[10] See (Edwards & Gaventa, 2001, p. 2)

responsibilities for its citizens[11]. This in turn would also coincide with the creation of a "global economy", a market free of any borders. This line of thinking of establishing a global state and a global economy side-by-side with a global civil society seems to be consistent with the traditional view of balancing the three interdependent actors, and to some limited extent, all three are already existent at a global level. However, while at least the term "global civil society" commonly bears positive associations and hopes, the terms "global state" (or even "world government") and "global economy" will all too quickly result in a strong emotional backlash[12]. This fear can be explained by the fact that all historical attempts to unify the world under a single leadership – from Alexander the Great to communism[13] to global jihadism – were based on forceful acquisition of territory, totalitarian ideologies or conquest in the name of religion. Because of this violence and the resulting damage on peoples' lives, institutions and ecosystems, all such attempts have failed.

When considering its relationship to globalization, civil society can be described as both reactionary and progressive at the same time. On one hand, one of the root ideas of the global civil society has been to confront adverse social effects of global capitalism and neoliberalism[14]. The main events that have brought this opposition to public attention were the neo-Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, the demonstrations at the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization, and the founding of the World Social Forum. On the other hand however, the global civil society that is addressing these issues is itself a form of globalization. This paradox is made evident by seemingly contradictory slogans such as "globalize the resistance" or "world-wide movement against globalization". It would be a mistake to describe global civil society as anti-globalization.

---

[11] See for example the Transnational Republic project (http://www.transnationalrepublic.org/), or the World Passport initiative (http://worldservice.org/docpass.html), which advocates the creation of a "global citizenship".

[12] See for example the controversial report (The Commission on Global Governance, 1995) which was heavily criticized for proposing to increase the political power of the United Nations. Interestingly, the report also proposes to increase the role of "international civil society" within the world's political system.

[13] Consider the political slogan "Workers of the world, unite!"

[14] In other words, the market-friendly policies of the 1989 Washington Consensus.

It remains to be seen whether a global civil society will succeed where earlier historical projects of uniting the world have failed, and whether this global civil society will have to be accompanied by a global state and a global economy, as the conventional metaphor of a balance between Prince, Merchant and Citizen would suggest. One problem is that of identification. While anyone will instantly be happy to identify with the all-inclusive role of the Citizen, the more secluded roles of Prince and Merchant can bear the association of "them" rather than "us", and therefore, result in fears of being excluded and dominated.

Addressing such fears, the World Social Forum in its "Answer to the Global Crisis" states that "the majority of the world is unsafe and unhappy", and that "much more people now know that the system in which we are obliged to lived must be changed". It goes on to conclude that in order to overcome the global crisis, "we need another society, another economy, … and a more radical democracy". Another important point made by the World Social Forum is that one of the criticisms of civil society – the lack of unity and coherence – is actually one of its biggest strengths. This is exemplified by the Forum's report (Anon, 2002), which uses slogans such as "solidarity in diversity" or "disagreements are a virtue".

The emergence of the global civil society has also affected international relations and decision-making processes. Concepts such as "new diplomacy" or "complex multilateralism" have turned civil society into an established actor at international bodies and conferences, which are on one hand acknowledging the growing legitimacy of civil society to question governmental and economic policies, but on the other hand also its potential as a partner to advance international agendas. One challenge in such dialogue is the absence of a single definition and of a recognized structure of civil society. In other words, there is no single "Mr. or Mrs. Civil Society" which a government, international organization or corporation can interact with.

5. Network Structures

One major characteristic of civil society that distinguishes it both from the state and the economy is its internal organizational structure. While a state has a strictly hierarchical form, and the economy is based on markets, civil society is organized like a network. When considering the implications of this realization, it is important to note that the

concept of networks is a trans-disciplinary one which has been applied to many practical situations and academic theories both in the natural and social sciences[15]. In the social sciences for example, the idea of networks has been applied to many fields of study, such as the structures of corporations, international relations, terrorist organizations, and indeed also civil society. In this last case, networks are formed between victims as well as between victims and sympathizers.

Because of the broad application of the term, it is difficult to come up with a universal definition of networks that covers all their variations and all fields of study where the concept has been applied. The common elements of networks in all the different contexts are the notions of nodes, links and messages. Nodes are members of the network (e.g. individuals and groups of individuals within a civil society), links are enduring connections or communications channels between nodes, and messages are pieces of information that are periodically exchanged between nodes via links. Other important elements in the possible definitions of networks are their decentralized nature (i.e. the absence of any central authority for managing the structure), the existence of common goals and purposes, and the ability for rapid addition or removal of nodes and links.

The above properties are all typical of civil society, which compared to the state and economy is decentralized, dynamic and self-organizing. When contrasting networks with other forms of organization such as hierarchies or markets, it becomes obvious that each one has strengths and weaknesses. In the case of networks, all their strengths and weaknesses can be directly traced back to their decentralized nature and lack of central authority.

Perhaps the most important advantage of networks lies within their resilience against disruptions and attacks. Whereas hierarchical structures contain potentially weak points that offer attractive targets for attackers, networks are less likely to contain such weak spots. Even when disruptions occur, networks are more effective in repairing topological damages due to their redundant and easily readjustable links. The ability to easily add and remove new links also makes networks highly scalable, i.e. makes it

---

[15] For example, see (Powell, 1990)

possible to recruit and integrate new members into the network at any time, or even join separate networks together.

Another well-documented strength of networks is their ability to transmit and process messages in a very efficient way, bypassing hierarchies that may cause obstruction and delays, and getting information directly to the member(s) that needs it. Links between members can dynamically be optimized, and resources or communication channels that are found to be valuable can immediately be used again.

However, although network structures offer several potential advantages, there are weaknesses as well. In fact, the two most often cited advantageous properties of networks – their decentralized nature and lack of central authority – can simultaneously also be seen as a source of weaknesses. Basically, the absence of a central structure can make it hard to make decisions, hard to resolve emerging conflicts within the network, hard to locate and contact members and resources within the network, hard to agree on joint initiatives and hard to control the implementation of such initiatives. While a network is flexible in providing logistical resources to its members, it can be difficult or impossible to coordinate members and to concentrate the resources of the entire network for a larger, joint operation. Another disadvantage is that participation in networks is usually voluntary, and that there are no orders and no or hardly any notion of personal obligation and accountability, therefore making it hard to implement long-term project that would have to rely on more permanent structures.

6. The Role of ICTs

The role of ICTs has been and continues to be crucial to the development of an effective and beneficial global civil society, since they enable the necessary interconnectedness across borders, the free flow of ideas, exchange of thoughts and consensus building processes which are the backbone of a civil society of global scope. One obvious and relatively straightforward prerequisite for this to work is the fulfillment and protection of human rights in online communication systems, in particular regarding the availability of ICT infrastructure, the protection of privacy, the right to freedom of expression, and the guarantee of non-discrimination. In each one of these fields, there is much work that remains to be done. The Digital Divide is far from being closed, meaning that different parts of the world's population have unequal access to the opportunities of

ICTs[16]. Also, the right to freedom of expression online is restricted to various extents in many countries[17].

It is important to keep in mind that sometimes what appears to be civil society is actually driven by state or economic actors. In the context of ICTs, one example for attempts of disguising political or economic interests as civil society initiatives is the concept of paid blogging, i.e. the spreading of favorable opinions via weblogs for money. This strategy has been used by the Chinese government to post comments favorable toward its policies, in an attempt to influence public opinion on the Internet[18]. As another example, in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, the U.S. military has started using software that allows it to create multiple, fake online profiles, also known as "sock puppets" or "virtual armies" to sway public opinion, using tactics like posting fake comments on blogs[19]. And as (Castells, 2007) notes, corporations are investing heavily in using social networks to extend their influence. This can range from individual companies to open their own Youtube channels, to the acquisition of entire social networking platforms by large media corporations.

But there is another challenge when building ICTs that can effectively serve a global civil society. This challenge, which is much more subtle and goes beyond the above basic considerations, is to develop social networking services and communication structures which themselves – in their fundamental technical network architecture – reflect the organizational form of the global civil society they will enable. This means a decentralized and democratic network structure where data and messages flow directly between individuals and where network connections adapt dynamically according to the actual communication processes which they are serving. Current popular online services such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube – even though they are often praised as having the ability to connect people across borders, to facilitate intercultural dialogue, and to bring peace and democracy to the world – are based on quite the opposite approach.

---

[16] For example, see these statistics from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU): http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/index.html

[17] For example, see the (Freedom House, 2011) report.

[18] The online commentators engaged in this activity are sometimes called the "50-cent party". See (Bristow, 2008).

[19] See (Olson, 2011)

They are highly centralized services with single points of authority that are operated by for-profit corporations, and they have the potential to exert control over the personal data and the entire set of all communication processes between their participants. Therefore, even though one may think of today's popular ICT applications as serving the interests of the Citizen, they do in fact resemble the structure of the Prince, and are operated by institutions belonging into the realm of the Merchant, both of which is highly paradoxical and counter-intuitive. For a global civil society to truly work, both the architectural structure and the governance mechanisms of its communication channels must be based on civil society principles itself.

What French philosopher Frantz Fanon, known for his work on decolonization and his influence on national liberation movement leaders from Malcolm X to Ernesto Che Guevara, once said about colonialism also holds true in the quest to finding the right communication technologies to establish a truly free global civil society:

> *"A community will evolve only when a people control their own communication."*

A number of concrete technological initiatives are working toward this goal, e.g. the Federated Social Web[20], Diaspora[21], Freedom Box[22], etc. Their objective is to create a world-wide, interconnected network of data, messages and social relations, where individuals are at the center of the technical architecture. In this system, participants can freely choose between different service providers, arbitrarily switch between them, or even act as their own, independent node in the network. The most obvious and most often-cited advantage of this idea of basing ICTs on decentralized network structures is that nobody is dependent on any single central authority, which contributes to the desirable goals of putting individuals in control, to improve privacy, and to provide resistance against disruptions, censorship, surveillance and abuse of personal information.

But beyond these obvious benefits, what decentralized networks will really enable is a global civil society that offers a wealth of powerful new characteristics which can truly serve the participants' communication needs, and which is able to dynamically adapt its

---

[20] See http://www.w3.org/2005/Incubator/federatedsocialweb/

[21] See https://joindiaspora.com/

[22] See http://www.freedomboxfoundation.org/

structure according to arising challenges and opportunities. This will be an approach which does not simply re-create and re-enforce old communication channels, but which is instead flexible and courageous enough to also offer new patterns of exchanging ideas and thoughts. In such a system, communication may follow a more random rather than static pattern. Good ideas may reach recipients that would normally be neglected, malicious messages may be sorted out, and decision making processes may be facilitated in intelligent ways.

Another challenge to keep in mind is to be as culturally neutral as possible when building suitable ICT services. One objection that is sometimes raised in the context of a global civil society is that it is heavily based on Western values, in particular on individualism, self-expression [23] and maximizing personal choice. Based on this assertion, one should keep in mind that there are many ethnic groups that favor community over individuality, and values like prosperity and order over choice. Communication technologies that are meant to empower a global civil society should take this diversity of values into account and should offer not only tools that support personal identity and profile services, but that also place a central emphasis on group and community structures.

It is these above properties of decentralized social networking services which will have the potential to create a well-functioning global civil society, a global public sphere that is able to effectively host the discourses to approach and solve the big global problems of our time.

7. Conclusions

In today's interconnected world, we are facing a global crisis, which is exemplified by concrete environmental, financial and social problems. Also, the established structures such as nation-states and international organizations seem to be unable to properly cope with them. Hereby, a global civil society has the potential to play an important role in overcoming problems of a global scope, just like a flourishing civil society within one nation can be very beneficial for the democratic processes within its borders. There are

---

[23] In other words, values in the right part of the "Cultural Map of the World" in (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 64)

no unsolvable technical obstacles on the road toward a global civil society, but for it to function well, it must be accompanied by some degree of global governance and a global economic system, in order to set rules for the global public sphere in which the civil discourse can take place. Using the metaphors of the Prince, Merchant and Citizen, it is important to keep in mind that all of them are needed, and that they must be held in balance. These three elements are dependent on each other, and a primary goal during the evolution of the global civil society must be to combine the respective strengths of hierarchies, markets and networks. Only then will it be possible to effectively address the various problems that are sometimes collectively referred to as a global crisis.

When it comes to the role of ICTs in this global civil society, two things have to be remembered: First, it is ICTs which – together with modern transportation technologies – have led to a highly interconnected world and therefore to the precondition for a global civil society in the first place. Second, ICTs must be architected in a way that reflects global civil society itself, i.e. in a decentralized, dynamic and self-organizing fashion.

A crisis can also be seen as an opportunity. Stemming from the Greek word κρίσις (krisis, meaning choice, decision), the term should be perceived as a chance to question old, dominant ways of thinking and established structures, and to be open to develop alternatives. In nonscientific folk etymology, the Chinese word for "crisis" is sometimes said to consist of the two characters for "danger" and "opportunity". As such, the prospect of a changing world involving a global civil society should not scare us – instead, we should actively work toward it and build solid foundations for it to flourish.

8. Bibliography

Anon. (2002, February 5). *Porto Alegre II: Call of social movements.* Retrieved from
   http://links.org.au/node/91

Benedict XVI. (2009). *Caritas in Veritate. Encyclical letter on integral human development in charity and truth.*

Brinkley, D., & Hackett, C. (Eds.). (1991). *Jean Monnet: The Path to European Unity.* London: Macmillan.

Bristow, M. (2008, December 16). *China's internet 'spin doctors'.* Retrieved from BBC
        News: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7783640.stm

Castells, M. (2000). *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture: The Rise of the
        Network Society* (2 ed., Vol. 1). Cambridge, MA.

Castells, M. (2007). Communication, power and counter–power in the Network Society.
        International Journal of Communication, 1, pp. 238-266.

Edwards, M., & Gaventa, J. (2001). *Global citizen action.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Riener.

Freedom House. (2011, April 18). *Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet
        and Digital Media.* Retrieved from
        http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/FotN/FOTN2011_Handout.pdf

Habermas, J. (1962). *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer
        Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Held, D., Kaldor, M., & Quah, D. (2010, February 28). *The Hydra-Headed Crisis.* Retrieved
        from Global Policy: http://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/articles/global-
        governance/hydra-headed-crisis

Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy.* New
        York: Cambridge University Press.

Kaldor, M. (2003). *Global Civil Society. An Answer to War.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Keane, J. (2003). *Global citizen action.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meadows, D. L., Meadows, D. H., Randers, J., & William, B. W. (1972). *The limits to growth:
        A report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind.* New York:
        Universe Books.

Mesarovic, M., & Pestel, E. (1974). *Mankind at the Turning Point. The Second Report of the
        Club of Rome.* New York: Dutton.

Miszlivetz, F. (2010). We are in the situation of relative free will. An interview with
        Immanuel Wallerstein. In *Society and Economy* (Vol. 32, pp. 137-148). Budapest:
        Akadémiai Kiadó.

Miszlivetz, F., & Jensen, J. (2006). Global Civil Society: From Dissident Discourse to
World Bank Parlance. In P. Wagner (Ed.), *The Languages of Civil Society* (pp. 177-
205). Berghan Books.

Nerfin, M. (1987). *Neither prince nor merchant: Citizen - An introduction to the third
system.* Development Dialogue.

Olson, P. (2011, May 17). *Anonymous, The Military And Fake Virtual Armies.* Retrieved
from Forbes: http://blogs.forbes.com/parmyolson/2011/03/17/anonymous-
the-military-and-fake-virtual-armies/

Powell, W. (1990). Neither Market Nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization. In
Research In Organizational Behavior (Vol. 12, pp. 295-336).

The Commission on Global Governance. (1995). *Our Global Neighborhood.* Oxford:
Oxford University Press.