Chapter X
Information Networks, Internet Governance and Innovation in World Politics

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ABSTRACT

Political processes are undergoing profound changes due to the challenges imposed by globalization processes to the legitimacy of policy actors and to the effectiveness of policy-making. Building on a socio-political approach to governance and focusing on global information policies and networks, this chapter aims at developing a better understanding of the possibility of change in world politics nowadays, by critically analysing two innovative elements: the reality and relevance of "multi-stakeholder" practices and the growing role of information technologies as a complementary support to actors' relations. Looking at Internet Governance debates in recent years, the authors reconstruct networks of interaction connecting actors in the virtual space, and look at actors' communication modes. Thus they analyze the extent to which technological, as well as processual and cognitive innovation, shapes actors' orientations and the structures within which they interact in the specific context of Internet Governance.

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These changes also affect the supra-national and trans-national conduct of politics, suggesting that emerging global governance arrangements may be conceived as answers to dynamics characterized

by diversity and complexity in the post-Cold War era. Such developments are made even more critical by the role and relevance of communication, in its different forms.

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In the first two paragraphs we theoretically clarify the existing nexus between governance processes, information technology and information networks as emerging governance structures in world politics. The third paragraph sets the scene for the analysis, introducing contemporary debates on the governance of the Internet as a case study and explaining our methodological approach. In the fourth paragraph we articulate and critically assess the multi-stakeholder approach in relation to the notion of diversity in terms of actors involved, issues addressed, and knowledge produced. The fifth paragraph explores, through a comprehensive view of communication modalities, the complexity through which communication nurtures world politics and its dynamics: languages and frames, off-line and on-line interactions, innovation in processes through societal learning. In the Concluding remarks, we summarize the main findings from our investigation and introduce some open issues for further research.

CHALLENGES TO CONTEMPORARY WORLD POLITICS: DIVERSITY, DYNAMICS, COMPLEXITY

Addressing the complexities of political processes in the global landscape, we find a useful point of entry to our investigation in the socio-political approach to governance elaborated by Jan Kooiman, who suggests that governance in contemporary societies should be conceived as essentially interactive: "a mix of all kinds of efforts by all manners of socio-political actors, public as well as private" (2003, p. 3) through which actors with governing roles assume shared responsibilities.

Kooiman underlines how governing mechanisms are societal responses to demands that emerge in a context characterized by diversity, dynamics and complexity; a situation where more traditional arrangements, centred on state-actors, are no longer capable to respond effectively. On the one hand "no single actor, public or private, has the knowledge and information required to solve complex, dynamic and diversified societal challenges; no governing actor has an overview sufficient to make the necessary instrument effective; no single actor has sufficient action potential to dominate unilaterally" (Kooiman, 2003, p. 11). On the other hand, governing arrangements differ from local to global and from one policy domain to another, while the necessary technical and political knowledge is dispersed and governing objectives are difficult to define, and challenging to realize.

Diversity, in Kooiman's terms, refers to the plurality of actors involved in relevant processes: they are shaped in the interaction and, at the same time, they shape interactions by defining their boundaries, setting the political agenda, framing issues, problems and solutions. Actors' diversity can be gained by giving actors the opportunity to play out their identities in interaction. If we translate this to the global context, diversity refers to the shifting from a centrality of state actors to a plurality of entities - states, non-governmental

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