

Net-work is Format Work: Issue networks and the sites of civil society politics

Noortje Marres

To appear in: *Formatting network societies*, John Asherson, Jodi Dean, Geert Lovink (eds.), Routledge, forthcoming.

Introduction

During the last decade we have witnessed the proliferation of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the exponential growth of civil society organizations (CSOs).¹ The “network” is one of the prime conceptual, practical, and technical sites where these two developments come together. Arguably the most important feature of ICTs—of which the Internet is a fundamental component, both discursively and logistically—is that they facilitate networked forms of organization (of information and people). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—which have increased in number and in influence on institutional political processes, especially at the intergovernmental level—are also often characterized in terms of networks.² Features that currently distinguish these organizations are their propensity to form partnerships, both among themselves and with (inter-)governmental bodies and, sometimes, for-profit actors, and more radically, their commitment to decentralized and distributed ways of working.

This convergence between ICTs and CSOs finds specific expression in two notions that are frequently evoked to make sense of the practices these organizations engage in and the role of ICTs in facilitating them: the *social network* and the *info-network*. As to civil society practices, a wide variety of terms is used to load meaning into these networking activities, with

“building partnerships” and “awareness raising” on one end of the spectrum, and “making friends” and “sharing knowledge” on the other. This variety can be taken as an indication of the great divergences in style and status among the groups, movements and organizations that are brought together under the heading of “civil society.” But establishing and fostering “contacts” and spreading information are now ubiquitous activities of these entities, regardless of their institutional or rather less “institutional” status, geographical location, and the issues they work with. Importantly, characterizations of civil society practices in terms of social and info-networking make the importance of ICTs as a facilitator of these practices forcefully clear. As a bottom line, there is e-mail as a technology of social networking (and an incredibly successful one at that), and the simple and straightforward website as an obvious example of info-networking (albeit an arguably less successful one). Considering the ubiquity of these networking activities in the civil society sector, and the obvious merits of ICTs in this respect, it is in some sense ridiculous to question the usefulness of the concepts of the “social network” and the “info-network” to explain why ICTs matter to CSOs. However, it is far from self-evident that the *politics* of civil society can be understood in these terms.

In this chapter, I argue that the notions of the social network and the info-network are of limited use if we are to appreciate the interventions of CSOs in public debates, their roles as critics of governmental institutions, corporations, and other CSOs, and their attempts to force powerful actors to act upon social, economic, environmental and humanitarian problems. A different concept of the network provides a more fruitful heuristic to account for the political practices of CSOs and the difference that ICTs can make in this respect: the issue network. The social network casts exchanges among actors in terms of *collaboration*, and is therefore ill-suited if we want to acknowledge the *antagonistic relations* in which CSOs are implicated, especially

where their politics are concerned. The info-network highlights the *proliferation* of information through networks, and for this reason it is not a very helpful notion if we want to attend to the important work of *articulation*—of issues—that CSOs perform. With regard to the role of ICTs in facilitating the politics of civil society, the problem with the notions of the social network and the info-network is that they tempt us to think of the interconnections between ICTs and CSOs in terms of an *alignment* between the technical sphere, on the one hand, and the sphere of social organization and knowledge formation, on the other. If we are fully to appreciate the role of ICTs in the political practices of CSOs, however, we must also consider how these technologies are and may be *integrated* into these practices, operating upon their substance. The notion of the issue network has definite advantages in this respect.

At the same time, to adopt this concept is to complicate matters. It brings along specific assumptions about the type of politics that CSOs engage in, which are much more demanding than those alluded to above, i.e. that it is useful for civil society actors to make acquaintances and spread the word. If I can be forgiven for complicating matters in this way, it could be because to account for civil society politics in terms of issue networks is to attempt to take seriously the specificity of networks as sites of politics. It is also an attempt to understand civil society politics as a practice in which substantial and technological considerations are closely intertwined.

The issue network as a site of civil society politics

The concept of the issue network is used today to characterize a variety of political practices that add to and intervene in the representative politics characteristic of national democracies and the international system. The term has been taken up to describe the issue politics or “lifestyle politics” pursued by grassroots organizations and individuals in mobilizing

around affairs that affect people in their daily lives, from the environment to media ownership and gender issues.³ The term is equally applied to more professionalized practices of what are then called NGOs, most notably those of advocacy. Here the notion serves to highlight the open-ended alliances formed by NGOs working on common social, environmental and humanitarian issues, as part of their attempts to put these issues on the agenda's of political institutions.⁴ Importantly, these contemporary uses of the "issue network" represent an in some respects a radical break with the classic definition of the term. Today, the concept is generally considered to be affirmative in that it denotes a form of political organization compatible with, or even an instance of, liberal democracy. But when the American political scientist Hugh Hecló coined the term in the 1970s it was to problematize, and indeed criticize, the new politics of issues in which NGOs were engaging.⁵ According to Hecló, this form of politics *weakens* democracy. It is important to consider this origin of the notion of the issue network, however briefly, as it reminds us that we are dealing here with an un-innocent mode of political intervention.

In his seminal article "The issue network and the executive establishment," Hecló described a new form of political organization on the rise in Washington D.C. under the Carter administration. "Issue-activists" and "issue-experts" were forming "loose alliances" in which they defined political affairs "by sharing information about them."⁶ For Hecló, the emergence of issue networks had to be understood in the context of a wider development, which he described as the "broadening of organizational participation in policy-making." Especially problematic about the phenomenon, according Hecló, was that the "issue people" now got to define political affairs well before governmental officials, politicians, and the general public got involved. This was bound to alienate the broader public—not so much because they were excluded from participation in issue formation, but because the specialist, technical discourses in which issues

were being defined did not “speak” to more general and basic concerns of institutional outsiders. For this reason, Heclo argued, the proliferation of issue networks brings with it a democratic deficit.

We should keep this original critique of issue networks in mind as we explore the merits of the notion for an account of the politics of civil society, and the role of ICTs therein. Heclo’s initial analysis warns against easy equations between civil society participation in politics and democracy. It tells us that issue formation in networks is likely to entail political interventions the legitimacy of which is contested. This is so not just because adverse interests seek to undermine these interventions, but because a shortage of institutional legitimacy is the condition under which those operating beyond the representative political system inevitably work. Also, the failure to translate the concerns of affected actors is a real risk that those involved in issue formation must face.⁷

While an affirmative account of civil society politics in terms of issue networking thus entails a re-purposing of this term, there are good reasons to do so. The notion has at least three distinctive merits. As a first, general point, the “issue network” proposes that participants in such a network are connected to one another *by way of* the particular issue with which it is concerned. This proposal has the advantage of dispelling some of the mystery surrounding the question of how CSOs that have arisen and operate in radically different social contexts, may nevertheless develop common projects.⁸ As the legal scholar Annelise Riles points out, actors in civil society networks do not necessarily share much in terms of culture or lifestyle.⁹ Taking up the concept of the issue network, we can say that, in this context, the issues take on special importance as providing, enabling, or even necessitating, connections among actors. A second, more specific, merit of the “issue network” is that it draws attention to the work of issue formation, and more

specifically, that of *formatting* issues, as a crucial dimension of the politics of civil society. (Such format work is of particular interest when considering the role of ICTs in the political practices of CSOs.) Third, the concept invites us to attend to the ways in which CSOs, especially in as far as their politics is concerned, are implicated in extended configurations of actors and issues that are marked by *antagonism*. I first highlight the latter two features of the issue network, and the ways in which they make up for some of the limitations of notions of the social network and the info-network, before turning to the more specific question of ICTs in their relation to civil society politics.

Two merits of the “issue network”

Recent work on advocacy presents the network as an important contemporary site for issue formation by NGOs and social movements. In *Activism Beyond Borders*, the international relations researchers Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink rely on the notion of the issue network to account for the politics of transnational NGOs, and in doing so they point at “the framing of issues” as a prime political project pursued by these networks. One of the crucial undertakings of NGO networks, they point out, is to define, translate and label the issue in question: “Network actors actively seek ways to bring issues to the public agenda by framing them in innovative ways and by seeking hospitable venues.”¹⁰ This is an essential component of the political strategy of advocacy networks, they argue, since by choosing new frames, i.e. new labels and key-words—and we might add, new formats—an issue may acquire resonance in political circles and public spheres.

To be sure, the issue network also fulfills a function that transcends that of providing a platform for “agenda setting” by CSOs. If it is by virtue of CSOs’ shared issues that they acquire

a common political project, then the issue network may also be considered a site where civil society, as a political force, comes into being. And, when a network serves as its location, then the practice of framing issues takes on a distinctive form. Issue formation is something that happens in the circulation of information: as reports, press releases, news, articles, slogans and images circulate in the network, the stakes are defined, addressees for the issue emerge, and its urgency is made apparent. Thus, in this context, issue formation takes on the aspect of a collective, technologically mediated, distributed practice. This points toward a first merit of the concept of the issue network: it highlights a specific political effect that CSOs seek to achieve when sharing information, namely the political articulation of the issues they are committed to. In adopting the perspective of the issue network, then, we won't forget the larger political project of civil society: to generate issue definitions with a critical edge, which may cut into institutional processes of opinion-, decision- and policy-making, so as to open up a space in which action upon issues becomes possible.

The second feature of the issue network important for understanding the politics of civil society is the way it draws attention to the extended political configurations in which CSOs easily become implicated. This aspect of the issue network has not received much emphasis in the work on advocacy discussed above. But in policy studies the issue network is defined as a relatively open network of *antagonistic* actors that configure around a controversial issue. The issue network is here opposed to the policy-network, which is defined as closed, standing in the service of the de-politization of issues, and prone to achieve consensus (and as heavily institutionalized).¹¹ Defined in these terms, the "issue network" invites us to focus on the broader networks of dissenting actors from the governmental, non-governmental, and for-profit sectors as the sites at which CSOs engage in controversies over specific affairs. To say "issue

network” is then to ask: how do CSOs insert themselves, or are implicated by others, in formations of opponents and allies (as well as actors between these two extremes) that have configured around a common issue?

This question leads us into tricky territory. The implication of CSOs in extended networks of .gov, .org and .com is a controversial matter itself. Connections between CSOs and (inter-)governmental organizations, donors, and corporate bodies have been a topic of particularly intense contestation among civil society groups, as they raise troubling questions about the real autonomy of CSOs, the vulnerability of their work to appropriation by governmental and for-profit actors, and their commitment to radical action. The concept of the issue network, however, at the same time equips us to get a clearer view of contentious relations between civil society and its outside. Defined as an antagonistic configuration, the perspective of the “issue network” allows us to appreciate that actors that come together in such a network may do so precisely because they disagree over the issues in which they are jointly implicated, and the ways in which these are to be addressed. Moreover, as we explore how CSOs are affected by the wider circulation of information, people and resources in extended issue networks of .gov, .com, and .org, we may come to better appreciate the efforts that some CSOs make to dis-embed their activities from these networks.

The concept of the issue network invites us to focus on the framing of issues as a crucial dimension of civil society politics. It encourages us to explore how CSOs intervene in, or seek to dis-embed their activities from, extended networks of governmental, for-profit, and non-governmental actors. I now consider the advantages of the concept of issue network over “social network” and “info-network” for describing civil society politics in networked terms—before turning to the specific question of the role of ICTs in facilitating it. To the degree that the notions

of the social network and the info-network have informed accounts of the ways in which ICTs facilitate civil society practices, the political challenges that CSOs face have not received sufficient attention.

When social networking and info-networking are not enough

Studies of the relations between ICTs and CSOs rely on the notions of the social network and the info-network in at least two ways. First, in early work on this subject the notion of the social network was used to establish the connection between the *general* phenomena of civil society and the new ICTs of the 1990s, most notably the Internet. Thus, the political scientist Craig Warkentin argued that the relevance of the Internet for global civil society principally derives from the fact that, as a transnationally implemented network technology, it provides a perfect forum for the social networks of global civil society: “the Internet’s inherent qualities facilitate the development of global civil society’s constitutive network of social relations.”¹² Second, the “social network” and the “info-network” are drawn upon to specify the *particular* uses that CSOs currently make of ICTs. In their report, “Appropriating the Internet for Social Change,” Mark Surman and Katherine O’reilly distinguish the technical network (i.e. networked ICTs), the social network (i.e. coalitions of CSOs), and the intermediate notion of the network as a site of info-sharing, to elucidate such usage.¹³ In accordance with the latter two network concepts, they focus on “collaboration” and “publishing” as two important practices in which CSOs take advantage of ICTs.¹⁴ As I mentioned in the introduction, it is in some respects absurd to question the adequacy of these characterizations of civil society practice for the simple reason that they have served as guiding principles in the integration of ICTs into these practices. As long as our thinking about ICTs and CSOs is guided by the notions of the social network and the

info-network, however, we risk leaving crucial dimensions of the politics of civil society under-conceptualized, and thereby, under-explored. It is here that the issue network has something valuable to add.

A first difficulty with the “social network” and the “info-network” is that when they organize descriptions of civil society practices, it becomes hard to account for the formal dimension of these practices in positive terms—and this is precisely a crucial dimension of the politics of CSOs. The principal features that these types of networks are famous for are informality and relative amorphousness. The notion of the social network foregrounds relatively unregulated or under-regulated relations: social networks arise in the exchange of information and things among people, in the absence of institutionalized relations among them, or beyond or alongside such relations.¹⁵ As to networks for information sharing, they are classically conceived of as smooth, flat, and formless spaces, as in the work of Manuel Castells on the space of flows.¹⁶ Considering this, it should not surprise us that when formal features of social and info-networks are observed, these are easily interpreted in negative terms. This is especially the case where CSOs are concerned: normative conceptions of civil society tend to mobilize ideals of openness and egalitarianism.¹⁷ When social or info-networks in which CSOs are implicated turn out to have discernable shapes, this is then be taken to mean that they are more centralized, less distributed, more hierarchical, and less inclusive than the ideal of the network as an unbounded, informal, de-centralized form of organization promises. The (ideal) features of informality and amorphousness of networks have led the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello to question the viability of the network as a site of democratic politics, which is then conceived of as an intrinsically institutional activity.¹⁸ In line with this argument, the German sociologist Ulrich Beck criticizes social network theories for their lack of concern with

the specificity of institutional arrangements.¹⁹ Such critiques of networks and their theorization fail to acknowledge that this feature of informality is what makes the network a fruitful form of organization for civil society politics precisely because it works for under-institutionalized forms of organization.

The argument of these sociologists that informal social relations and amorphous networks of info-sharing by themselves cannot account for democratic politics, however, is not so easy to dismiss. At this point, a first advantage of the “issue network” over the “social network” and the “info-network” for an account of the politics of civil society, becomes clear: as this concept points towards the *framing* of issues as a crucial aspect of civil society politics, it draws our attention to the engagements of CSOs with the formalities of politics, without forcing us to deny that such engagements are enabled by informal relations among these actors and their audiences. As CSOs organize as issue networks, and/or insert themselves into broader issue networks of .gov, .com and .org they can be seen to participate in the formalization of their issues, transforming them into specific claims.

In the spring of 2004, for example, environmental organizations and NGOs monitoring financial institutions organized into a network and put forward the demand that the World Bank phase out its funding of fossil fuel projects by 2008. This claim was taken from a World Bank commissioned report, the Extractive Industries Review. In their mobilizations, the network took it up as an effective translation of issues of the environment, poverty and governance into a concrete demand. Considering such engagement of CSOs with major institutions, we can observe a second difficulty with the concepts “social network” and “info-network.” As they foreground relations of collegiality or solidarity and sharing, they lead us to focus on the networks that CSOs and their audiences form among themselves. These notions are therefore not very well suited for

an account of the broader configurations of .gov, .com, and .org in which CSOs are implicated, especially where their politics are concerned.

Importantly, such extended networks cannot be understood as a combination of the social and the info-network. This becomes clear when we take seriously the argument made by the American pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, that it is in the nature of political communities to bring together actors who do not relate socially. (The circumstance, highlighted by Annelise Riles, that CSO networks cannot be expected to be held together by thick social or cultural bonds, receives a general formulation in Dewey's political theory: he observes this to be the case for political communities broadly speaking.)

In his classic work on democracy and technology *The Public and Its problems*, John Dewey explicitly distinguished the political community from the social community.²⁰ He proposed that political communities consist of actors that are *indirectly* implicated in a common issue. According to Dewey, political communities bring together actors who do not have much in common as far as their daily lives are concerned, but who are jointly implicated in a problem, which puts their respective forms of life at risk. Political communities in this sense consist of *strangers* according to Dewey.²¹ To give a contemporary example, agro-industrialists from Kansas and Dutch vegetarians may not share much in terms of lifestyle or culture, and neither is it necessary for them to interact with one another as part of their daily lives. But when pig genes were inserted in American export corn, these actors become caught up in a common issue. The Deweyian approach to politics helps to make it clear why the political task of issue formation involves connections that differ from social and informational ones. When CSOs engage in the articulation of issues, they must work with relations among relative strangers, among whom social bonds are largely absent. Moreover, we should add to Dewey's definition of the political

community that an issue must be expected to disclose antagonistic relations among actors: it is precisely to the degree that their interests in the issue exclude one another that a given problem turns into a political affair. Where CSOs engage in issue formation, we must expect them to become implicated in actor configurations in which the definitions of issues are contested. So spreading information about the matter at hand is not enough; issue framings put into circulation by antagonistic actors must be actively countered.

One could say that the Deweyian definition of the political community underestimates the degree to which the articulation of issues requires intensive social and info-networking. For example, before Southern African women's organizations can achieve an intervention in the wider issue networks that have configured around women's issues, they must have engaged in issue formation among themselves, invented a language in which to phrase their concerns and commitments, and found the precise formulations that capture them effectively. But while issue formation may thus require collaboration and information exchange, it cannot be reduced to such activities insofar as it constitutes a *political* practice. In its emphasis on friendly relations among actors who share certain affinities, the notion of the social network directs attention towards networks of, precisely, friends and colleagues. As such, it de-emphasizes the ways in which civil society actors, as they engage politically, become antagonistically implicated in stranger networks (or from which, as an alternative political strategy, they actively seek to dis-embed their practices). The notion of the info-network entails a conception of the spread of information as a matter of the diffusion, propagation or proliferation of bits and pieces of knowledge. It thereby de-emphasizes the fact that issue formation involves articulation, i.e. the active (re-)formatting of issues, and contestation of divergent issue-formatting, that are circulating in the issue network. The concept of the issue network not only makes up for these limitations of the

“social network” and the “info-network.” It also directs attention to roles of ICT in civil society politics that remain under-explored as long as the other two network concepts organize accounts.

ICTs as mediators of issue formation

When we use the notions of the social and the info-network to describe relations between CSOs and ICTs, we are tempted to account for these relations in terms of a fortunate *alignment* between the organizational forms of civil society and those that characterize these technologies. As I mentioned in the introduction, these network concepts direct our attention to morphological similarities between ICTs and CSOs: CSOs share information and form partnerships; ICTs—the Internet, but also telephony and old fashioned mail systems—represent technical networks that provide a forum for such organizational networking. Early accounts of the relations between the Internet and civil society adopted this isomorphic schema. Craig Warkentin argued that “[b]ecause the Internet’s inherent characteristics and transnational reach parallel (or correspond to) those of global civil society, the medium serves as both a logical and an effective tool for establishing and maintaining social connections that can contribute to global civil society.”²²

Recent accounts point to the drawbacks of this approach. Most generally, it leads us to underestimate the extent to which the use of ICTs *transforms* civil society practices, and vice versa, since it describes ICTs and CSOs as being already similar — before interferences occurred between them. But of course, the rise to prominence of the Internet may be *responsible* for the fact that CSOs increasingly organize themselves as networks. The effects of this transformation are not unambiguously positive. The energies invested in the formation of partnerships among organizations may go at the expense of loyalties to the particular, rather more grounded, contexts in which these organizations operate. Conversely, the concepts of public debate and dialogue that

are so central to discourses about civil society have left their marks in ICTs, providing important justifications for the organization of online spaces as fora for debate.²³ To appreciate such transformations of both civil society practices and ICTs, then, we must approach ICTs as active *mediators* of civil society practices.²⁴

The concept of the issue network directs attention to a second aspect of the role of ICT in civil society practices that risks being left out of account where morphological similarities between ICT and CSOs are at the center of attention. The latter approach leaves unanswered the question of how ICTs enable or disable the articulation of *the issues* around which CSOs mobilize. The application of a “correspondence model” to the relations between ICTs and CSOs leads to a preoccupation with information exchange and the social relations constituted in the process of this exchange. Accordingly, the *substance* on which civil society politics operates—the affairs that it is concerned with—here is easily lost from view. The perspective of the issue network invites us to approach ICT as mediators of civil society practices, and more particularly, as mediators of issue formation. The principal question to be asked with regard to ICTs thus becomes: how do these technologies transform civil society practices of the formatting of issues? And more straightforwardly: how do ICT enable transformations of the issues of civil society politics? How do they constrain their articulation?

With respect to the first question, now that many CSOs rely on the new ICTs to organize advocacy campaigns, they increasingly engage in “issue-splicing.” As CSOs working in particular issue areas link up their campaigns with those of CSOs working in other areas, by setting up joint campaign web sites, say, objects of civil society concern, such as ICT or the environment, come to be framed as hybrid affairs, as raising issues of governance, women’s issues, indigenous rights, et cetera. We can wonder whether the pursuit of such a logic of

hybridization comes at the expense of more creative practices in which NGOs develop new issue framings, and an aesthetics that could ensure a place for issues in political discourses. To give an example of the more specific ways in which ICTs disable and enable issue formation by CSOs: when news of missing journalists in Central Asia is posted on a website in PDF format, this is probably bad news for the missing journalists; a PDF that sits somewhere on a server is not likely to contribute to the transformation of this tragedy into a political issue. If, on the other hand, the news release is emailed to NGOs working on media freedom, addressing people personally and inviting posting, this is more likely to contribute to issue formation.²⁵ As an example in which info-technological practices of issue formation are not dedicated to intervention in extended issue networks, but instead, serve as a means of disengagement from these larger configurations around issues, we can think of collaborative data base building projects, in which only those actors willing to let collectives tinker with their data will participate.

To approach ICTs as enabling and disabling the format work performed by CSOs, in their (dis-)engagement with or from broader issue-networks, is to embrace a particular understanding of the politics that these actors pursue. The task of these organizations, we then say, is to articulate and frame issues in such a way that dominant issue framings circulating in broader issue networks are effectively contested and transformed, thereby opening up a space for intervention that otherwise would have remained closed. Of course, such an understanding of the politics of civil society leaves undiscussed many other practices of CSOs, such as fostering bonds of solidarity among CSOs and their supporters. Nevertheless, an exploration of the ways in which ICTs constrain the format work performed by CSOs has relevance beyond the important but admittedly narrow question of the politics of issue formation in that it approaches

ICTs as *substantially integrated* in civil society practices. As opposed to the *alignment* between the aims of civil society and the tools of information and communication, the perspective of the issue network leads us to focus on the *intertwining* of substantive and technological considerations in the networked politics of civil society. Crucially, in the performance of format work, as in the case of the attempt to effectively spread the news of missing journalists in Central Asia, technological and substantial concerns cease to be clearly distinguished. Substantive concerns about the fate of the missing journalists and technical considerations about the information format in which their circumstances are to be rendered public here are intimately related: as I said, when the news of missing journalists in Central Asia goes out in PDF format, this is probably bad news for the missing journalists. If we wish to explore the extent to which ICT now form a constitutive dimension of civil society practices, and do not just provide a forum for these activities without affecting them, the ways in which these technologies enable and disable format work is thus an important place to start.

Conclusion

The concept of the issue network, I have argued, enriches our understanding of the networked politics of civil society, and the role of ICTs in facilitating it. It invites us to focus in on the technological practices of info-politics that civil society groups and organizations engage in, and to approach them as practices of the framing of issues. As CSOs seek to intervene in broader issue networks, or as an alternative strategy, attempt to actively dis-embed their activities from these extended networks, they engage in practices of the formatting and re-formatting of issues. This aspect of civil society politics remains under-conceptualized in accounts of the relations between CSOs and ICTs that foreground the social and the info-network

as the topos where the two meet. As opposed to the friendly networks of the social and the noncommittal networks of information sharing, the issue network directs our attention to antagonistic configurations of actors from the governmental, non-governmental and for-profit sectors, and the contestation over issue framings that occurs in them. Here the principal question becomes how CSOs can effectively engage in format work, intervening in issue framings that circulate in the broader issue network with issue-framings of their own, or, alternatively, to dis-embed their framings from these network flows. It is certainly not clear which info-technological applications, exactly, effectively enable such format work. The relation between technical application and political intervention, in the case of issue network politics, often appears to be rather “accidental.” For example, in April 2002, a Yahoo discussion lists emerged as a central location on the Web for critiques of the World Bank: the Web sites of several NGOs monitoring international financial institutions singled this list out as a relevant location, by way of hyperlinks.²⁶ But the absence of a pre-determined relation between issue-political practice and technical application may also be taken as an invitation for the issue-politically minded to take an active interest in the possibilities of info-technological format-work, and vice versa, for techies to develop an appreciation for issue-specific considerations.

1. Anheier, Helmut, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor, introduction to *Global Civil Society Yearbook 2001*, edited by Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

2. Bach, Jonathan and David Stark, “Link, Search, Interact: The Co-Evolution of NGOs and Interactive Technology,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 3 (2004): 101-117.

-
3. Bennett, W. Lance, "Ithiel Sola Pool Lecture: The UnCivic Culture: Communication, Identity, and the Rise of Lifestyle Politics," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31, no. 4 (1998): 740-61. Bennet, W. Lance, "New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism," in *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*, edited by Nick Couldry and James Curran, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, 17-37.
4. Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998). The concept of the issue network has also been used to conceptualize a post-institutional politics of problem solving. Thus, in the work of Jean-Francois Rischar, the issue network represents a form of organization in which actors from the sectors of government, business, and civil society informally work together on major policy problems, thereby circumventing the obstacles that the more "bureaucratic" approaches of international governmental institutions put in the way of solutions. Less provocatively, the issue network is also referred to in proposals for new forms of stakeholder democracy, whereby consultations of relevant parties from business and civil society are to enrich decision-making processes hosted by (inter-)governmental organizations, as in the work of David Held. Considering the divergent uses to which the concept of the issue network is being put today, it is clear that political formats are underdetermined by this organizational form. The issue network has been described as a site of, alternatively, contestational, managerial and consensual politics. In this article, I will focus on the first format. Rischar, Jean-Francois, "Network solutions for global governance," *openDemocracy*, January 16, 2003. Held, David, *Global Covenant: The Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2004).

-
5. Heclo, Hugh, "The Issue network and the executive establishment," in *The New American Political System*, edited by A. King (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1978).
 6. Heclo, "The issue network and the executive establishment," 104.
 7. I explore the problem of democratic legitimacy that the organizational form of the issue network brings with it in the third chapter of my doctoral thesis. Marres, Noortje, "Issues in? Publics Out?" Chap. 3 in "No Issue, No Public: Democratic deficits after the displacement of politics," University of Amsterdam, 2005.
 8. Keck and Sikkink answer this question by positing that NGOs share basic norms and principles. Such an answer, however, risks importing a universalist notion of a common moral and/or cognitive framework into accounts of civil society practices, a notion hard to sustain empirically. And, it is posits precisely that which requires explanation, namely, how norms and principles come to be widely adopted. Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 2.
 9. Riles, Annelise, *The Network Inside Out* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001) 57-58.
 10. Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 17. Keck and Sikkink derive from the "issue network" the term "advocacy network," in line with other work in policy studies. The latter term denotes civil society networks, as opposed to networks involving representatives of government and business. I will use the term "issue network" to emphasize that CSOs are likely to be implicated in broader configurations of .gov, .com, and .org, as I explain below.
 11. Smith, Martin, *Pressure, Power and Policy: State Autonomy and Policy Networks in Britain and the United States* (London: Harvester Wheatsleaf, 1993) 60 – 67.

12. Warkentin, Craig. *Reshaping World Politics, NGOs, the Internet and Global Civil Society* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) 32.

13. Surman, Mark and Katherine O'reilly, "Appropriating the Internet for Social Change: Towards the Strategic Use of Networked Technologies by Transitional Civil Society Organizations," Information Technology and International Cooperation Program, Social Science Research Council, November 2003.

14. Surman and O'Reilly distinguish two further civil society practices in which ICT play a crucial role, **mobilization** and observation. Their report thus invites us to add the "affective network" and the "knowledge network" to the lists of networks in which CSOs and ICTs meet. I do think these network concepts can enrich our understanding of the interrelations between CSOs and ICTs, among others because they help specify the different uses to which these technologies are put. In this respect, the focus of my account on the social and the info-network is too limited, and requires expansion. However, the notions of the "affective network" and the "knowledge network," too, may easily lead us to fail to consider the role that issues play in organising civil society practices. In issues, affective, political and epistemological considerations are entangled with ontological concerns: the "being" and "becoming" of actors is caught up in political affairs (human rights, the environment, poverty, gender-relations, etc.). The four network types—info-network, social network, affective network, knowledge network—not only make it difficult to appreciate the entanglement of the epistemological, the social and the political. They leave out of consideration the ontological dimension.

15. This is the definition of a social network proposed by social network analysts Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman: "Just as a computer network is a set of machines connected by a set of cables, a social network is a set of people (or organizations or other social entities)

connected by a set of social relationships, such as friendship, co-working or information exchange.” Garton, Laura, Caroline Haythornthwaite and Barry Wellman “Studying Online Social Networks,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 3, no. 1, June 1997, <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue1/garton.html>.

16. Castells, Manuel, *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

17. Michael Hardt’s characterization of networks of social movements provides a radical example. He describes these networks as horizontal (radically de-centralized) and indefinitely expansive, and sharply distinguishes them from centralized, representative forms of organisation, which he attributes to political parties. Hardt, Michael, “Porto Alegre: Today's Bandung?” *New Left Review* 14 (March-April, 2002).

18. Boltanski, Luc and Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999) 160-168.

19. Beck, Ulrich, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

20. Dewey, John, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1991 [1927]) 12 – 36.

21. The notion that publics are made up of relations among strangers has recently been taken up by Michael Warner. See his *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

22. Warkentin, *Reshaping World Politics*, 33.

23. Dean, Jodi, *Publicity’s Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

24. This has recently been proposed by Jonathan Bach and David Stark, who take up a central concept from actor-network theory, that of the co-construction of social and technical

entities, for the study of the interrelations between CSOs and ICTs. Arguing for an approach that is sensitive to transformations of both entities, Bach and Stark propose to describe them in terms of a process of co-evolution. While their approach presents a welcome shift away from the isomorphistic approach to ICTs and CSOs, Bach and Stark's account preserves the preoccupation with social and epistemic networks characteristic of earlier work on the subject.

Bach and Stark, "Link, Search, Interact." 101-102.

25. The case of the missing journalists of Central Asia and the ways in which it was (not) built on the Web, was researched by Richard Rogers during the workshop "Social Life of Issues 6: The Network Effects of Civil Society," organized by the govcom.org Foundation, C3, Budapest, May 2002.

26. "Bank Boycott," discussion list, <http://groups.yahoo.com/subscribe/bank-boycott>.