The Strength of Being (supposedly) Weak – IOs and Civil Society in IG

Meryem Marzouki
CNRS & UPMC Sorbonne Universités - Paris, France

WS68 – Can Civil Society Impact Global Internet Governance?
IGF 2015 – João Pessoa, Brazil
Context

- A 3 years project (with Nanette Levinson, American U. Washington DC)
- Longitudinal study (from WSIS to present) of IOs as “inconspicuous strategic players” in global IG
- Main case studies so far: UNESCO, OECD, CoE
- Methodology: Interviews, document analysis, quantitative analysis of activities & collaborations at IGFs, participant observation
Main Findings

- Pro-active role of IOs as actors in their own rights vs. just interstate coordination mechanisms
- IOs reinventing themselves both externally and internally for strategic resilience/survival and mandate extension
- IOs crafting their roles via issue/policy entrepreneurship, mainly at the IGFs in cooperation with civil society and technical communities
- IOs opening to transnational actors (civil society, technical communities) for mutual consolidation of roles and activities
Illustration on Case Studies (a flavor)

- **UNESCO**: need to “get back in the game” after “marginalization” at WSIS => “Internet Universality” concept channeling almost all of its mandate issues in IG discussions.

- **OECD**: since 2008 Seoul Ministerial, strong link between IG issues & Internet Economy, and institutionalized participation through CSISAC and ITAC.

- **CoE**: need to “strategize” to put human rights at the heart of IG, after 1st IGF where “everyone there looked at [them] as aliens” => inescapable IG actor, institutionalizing IGF work (Guide for HR of Internet Users), fully playing the multistakeholder game (Committees of Experts, Decl. and Rec., IG Strategy articulating all sectors).
Conclusions (1)

- Civil Society: new blood rejuvenating IOs old bodies
- IOs: Political opportunity structures to help institutionalizing Civil Society’s vision(s), issues framing(s) and outcomes
- In IG field, same trends observed for IOs and Technical Communities (Levinson & Marzouki, 2015)
- From the literature on PolSci/IR: also confirmed in other global governance sectors (Schemeil, 2012), such as Environment (Jinah, 2014)
Conclusions (2)

Importance of Global IG context:

- No global treaty (yet?)
- Mainly soft law and non binding standards, including at regional and national levels
- IGF a networked, ad hoc, messy environment
- Highly technical issues, quickly developing and requiring specific expertise
- Largely ignored by the general public
Global IG perfectly fits (if not calls for) a multistakeholder regime, but...

- The democratic issue? Legitimacy, representativeness/actual openness, transparency, accountability, balance of powers... Need to formalize Civil Society (inter alia) participation in IOs proceedings (OECD, 2008; IGF BPF on developing meaningful multistakeholder participation mechanisms, 2015; ...)

- The (all!) human rights and rule of law issue? Specifics of the online domain negatively impact rights and remedies / From a privately ordered space to a privately contracted system of rights (Jøergensen & Marzouki, 2015)