



## Debating communication imbalances from the MacBride Report to the World Summit on the Information Society: an analysis of a changing discourse

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### ABSTRACT

This article argues that it is important to position the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in a historical perspective to understand the roots of the current debate and how they relate to changes that are affecting the world today. A lexical content analysis of the words and phrases of three key documents – final Recommendations of the MacBride Report and WSIS final Declarations from the Geneva Summit (official and alternative) – enable us to identify continuity and change in international policy discourses on communication imbalances, the role of information technologies for development and their implications for human and communication rights. The discussion of the findings points out similarities and differences between the narratives of yesterday and today and how these relate to developments in the social and political environment.

### KEY WORDS

communication imbalances ■ global communication debates ■ MacBride Report ■ NWICO ■ World Summit on the Information Society

### **World politics and communication: historical precedents and contemporary transformations**

It is useful to remind ourselves that the WSIS debate has its legacy within the United Nations system. Marc Raboy points out that the WSIS was the third attempt by the United Nations system to deal globally with information and communication issues:

In 1948 ... the Universal Declaration on Human Rights spelled out, for all, what the great revolutions of the eighteenth century had struggled to obtain

for Europeans and Americans: that the capacity to seek, receive and impart information is a basic human right. In the 1970s ... the non-aligned nations sparked a debate on a 'new world information and communication order', drawing attention to such questions as the inequalities in North-South information flow, the cultural bias of technology and the lack of communication infrastructure in the so-called Third World. 1948 was a moment of consensus, but the debates of the 1970s were fraught with conflict, as is well known. (2004b: 225)

Reviewing the role of the UN and UNESCO in the evolution of international agreements in the field of information and communication, Ulla Carlsson (2003) reminds us that no less than 41 international conventions and declarations were adopted between 1948 and 1980, which 'focused on the legal status of various elements in mass communication and specified objects for regulation on a multilateral basis' (p. 36).

In the 1970s, debates around the proposal of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) were central to this. The underlying idea, in a time of decolonization and the emergence of newly independent states in international fora, was that no real independence would be possible unless political, economic and cultural autonomy for all states could be obtained. This was the subject of much controversy, mainly due to the Cold-War climate, as the aspirations and demands of the Southern countries were supported by the Eastern bloc and strongly opposed by Western countries and Western media institutions. These demands concerned a number of issues, which have been summarized as the 'four Ds': 'democratization' (the need for pluralism of sources of news and information), 'decolonization' (the struggle for independence from foreign structures and self-reliance), 'de-monopolization' (denouncing concentration of ownership in media industries) and 'development' (Nordenstreng, 1984).

Actions were required to bring about changes in the international communication system so that states could 'develop their cultural system in an autonomous way and, with complete sovereign control of resources, fully and effectively participate as independent members of the international community' (Hamelink, cited in Carlsson, 2003: 43).<sup>1</sup> Thus information and communication issues became a major aspect, both a tool and an end, in the South's struggle for sovereignty through self-reliance.

The demand for a NWICO was provided with intellectual rigour through the work of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, led by Sean MacBride; its final report, known

as the MacBride Report,<sup>2</sup> adopted by UNESCO at its General Conference in 1980, was the culmination of the NWICO debate that later became gradually marginalized.

There are two key aspects relevant to the argument here. The first is that in those debates and related documents, reference was often made to the need to democratize international relations: there was a clear awareness that a reordering of information and communication at the international level was crucial to bring about 'radical changes in global power relationships' (Carlsson, 2003: 42). Information and communication were recognized as closely linked to the overall structure of the international system. Second, technological transformations (including the speed and extension of transnational flows and infrastructures) required new regulations and rules, in a world that was undergoing profound changes (Rosenau and Singh, 2003).

This historical precedent to WSIS is therefore meaningful both in terms of the involvement of the international community in multilateral negotiations about information and communication, and because of the very issues that stimulated such debates: the potential of communication technologies in overcoming global inequalities and the recognized need for international agreements and regulation. The two key issues that played a part in forming the idea of a World Summit on the Information Society at the start of the new millennium were, in fact, the growing inequalities and technological gaps and the challenge to reorder a world system in which multilateralism no longer seems to be a recognized principle and institutional legitimacy is a contested matter (O'Brien et al., 2000).

These are aspects of contemporary global processes that affect practices of political conduct at all levels (Rosenau, 1992, 1999; Held et al., 1999), as well as global 'media- and technoscapes' (Appadurai, 1996). Changes on the global scene interfere today with the separation between domestic and international political processes (Held, 1999); we witness a shifting in the location of authority towards supra- and extra-national fora, the emergence of a transnational civil society, the re-orientation of intellectual, political and economic elites (Rosenau, 1999). In this context, transformations in the role information technologies play in everyday life have stimulated a comprehensive rethinking of societal development: an 'informational paradigm' seems to be emerging, while networks of power, wealth and communication spread around the globe (Castells, 2000), strengthening the interplay between political processes and communication developments.

Moreover as public institutions are forced to redefine their *modus*

*operandi*, transnational corporations and business organizations are increasingly influencing global processes, particularly in the communication and information sectors (Herman and McChesney, 1997; Hamelink, 2001; Kleinwachter, 2001; Padovani, 2001) and are gradually being legitimized as interlocutors in international fora. At the same time, the 'public space' is becoming transnational and its 'inhabitants' are asking for institutional mechanisms and guarantees that allow them to participate meaningfully in developing not just norms and visions, but also concrete and effective governance structures (Nye and Donahue, 2000; O'Siochru, 2003; Padovani and Tuzzi, 2004). The more that political issues such as communication imbalances become global in scope, the more global policies are needed to accommodate the different interests at stake.

These developments should be conceived in a longer time span, as the results of historical relations of interdependence leading to emerging 'visions of global governance'. The governance concept is now generally accepted as a way to describe negotiation practices between public, private and third sector agents, creating complex networks of interdependence at different levels of authority (Padovani, 2003). The need to re-define basic norms for the sectors of information technology, communication and knowledge, of which an exemplary case is that of the governance of the internet (Kleinwachter, 2004), parallels the need that was perceived from the late 1970s onwards. At the same time, the emerging discourse about multi-stakeholder approaches to governance can be conceived as an evolution in conceptualizing the democratization of international relations.

### **An emerging global communication movement?**

A second reason to place the reflection on WSIS in a longer term perspective has to do with the profound transformations that have occurred in the socio-political structure of world affairs. As a reaction to opacity in the conduct of politics beyond the national level, new mobilizations from the grassroots have emerged. Reference to the 'global civil society' is growing in literature (Kaldor, 2003; Keane, 2003) as well as in political discourse. Criticism of an unproblematic use of the term is also growing (Kooiman, 2003; Calabrese, 2004), yet the diffused use of the concept suggests an awareness that something new is happening in a transnational space that has greatly benefited from the dissemination of ICT; a trans-national reality has emerged which is now able to articulate its demands and actions through dynamics that connect the global context to local spaces.

The so-called 'no-global/new-global' movement, that became visible in Seattle in November 1999,<sup>3</sup> has afterwards created its own spaces for reflection, through the World Social Forum, regional and local social fora, and through a number of counter summits that have been organized since then to coincide with high-level political gatherings (Pianta, 2001). This process roused the interest of scholars who started to investigate the transnational dimension of mobilizations and protest politics (Smith et al., 1997; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Guidry et al., 2000; Hamel et al., 2001).

So where do communication and information issues fit into this picture? The question is relevant, as ICTs and information sharing have become important resources for such mobilizations (Keck and Sikkink, 1999; Leon et al., 2001; Carroll and Hackett, 2004). Furthermore, today information and communication are not just considered as instrumental tools for networking and activism, they are also becoming major issues to be discussed in their own right (Mueller, 2004). The tension between an instrumental conception of information technologies and their impact in setting the context for more participatory political process is still unresolved. Nevertheless, themes debated in civil society fora increasingly include questions of media concentration, the need for pluralism and access to information, legal issues concerning individual freedoms and privacy, communication rights and the application of ICTs.

It is therefore interesting, in reviewing the history of international communication debates, to recognize that reference to 'the emergence of a global movement' in media and communication started in the early 1980s. Nordenstreng recalls how, in 1983, a loose coalition of international organizations of journalists<sup>4</sup> involved in the NWICO debates issued a document on 'International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism' which stated: 'The journalist operates in the contemporary world within the framework of a movement towards new international relations in general, and a new information order in particular' (Nordenstreng, 1999: 241). Possibly the use of the term 'movement' at that time was related to the Non-Aligned 'movement' struggling for democratization of the international system; as well as influenced by the experience of 'new social movements' which had become relevant to Western societies in those years. But the idea did not disappear subsequently.

Some years later, Nordenstreng and Traber wrote a booklet – *Few Voices, Many Worlds* – with an interesting subtitle: *Towards a Media Reform Movement* (Traber and Nordenstreng, 1992). They noted that, by the early 1990s, NWICO was no longer on the international agenda:

At present, the forum for debate over NWICO has been left to scholars and communication specialists ... What is needed is to bring the concerns of the MacBride Report to general attention, and encourage further debate and study by concerned individuals and non-governmental organizations. (1992: 1)

The authors' call for an international mobilization was grounded on the evidence of a growing number of initiatives that aimed at fostering the debate outside institutional fora.<sup>5</sup>

The 'movement' was still very much restricted to specific sectors – academics, a few NGOs and some media professional associations – and it was mainly focused on media-related issues; but the term was no longer used in close relation to the NWICO debate, which had been essentially characterized by the presence of state actors. There was an explicit awareness of the need for the involvement of citizens' organizations. By the end of the decade there had been some developments in this direction, as Vincent et al. (1999) noted in their update to the MacBride Report:

What started, historically, with the proposed restructuring of the international information and communication order has grown into an alliance of grassroots organizations, women's groups, ecology networks, social activists, and committed academics. Some now call it a media reform movement, others emphasize media education, of which the mass media are an important part. There is a new NWICO in the making which sees itself as a network of networks based in civil society. (pp. ix-x)

We can therefore trace an evolution in the use of the term 'movement' that gradually brought the concept closer to today's reality. Sean O Siochru (2005) argued that

the emergence of a transnational advocacy campaign on media and communication issues, with a focus on the global level, is a necessary step in combating current negative trends in turning the media tide in favour of people and sustainable and equitable human development.

Our analysis of documents by the civil society sector in WSIS stressed that: 'WSIS has shown the articulation of civil society realities and the multiplicity of networks and connections that can develop from interaction in a common space, which is no longer just physically defined but also built through long-distance connections' (Padovani and Tuzzi, 2005).

A social reality, with historical and conceptual roots in the debates of the 1970s and early 1980s, has developed its networking structures and strengthened its international presence in subsequent years leading up to the WSIS, through such initiatives as the MacBride Roundtables,

the proposal for a People's Communication Charter<sup>6</sup> and the Platform for Democratization of Communication.<sup>7</sup> The Communication Rights in the Information Society Campaign<sup>8</sup> (CRIS) has created a space where senior activists and scholars and younger interested individuals and organizations have built an inter-generational bridge between NWICO and WSIS.

But WSIS also offered the opportunity for other mobilization experiences, not directly linked to communication, such as the women's and the indigenous peoples' movements, to voice their vision about information-related issues. Furthermore, this happened in a dialogue with more recent mobilization experiences, around digital rights and the governance of the internet, as well as about youth presence in the ICT environment and the use of ICTs for an '*Internet citoyen et solidaire*'.

Attempts have been made to map out this articulated reality,<sup>9</sup> though much remains to be done, as the landscape is continuously changing. This complex phenomenon also needs to be placed in a longer time perspective, if we are to develop appropriate conceptual frameworks for conducting further research, capable of investigating social dynamics that are today characterized by a plural agenda, a multilevel *modus operandi* and a transnational networking structure.

### **Analysing the 'worlds of words'**

Analysing discourses is a way to look at transformations over time and investigate the challenges that not only diplomats and policy-makers, but all those that 'hold stakes' in the development of global communication are facing today.<sup>10</sup> As Annabelle Sreberny reminds us 'Summits may be all about words, but the words have consequences' (2004: 201). A lexical content analysis of the language adopted in documents shows how ideas and concepts were elaborated in different historical moments. Some of them have remained relevant over time, others have been transformed and new ones have emerged.

Conscious of the relevance of language in diplomacy and negotiations, and in order to assess continuity and change in debates, I selected and compared the language of three key documents, which can be considered representative of the historical 'experiences' under examination.

The first one is the final section of the *MacBride Report*, in which the Commission members synthesized the findings of their research and reflections on communication problems, adding a propositional prospective towards the attainment of a New World Information and

Communication Order. Such proposals are arranged in 'Recommendations and Conclusions' into five sections<sup>11</sup> that deal with: the need for developing countries to build their own communication systems and news agencies, the need to foster regional cooperation, together with national capacity and training systems in communication and information; the need to address issues of cultural identity, content production and inter-regional exchange; and basic needs in terms of infrastructures and services.

Of particular interest is the section on 'Democratization of Communication' where explicit reference is made to individual and collective rights, among which the right to communicate is considered as a cornerstone of a 'new era of social rights'. Media ownership concentration is mentioned as a major obstacle to be removed if pluralism and diversity are to inform communication systems; while effective legal and regulatory measures have to be designed if democratization processes are to be fostered.<sup>12</sup>

The document is representative of the political climate of the time and of the specific language used in debates that involved Western and Soviet bloc nations, and a cohesive group of Non-Aligned countries, as well as scholars and media professionals. It was the result of investigations conducted by communication experts, scholars and policy-makers<sup>13</sup> and not the outcome of a diplomatic negotiation, but it was officially adopted by UNESCO (through Resolution 4/19, 1980). The text has therefore received official legitimization by the international community.

Also legitimized as the output of a high-level political summit, the second document considered in our analysis is the WSIS Official Declaration of Principles adopted in Geneva on December 12, 2003: *Building the Information Society: a Global Challenge in the New Millennium*.<sup>14</sup> The 'Representatives of the people of the world ... declare[d] common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society' and established basic principles towards that end, articulated into eleven points:

1. the role of government and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development
2. information and communication infrastructures as foundation for an inclusive information society
3. access to information and knowledge
4. capacity building
5. building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
6. enabling environment
7. ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life
8. cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
9. media

10. ethical dimension of the Information Society
11. international and regional cooperation.

This document is the result of a diplomatic negotiation and its language clearly reflects its nature. It also expresses the plurality of issues that make up the international agenda and reflects today's official narrative and governments' priorities.

Equally legitimized by recognition as one of the official outputs of the Geneva Summit, is the third document, *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs*, which is the 'alternative' Declaration<sup>15</sup> adopted by the Civil Society Plenary. WSIS has witnessed the emergence of a visible and vocal non-governmental sector, which has over the years grown in numbers and areas of interest, mobilizing for action, defining common priorities and building a shared language (Padovani and Tuzzi, 2004, 2005).

The structure of the Civil Society Declaration is quite different from the Official Declaration, as are the opening words:

We, women and men from different continents, cultural backgrounds, perspectives, experience and expertise, acting as members of different constituencies of an emerging global civil society ... have been working for two years inside the process, devoting our efforts to shaping a people-centred, inclusive and equitable concept of information and communication societies.

The preamble 'A Visionary Society' is followed by a list of 'Principles and Challenges':

1. social justice and people-centred sustainable development
2. centrality of human rights
3. culture, knowledge and public domain (covering such themes as linguistic diversity and the media)
4. enabling environment (to parallel the official language, but referring to the ethical dimension, democratic and accountable governance)
5. human development, education and training
6. information generation and knowledge development
7. global governance of ICTs and communication.

### **Research questions and methodology**

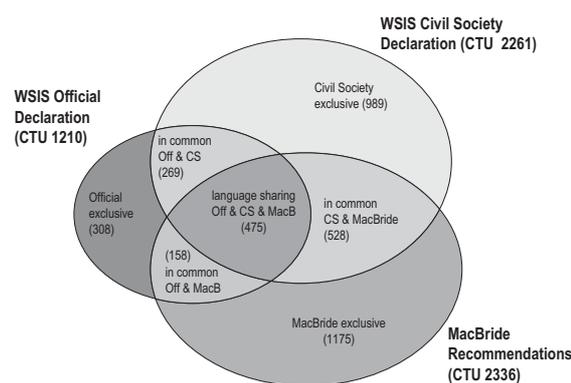
The analysis deals with two moments in history and three documents or 'speakers', since one of the novelties of the WSIS process was the choice to have both governmental and non-governmental actors formally involved. Referring to this triangle of voices some research questions are addressed:

- What can we say about legacies and transformations, analysing the language in communication debates?
- What are the issues at the core of each document? What are the 'common' elements?
- Is it possible to identify conceptual links and elements of continuity? Are these to be found mainly in the relationship between the MacBride Report and the Official Declaration or in connections between MacBride and the alternative Civil Society document?

The lexical content analysis compared the vocabularies of each text in terms of the amount of different complex textual units (CTUs), i.e. not only words, but also multi-words or sequences. These were included in the analysis for the following reasons: (a) to increase the amount of information (they carry more information than simple word-types); and (b) to reduce the ambiguity of simple word-types (which is due to their isolation from their context of usage). Note that the three documents differ in length: MacBride and the Civil Society Declaration are quite similar, while the WSIS Official Declaration is half the length of the others. This affects the relative weight of each CTUs' occurrence in the texts.

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the interconnection between the selected documents in terms of shared and exclusive language. The study compared the vocabularies in terms of shared and exclusive use of language, as well as elements common to all three, in order to test the following assumptions:

- (a) Common elements between MacBride Report Recommendations and the WSIS Official Declaration could be explained referring, in both cases, to processes of mainly intergovernmental nature.



**Figure 1** Interconnection between selected documents in terms of shared and exclusive language.

- (b) Common elements between MacBride Recommendations and the WSIS Civil Society Declaration (2003) could be thought of as a legacy of the NWICO debate in the perspective of 'communication societies' (O'Siochru, 2004), in the awareness that during the 1980s the debate had been marginalized to academic settings and grassroots groups while social mobilizations on related issues have grown.
- (c) Common elements between the WSIS Official Declaration and the WSIS Civil Society Declaration could be thought of as new substantial elements with respect to former debates, due to changes in the world context, in technology and in the conduct of policy. Common elements may also be explained by actors' participation in the same process over the 18 months of the WSIS preparatory process to the Geneva phase.

### Exclusive language

The study also looked at the characteristic language of each document, through the analysis of textual units that are used only by one document and never by others, in order to identify which themes, issues and dimensions are central to each document (see Figure 2 and Table 1).

### Shared and specific language

Language can be shared by documents, but formulas can be highly specific to one document in relation to others (i.e. relatively more used by that document). Therefore, together with the identification of common elements between texts, the study also indicated which aspects are relatively more important for each document (see Figure 3 and Table 2).

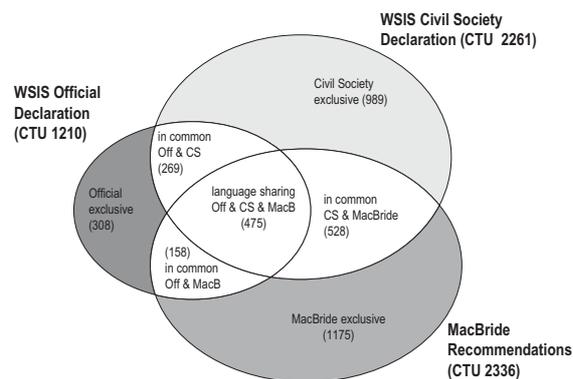


Figure 2 Characteristic (exclusive) language of each document.

**Table 1** Exclusive language.

<p><i>MacBride Report</i>  news (23/23), professional (16/15), mass_media (13/12), broadcasting (9/9),  advertising (9/9), profession (8/8), new_world (7/7), protection_of_journalists (7/7),  dependence (6/6), self-reliance (6/6), disarmament (5/5), democratization (5/5),  television (5/5), newspapers (5/5), transnational_corporations (5/5),  communication_development (4/4), information_flows (4/4), communication_needs (4/4)</p> <p><i>WSIS Official Declaration</i>  development_of/building_the_information_society (10/10),  countries_with_economies_in_transition (4/4), ict_applications (4/4), connectivity (3/3),  ict_infrastructure (3/3), productivity (3/3), internet_related_public_policy_issues (3/3)</p> <p><i>WSIS Civil Society Alternative Declaration</i>  community_media (9/9), free_software (10/9), cultural_and_linguistic (10/9),  indigenous_people (10/9), transparency (6/6), transparent_and_accountable (3/3),  communication_societies (6/6), pluralistic (6/6), open_access (8/7), conflict_situations  (6/6), knowledge_societies (5/5), information_and_communications (5/5),  knowledge_and_information (5/5), human_knowledge (5/5), women_and_men (5/5),  to_participate (7/6), freedom_of_expression (4/4), community_driven (4/4),  community_informatics (4/4), unequal_power (3/3), media_workers (3/3),  media_freedom (3/3)</p>
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Note: Numbers in brackets indicate the number of times a CTU occurs in the corpus with reference to how many times it is used in the document (total X/document Y).

### Common language

The study also found CTUs that are common to all three documents, the assumption being that there exist some shared substantial issues which could provide a basis on which to establish an agreed approach to communication problems (see Figure 4 and Table 3).

### Differing visions of information and communication in society

Having compared the three documents and outlined similarities and differences in the use of language, the analysis found that, in spite of some shared language, each document expresses a quite different vision of communication in society. Very few elements are common to all documents. Only aspects related to development and technology seem to be equally frequently used among all documents. This demonstrates the general awareness of the need to overcome inequalities, which have actually become more evident over the past 25 years. The focus on technology, and a quite similar wording, also indicates that in spite of technological innovations that have intervened in the past decades, the

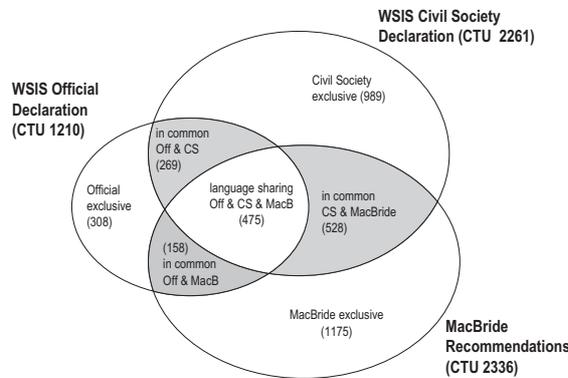


Figure 3 Specific (relatively more important) language of each document.

Table 2 Shared and specific language

<p><i>MacBride Report / WSIS Official Declaration</i></p> <p>a) each_country (7/2), independence (6/1), cultural_identity (5/1), ethics (4/1), national_development (4/1), all_nations (4/1)</p> <p>b) international_and_regional (2/4)</p> <p>c) national_and_regional (2/2), international_cooperation (3/5), to_create (3/1), to_enable (1/3), to_enhance (2/2), to_increase (2/2), to_serve (2/1), to_evaluate (2/1), to_assess (2/1) (long list of words used just once by both documents)</p> <p><i>MacBride Report / WSIS Civil Society alternative Declaration</i></p> <p>a) journalists (28/4), journalism (6/2), mass_media (11/2), exchange (8/1), infrastructures (6/1), researchers (5/1)</p> <p>b) participatory (2/6), research (4/10), communities (2/22), independent (1/9), accountability (1/5)</p> <p>c) communications (9/8), inequalities (6/5), control (4/7), power (3/4), capacities (4/3), means_of_communication (3/4), regulations (3/3)</p> <p><i>WSIS Official Declaration / WSIS Civil Society alternative Declaration</i></p> <p>a) information_society (36/7), sustainable_development (7/5), all_stakeholders (10/2), private_sector (6/3), special_needs (5/1), enabling_environment (3/2)</p> <p>b) civil_society (5/18), public_domain (3/13), free_software (1/9), indigenous_peoples (1/9), cultural_and_linguistic (1/9), open_access (1/7), intellectual_property (2/5), to_participate (1/6), regulation (1/5), international_law (1/5), traditional_media (1/5), global_knowledge (1/5), public_policy (1/4), people_centered (1/4)</p> <p>c) access_to_information (4/7), applications (3/4), digital_divide (2/3), digital_solidarity (3/2)</p>
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Notes: Numbers in brackets indicate the number of times a CTU occurs in doc 1 in relation to occurrence in doc 2.

- a) CTUs relatively more relevant to doc. 1.
- b) CTUs relatively more relevant to doc. 2.
- c) CTUs used in a similar way in both documents.

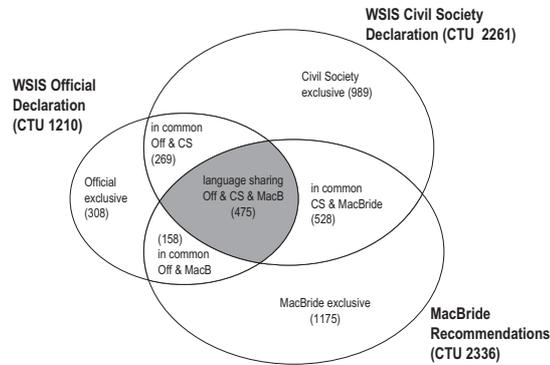


Figure 4 Common language shared by all documents.

Table 3 Common language

Common language (CTUs)	MacBride Report	WSIS Official Declaration	WSIS Civil Society Declaration
communication	60	2	9
decision_making	8	3	7
democracy	1	1	5
democratic	4	2	9
developing_countries	26	6	7
development	33	23	28
diversity	5	2	6
governments	2	4	10
human_rights	16	3	14
information_and_communication	9	5	53
investment	3	5	1
knowledge	3	6	23
media	39	5	23
must	10	3	39
national	28	5	5
participation	8	2	11
policies	8	3	7
research_and_development	4	2	1
responsibility	9	1	5
rights	5	3	15
technologies	5	7	8
women	2	3	13

Note: Numbers indicate the number of times a CTU occurs in each document.

language to express the centrality and role of information technology in society has remained quite similar.

This also confirms the on-going challenge posed by technological innovation to the development of appropriate regulatory mechanisms. Within the global landscape of communication governance one crucial

issue is: what mechanisms and procedures can be promoted to favour the participatory dialogue that has been formally legitimized by WSIS? Needless to say the bigger challenge does not reside in procedures per se, but in a change of mentality that starts being perceived by public administrators as well as social actors (Mueller, 2004; Padovani, 2004).

There are more elements in common between the MacBride Recommendations and the WSIS Civil Society Declaration than between MacBride and the Official WSIS output. Issues of common interest are: human rights, freedoms and a strong reference to the 'public dimension' (public spaces, services, policies). Reference is also made to the institutional responsibility to develop legal frameworks through a decision-making that should foster democratization processes. Yet while democratization is expressed in a generic manner in the MacBride Report, consistently with the above mentioned interest for 'democratizing the international system', democratic, open and inclusive processes are crucial to the Civil Society document, which shows a more concrete approach to democratic processes, between, as well as within, societies.

A few more elements are shared by the two documents, among which are the use of the term 'power', a reference to 'world peace' and two interesting evolutionary visions of human rights, respectively more important for MacBride and Civil Society. The idea of a 'right\_to\_communicate' appears in both documents, but is used three times in the MacBride Recommendations and once in the Civil Society Declaration; while the formula 'right\_to\_participate' is used three times in the WSIS Civil Society document and once in MacBride. This possibly reflects the different context in which visions were developed together with the contemporary recognition that it is only through inclusive decision-making that policies can be adopted which allow the democratic potential of communication to develop, thus fostering the right to communicate.

Few elements are shared by the WSIS Official Declaration and the Civil Society document, in particular the 'access dimension' (access\_to\_information, universal, affordable and equitable access) and the 'development dimension' (promotion\_of\_development, levels\_of\_development, ict\_for\_development). Two specific sets of words, relating to the so-called 'digital\_divide' and to 'sustainable\_development', reflect the evolution of concepts over the years. Sustainability had become an issue in the international agenda on the occasion of the UN Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, whereas in previous years the focus would have been on self-reliant or endogenous development. Similarly, the so-called 'digital divide' has been promoted as a central issue for the international community

through the World Economic Forum in 2000: imbalances in information technologies have become 'divides' mainly understood in a digital sense.

Few aspects connect the MacBride Recommendations with the WSIS Official Declaration: mainly the use of verbs, indicating commitments to be made (to create, enable, enhance), and reference to international organizations and cooperation, maintaining a focus on the national dimension (national priorities, efforts, capacity) which appears stronger in the MacBride document. It therefore seems that the 'official discourse' has definitely and profoundly changed.

Overall each document expresses quite different visions (see Table 4). Highly relevant to the MacBride language is reference to mass media, broadcasting, the profession of journalists, news and information flows. Strong focus is also on the concentration and monopolization of communication structures, which does not find an equivalent in either of the two other documents. Exclusive to MacBride is reference to transnational corporations. This focus on the world media system and the role of media in development, which has actually been one of the major concerns in former debates, has been quite marginalized in the WSIS official discourse,<sup>16</sup> raising criticism among civil society organizations as well as scholars (Carlsson, 2003; Hamelink, 2004; Raboy, 2004a, 2004b). In contemporary official narratives problems raised by global media concentration are hardly mentioned, in spite of this being one of the most problematic developments on the world media scene. No conceptual articulation emerges from the Official WSIS Declaration of the interrelation between traditional and new media, nor between public, commercial and community media.

Furthermore, in the MacBride Report 'communication' is widely referred to: means of communication, flows of communication, new communications, development communication. In spite of the focus on world information flows that characterized the NWICO debate, information and communication were conceived as two different things, both part of the broader international reality. The international arena is relevant to MacBride but a strong focus is also placed on countries and national spaces. It may be interesting to note that in the Report the word 'state' is never used: the 'national' dimension prevails. Furthermore, as anticipated above, democracy is conceived as a necessary horizon and is articulated in different ways – democratization, democratized, democratizing – but not in relation to actual decision-making processes. Finally, we find expressions such as 'self-reliance' and 'independence' which reflect the historical context in which the debate took place. 'Civil\_society' is never mentioned, while sparse reference is made to 'organized\_social\_groups'.

The basic idea in the WSIS Official Declaration is that of building the

information society through technology and its applications, connectivity, technology transfer and infrastructure development; the other strong focus being on economic growth, productivity, job creation, competitiveness and investment. This reflects policy narratives around ICTs and communication that have developed since the early 1990s: the launch of the Global Information Infrastructure in 1994 and the European commitment to the 'European information society' (Padovani and Nesti, 2003). Language is consistent with contemporary global trends, 'spurred by deregulation and privatization, concentration and commercialization' (Carlsson, 2003: 61). In the official discourse, a prevailing technologically-oriented view of societal transformation goes along with a neo-liberal approach, according to which institutional actors are essentially required to 'foster enabling environments'.

The other peculiar element in the document is the exclusive and recurrent reference to security issues (cybersecurity, confidence\_and\_security, security\_of\_networks, global\_culture\_of\_cyber\_security) which has become central to the official WSIS language. As suggested elsewhere, there exists in WSIS

two ways of conceiving security ... on one side international security and stability (the international political dimension) and on the other side the need to enhance the confidence of consumers in the information society (the economic dimension). What seems to remain uncovered ... is the individual dimension of a human right to personal security in an information environment that can be more and more un-safe for citizens, though safe enough for consumers. (Padovani and Tuzzi, 2003)

Several elements characterize the Civil Society Declaration and its diversified language. The use of plurals is strong – societies, peoples, actors – and the emerging vision is very much 'globally aware' (global\_civil\_society, global\_governance). There is also strong reference to communities (community media, informatics, broadcasting), while information is always accompanied by communication and/or knowledge, thus stressing a broader conception of communicative flows, interplaying with culture and human knowledge. While communication is strongly referred to in the MacBride document, a stronger focus on 'knowledge' seems to express the deepest concern of civil society organizations in WSIS. Democracy is also referred to by civil society organizations; in their view it goes along with accountability, transparency and the responsiveness of institutional powers and other actors who are called to commit themselves to shaping information societies capable of responding to human needs. The recurrent verb is 'must' (be\_ensured, be\_promoted, be\_protected), the focus being on the right to be guaranteed and not just on the action to be promoted.

**Table 4** Highly characteristic elements of each document

MacBride Recommendations	WSIS Official Declaration	WSIS Civil Society Declaration
Mass media, broadcasting, journalists	Building/developing information societies	Plurality Global awareness
Concentration of communication structures, trans-national corporations	Connectivity, infrastructure	Communication + information & knowledge
Communication	Economic growth, productivity, competitiveness	Democracy + accountability, transparency, responsiveness, participation
International arena + national realities	Security, confidence	'Must'
Democratization, democratizing		Power, unequal power, empowering
Self-reliance, independence		Communities

This articulation and the internal consistency of the document also show a growing awareness of the role to be played by non-state actors in global communication governance. This participatory dimension becomes a crucial challenge, to be faced through the recognition of existing 'unequal powers' and the need to 'empower' citizens and communities.

### Concluding remarks

All three documents are expressions of ages of turbulence and transformation. In the 1970s turbulence was the result of decolonization processes that challenged the structure of the bipolar world system, while at the dawn of the new millennium, turbulence is multi-dimensional (Rosenau, 1990; Held et al., 1999). Communication and information were, and still are, at the core of world turbulence: technological developments bring fast changes that imply political as well as cultural adaptations. The spread, adoption and use of communication technologies, both by global and local actors, is challenging the traditional conduct of world affairs by state actors; inequalities in access to information and knowledge and in the capacity to meaningfully operate communication systems deepen other socio-economic inequalities.

The focus of debates has shifted from mass media and information flows to new media and information technology but we still find a plurality of visions concerning communication in society which will hardly be harmonized in the near future. Visions of the 1970s reflected the ideological

confrontation between the two superpowers and the attempts of a 'third voice' to be heard. Contemporary visions stem from the plurality of subjects that are 'taking the floor' on the world scene. However, it should be stressed that a stronger linkage is found between 'old' debates about democratization and development and the 'new' visionary perspective developed by Civil Society groups at WSIS, than between any other set of documents.

In spite of the transformations that have been outlined, global turbulence has roots in the past: world divides are still major challenges to world peace. Potentialities offered by new technologies must be properly channelled to produce positive effects, and the basic issue remains the political will that is needed to face such challenges. Traditional actors in international politics do have a crucial role to play, not just in fostering 'enabling environments' but in setting the normative context for strategies that should reflect such political will. Meanwhile the synergies created between local initiatives and international social mobilizations, thanks to creative uses of ICTs, have nurtured the seeds of a global movement on communication issues, which is now 'challenging the old world of governments'.

WSIS has shown that politics from above and from below are breaking new ground around communication and information issues. To address communication challenges in the appropriate manner and develop mechanisms that will combine different discourses into a fruitful policy dialogue, overcoming the 'hybrid between new technologies and old organization forms' (Mueller, 2004), is a challenge for all stakeholders, looking at lessons from the past while entering the future.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes

- 1 Several authors have written extensively and critically on this specific moment in history, which happened to intensively involve communication scholars in the course of the late 1970s and 1980. We refer to the complete and updated reviews by Golding and Harris (1997), Nordenstreng (1999), Lee (2003) and Carlsson (2003) for in-depth analysis.
- 2 *Many Voices, One World: Communication and Society, Today and Tomorrow – Towards a New, More Just and More Equitable World Information and Communication Order*. The Report has recently been reprinted in the US by Rowman and Littlefield.

- 3 We have discussed elsewhere the fact that Seattle was just a window that made visible a growing 'mobilization from below' that had developed in preceding decades (Padovani, 2002).
- 4 The Consultative Club was the most relevant non-governmental actor in the NWICO debate. The coalition was formed under the auspices of UNESCO in 1978 and remained active until 1990 (Nordenstreng, 1999: 241).
- 5 Such as the research activities of the International Association for media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the colloquia organized by the MacBride Roundtable, or the development activities in the field of communication carried out by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC).
- 6 Elaborated by Cees Hamelink, the text is available at [www.pcc.org](http://www.pcc.org)
- 7 [www.comunica.org](http://www.comunica.org)
- 8 [www.crisinfo.org](http://www.crisinfo.org)
- 9 See Center for International Media Action, [www.mediaactioncenter.org](http://www.mediaactioncenter.org). CIMA acts as a resource centre for organizations and activists and has recently developed a directory of organizations that are active in advocacy initiatives on communication governance in the US. It has just conducted a worldwide survey on communication advocacy groups. See also Convergence Center, at Syracuse University [<http://dcc.syr.edu/index.htm>]. The centre supports research on and experimentation with media convergence and presents, among its latest projects, investigations on Citizen Activism in Communication and Information Policy.
- 10 My colleague, Arjuna Tuzzi, and I have applied lexical-content analysis to different WSIS documents and it has proved a useful way of investigating a reality which is, by its own nature, a 'communicative event'. I am therefore building on Padovani and Tuzzi (2003), Padovani and Tuzzi (2004) and Padovani and Tuzzi (2005).
- 11 'Strengthening Independence and Self-Reliance', 'Social Consequences and New Tasks', 'Professional Integrity and Standards', 'Democratization of Communication' and 'Fostering International Cooperation'.
- 12 For an in-depth qualitative analysis of this section of the MacBride Report, see Carlsson (2003) who sees four underlying perspectives in the document: one about communication (and linkages between information, communication and media, distinguishing institutions and organizations); one about development (concerning the role of information and communication media in development processes); one linked to the Third World approach (summarized by the above mentioned four Ds); and the last one about practicability (with a focus on levels of action). For critical evaluation of the text we also refer to a review proposed by Hamelink and Hancock in 1999. They set the Recommendations in context 20 years after the adoption of the report and evaluate their impact on international communication strategies (in Vincent et al., 1999).
- 13 For a presentation of the composition of the MacBride Commission, see Carlsson (2003).
- 14 Document WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E, available at [[www.itu.int/wsis](http://www.itu.int/wsis)].
- 15 Also available on the WSIS official website. A number of documents (eight) were mentioned at the Closing Ceremony in Geneva, which we have analysed in order to identify the different 'visions of the information society'. But only the Civil Society Declaration has been considered as an official output of the Summit, alongside the governmental documents.
- 16 The only reference in the official WSIS Declaration is paragraph 55.

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