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Title: Multistakeholder processes, institutions and democracy

The evolution of global governance mechanisms reveals a number of responses from both state-based and new forms of actors. On the one hand, non-state actors (stakeholders) claim that they should be involved in global governance structures to provide legitimate and effective management of global public goods, and on the other hand, traditional governance mechanisms (states) claim to be more effective and efficient in representing their citizens' interests.

Multistakeholderism, an emergent element of the discourse surrounding global governance institutions, attempts to bridge the gap between these old and new forms of actor, namely private interests, state actors and (transnational) civil society. This trend did not appear out of thin air, but was the response of international and regional organisations to growing criticism of a perceived lack of accountability and a remarkable sense of exclusiveness in their decision making structures; common sense stated that including more stakeholders would generate more legitimate and effective policy processes and outcomes. It is a contested subject: different actors perceive these multistakeholder institutions in different ways. This transformation in global governance is designed to make governance processes more effective and more legitimate, but can it do both at the same time? Is it even capable of achieving either objective? Academics and policy-makers have indeed argued that regional governance and inclusion of private actors and civil society in policy dialogues could help resolve or mitigate the 'political trilemma' by making global governance institutions more efficient and more legitimate.

This research theme on stakeholder engagement at a global and regional levels is currently being developed in the Centre on Digitalisation, Democracy and Innovation (D2I). Our centre brings together and collaborates with a range of actors in Brussels, the United Nations University in Bruges (see http://cris.unu.edu/gremlin/), and beyond (see e.g. https://eutopia-university.eu/) due to formal links that would allow researchers to engage with these different communities. Our centre specifically wishes to address the profound challenges to the authority and legitimacy of democratic governance, and currently does so in a variety of areas, including the study of global Internet Governance. We ask questions such as: can governance of the Internet be entrusted to private actors alone? Which actors are involved and how do they interact? Such themes address the growing need for continued stakeholder engagement in global, European, national and local governance, and the need for concerted regulation in the digital environment.

Our team conducts cutting-edge academic and policy-relevant research on the ongoing digital transformation of society on a range of topics such as artificial intelligence, political communications, journalism, disinformation, taxation, copyright, research and innovation policy, and technology governance. We critically examine the evolution of new modes of governance from an interdisciplinary perspective, specifically in terms of multistakeholder and democratic processes involving private, public, and civil society actors.

We also welcome comparative or in depth case studies that would go beyond Internet Governance topics, and cover themes such as global justice or sustainabillity, thus involving cross-centre research at the Institute for European Studies (http://www.ies.be/).

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