

Remodelling the Transnational Political Realm: Partnerships, Benchmarking Schemes and the Digitalization of Governance*

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Abstract

Drawing on theories of governance and governmentality and on ongoing fieldwork, this paper explores the correlation between the advent of ICTs and changes of statecraft. It examines the spread and application of ICTs at the intersection of two important developments in most parts of the world since the 1980s: the managerial reform of the public sector and the globalization of politics. While the first refers to the relationship between the spread of ICTs and the introduction of private sector management in public sector organizations, the second dimension connects the dissemination of ICTs to the ascendance of transnational organizational forms. Conceptualizing these forms as ‘transnational modalities of governance’, the paper takes a closer look at two empirical instantiations: transnational partnerships and transnational benchmarking schemes, exemplified by ICT-based organizations that address new ICT policy issues. While the cases of partnership and benchmarking are transnational instantiations of political technologies of agency and performance, i.e. of ‘soft’ forms of regulation that seek to enhance participation and empowerment while promoting competition and self-discipline at the level of organizations and individuals, they are also nodes through which the accomplished actors of these emergent organizational forms flow, mix and create alliances. These nodes are of interest both because of what they offer social actors in terms of knowledge about ICTs and their implementation in political, economic and social realms, and because they illustrate how the advent of ICTs interact with the current reordering and remodelling of statecraft.

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Introduction

Sometimes viewed as a panacea to enhance governmental efficiency and effectiveness, at other times celebrated for its democratizing potential, the new information and communication technologies¹ (ICTs) and particularly the Internet, have become a *sine qua non* in any thinking about modern government anywhere in the world². In fact, few government institutions – from the local to the international levels - today question the potential of ICTs and how they will improve the quality of life for public employees and citizens, not only by creating reductions in costs and time, but also by opening up new channels of communication between superiors and subordinates, between the governing and the governed. In a similar vein, most private

¹ Our use of the concept ‘new ICTs’ encompasses high-speed media such as the computer, the cellular phone, the television, the fax machine etc, as well as their increasing convergence into a ‘hypermedia environment’ consisting of a ‘single seamless web of digital-electronic-telecommunications’ (Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia. Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 115.

² See e.g. Jane E. Fountain, *Building the Virtual State: Information Technology and Institutional Change* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001); and G. Nulens and L. Van Audenhove, ‘An Information Society in Africa? An Analysis of the Information Society of the World Bank, ITU and ECE’, *Gazette* 61(6) (1999), 451-471.

companies and civil society organizations around the world are currently adapting ICTs as part of their managerial, organizational or mobilization strategies, giving rise to conceptions such as the ‘networked business model’ and ‘citizen networks’³.

What is perhaps less recognized is that the embrace of ICTs in government institutions tends to be premised on more fundamental changes in ideas and practices of statecraft. Drawing on theories of governance and governmentality and on field research⁴, we will explore the correlation between the advent of the ICTs and changes of statecraft. More specifically, we will examine the spread and application of ICTs at the intersection of two important dimensions of public sector reorganization in most parts of the world since the 1980s: the managerial reform of the public sector and the globalization of politics. The first refers to the relationship between the spread of ICTs, the promotion of markets and the introduction of private sector management in public sector organizations – developments that affect the public sector’s role both as a provider of services and as a regulator. The second dimension, the globalization of politics, connects the dissemination of

³ Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy. Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ronald J. Deibert, ‘International Plug 'n Play? Citizen Activism, the Internet, and Global Public’, *Policy International Studies Perspectives* 1 (2000): 255-272; Ronald J. Deibert, ‘Black Code: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace’, paper presented at the International Studies 44th Annual Convention, Portland, Oregon, February 25th-March 1st 2003.

⁴ The empirical data discussed in this paper is based on ongoing fieldwork involving interviews and documentary research of the organizations involved in the study. As such, our research is part of the Danish based ‘Media and Democracy in Network Society’ research programme (see www.modinet.dk), which runs from 2002-5 and involves more than 40 researchers from the humanities and social sciences.

ICTs to the ascendance of transnational organizational forms, with implications for governance more broadly speaking. We have chosen to call these emerging forms of organizing ‘transnational modalities of governance’ with a view to highlighting their potential impact on global authority structures and processes. While being intimately related to the globalization of politics and to the managerialization of public authority, these modalities are themselves based on ICTs. This, we will argue, is no trivial observation. Media matter and ICTs can – and increasingly do - make a difference in the ways in which governments and non-state actors construct and exert their power in global politics.

This paper identifies two such modalities of governance, both of which are concerned with the spread, application and implications of ICTs - transnational partnerships and transnational benchmarking schemes – and studies in some detail these organizational arrangements and their relationship to government institutions at the national and subnational levels. Transnational partnerships typically take the shape of collaborative schemes between state and non-state actors from a variety of countries – a fluid form of ‘institutional space’⁵, most often designed to address a particular issue, not seldom a ‘wicked issue’, i.e. issues that cut across traditional policy area demarcations⁶. Transnational benchmarking schemes are developed by state and/or non-state actors to measure the performance of state organizations, sometimes devised as comprehensive exercises, covering the aggregate performance of a particular type of organization or institution, e.g. a state

⁵ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society*, (London: Sage, 1999), 169.

⁶ We use the term ‘transnational partnership’ to cover a range of collaborative schemes which are also frequently characterized as ‘multisectoral stakeholder networks’, ‘multisector transnational partnerships’, etc. Such arrangements subsume intergovernmental organizations, business and civil society organizations, and frequently also national governments, into loose rigid organizational set-ups that address specific issue-areas.

administration, sometimes targeting a particular aspect or policy area, e.g. educational standards. Viewed as modalities of governance, both partnerships and benchmarking schemes have a regulatory impact on organizational action. Both modalities of governance have existed for quite some time in national and local political settings, but we believe that their extension into the transnational realm is relatively new, related to changes in practices of statecraft and that it characterizes some policy fields more than others. Wiring up citizens and businesses (e-literacy, e-access, and e-business) and the public sector (e-governance/e-democracy) certainly appears to be issues that lend themselves to these forms of governance modalities. The Internet is the latest major addition to the repertoire of 'modern' statecraft technologies and perspectives. Its exploration and adaptation to the existing governance architecture have to a large extent been driven by sources of authority recruited from outside traditional government, not by design but because traditional government has found it very difficult to institutionalize change, proactively to offer a framework for governing and steering change. When public sector institutions – local, regional, national or federal governments, agencies, departments – or the individuals that inhabit them decide to engage with different forms of transnational governance modalities it is a manifestation of the globalization of political life. It can also be seen as a reflection of these institutions re-asserting their power, more proactively and more confidently playing the governance game⁷.

⁷ When organizations play the 'governance game' they implicitly recognize what has been theorized as the shift from government to governance, i.e the movement from co-ordinated, hierarchical structures and processes of societal steering, to a more network-based process of exchange, negotiation and soft regulation (see e.g Dorte Salskov-Iversen, Hans Krause Hanse and Sven Bislev, 'Governmentality, Globalization, and Local Practice: Transformations of a Hegemonic Discourse', *Alternatives* 25 (2000), 183-222). It should be noted that the government-to-governance assumption can lead to a simplified view on current changes in the exercise of ruling. Rather than

Our exploration of transnational modalities of governance is conducted from the vantage point of governmentality theories, highlighting the correlation between knowledge, power and discourse in the field of governance⁸. It is important to note that our interest here is not to discuss the potentially ‘distorted’ or ‘genuine’ character of such modalities with respect to normatively based conceptions of global democracy. Suffice it to say that we see transnational modalities of governance as important elements in global governance, understood as an ‘evolving

implying a shift from old to new patterns of ruling, one might speak of an ‘overlay of different governance regimes that produce tensions and contradictions’ in various realms of policy (Janet Newman, ‘Participatory democracy, governance and citizenship: theorising political and cultural change’, paper presented at the *Democracy after Governance Seminar*, Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen, March 20th-21st 2003). In fact, hierarchy and networks, and the different implications such organizational features can have for organization and management at all possible levels of governance, may coexist, interact or contradict one another, producing new patterns of change.

⁸ Graham Burchell, Collin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality*, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); P. Miller and N. Rose, ‘Governing Economic Life’, *Economy and Society* 19 (1990), 1-31; Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society*. See also Sven Bislev, Hans Krause Hansen and Dorte Salskov-Iversen, ‘The Global Diffusion of Managerialism: Transnational Discourse Communities at Work’, *Global Society*, vol.16 (2) (2002), 199-212; Hans Krause Hansen, Dorte Salskov-Iversen and Sven Bislev, ‘Discursive Globalization: Transnational Discourse Communities and New Public Management’, in *Toward a Global Polity*, eds. Morten Ougaard and Richard Higgott, Richard (London: Routledge, 2002), 107-124; Dorte Salskov-Iversen, Hans Krause Hansen and Sven Bislev, ‘Governmentality, Globalization, and Local Practice: Transformations of a Hegemonic Discourse’.

system of (formal and informal) political coordination – across multiple levels from the local to the global – among public authorities (states and IGOs) and private agencies seeking to realize common purposes or resolve collective problems’⁹. While our account is anchored in poststructuralist thinking, it has also been shaped by insights from approaches that are more based on critical realism, such as the recent accounts of ‘global polity’¹⁰; ‘global politics’¹¹ and of the role of media in global politics¹². Methodologically, our primary focus is on the ‘discursive moment’ of statecraft and transnational modalities of governance. This implies viewing language as a form of social practice, socially shaped and socially shaping, i.e. constitutive of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge¹³. It draws on David Harvey who conceives of discourse as one of six fundamental ‘moments’ that make up social processes in their totality: power, beliefs, institutions, material practices and social relations. Harvey’s discursive moment refers to forms and processes of organizing meaning which are often, but not always realized through language¹⁴.

⁹ David Held and Anthony McGrew (eds), *Governing Globalization. Power, Authority and Global Governance* (Malden: Polity, 2002), 9.

¹⁰ Richard Higgot and Morten Ougaard, ‘Introduction: beyond system and society – towards a global polity?’, in *Towards a Global Polity*, eds. Morten Ougaard and Richard Higgot. 1-20.

¹¹ Held and McGrew, *Governing Globalization. Power, Authority and Global Governance*.

¹² Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia. Communication in World Order Transformation*.

¹³ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis. The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 131.

¹⁴ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 76. The discursive moment can capture the correlation between knowledge, power and discourse, and thus it enables us to examine one of the major characteristics of discourses, namely their ability to generate effects of truth. And by normalizing or naturalizing specific ways of thinking and doing

The article is divided into three sections. This first section examines the broader global context of the emerging transnational modalities of governance that propagate the spread and implementation of ICTs in public sector organizations. While basically in agreement with the view that the rise of these modalities of governance can be traced to the globalization of politics, we also find it important to view them in relation to the prevailing political rationalities and technologies of statecraft, described by some as ‘neoliberal’¹⁵, by others as ‘advanced liberalism’¹⁶. Of particular interest is the spread of the political technologies of ‘agency’ and of ‘performance’, which is in turn related to the managerialization and marketization of the public sector. Whereas political technologies of agency are designed to enhance or deploy possibilities of agency – be it at the level of individuals and/or organizations - within a dispersed, decentred and open-ended structure of rule in which state authority is only one among many authorities, the political technologies of performance are created to make these self-regulating entities accountable through surveillance, performance measurement and competition.

Section two takes a closer look at two cases of the ascending modalities of governance and how they relate to these political technologies: The first case is ‘transnational partnering’, exemplified by the Digital Partnership, the Global Digital Divide Initiative and the Global Knowledge Partnership –a transnational modality of governance shaped by the political technology

things, often with a claim to scientific or other expertise, discourses produce effects of power (M. Foucault, 208-226, in H.L Dreyfus and P.Rabinow, *Michel Foucault Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,1982)).

¹⁵ D. Garland, ‘Governmentality and the problem of crime’, in *Theoretical Criminology* vol. 1(2) (1997), 173-214.

¹⁶ N. Rose, ‘Government, authority and expertise in advanced liberalism’, *Economy and Society* 22(3) (1993), 283-99; Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society*.

of agency. The second case is concerned with ‘transnational benchmarking’, exemplified by the Balanced E-Government Index, which in turn serves as a vantage point for observing how a couple of accomplished performers comply with and use the political technology of performance, whether nationally or transnationally. The third and concluding section lays out the final perspective on the correlation between the advent of ICTs, the reconfiguration of public sector organizations and the rise of transnational modalities of governance.

ICTs and the rise of advanced liberal government

The rise of transnational modalities of governance has not occurred in a vacuum, but is closely related to what some scholars have conceptualized as the ‘global polity’. According to Higgott and Ougaard¹⁷ there are five principal characteristics of the ‘emerging global polity’: (1) The growing political interconnectedness, not only between states, but also between supra-, sub- and non-state actors; (2) the rise of vast and interlocking networks of global regulation and sites of decision-making; (3) the growing sense of a ‘global community’ (but not necessarily a common sense of global values) which goes beyond the traditional confines of the state; (4) the weakening of domestic polity; and, finally (5) the notion that ‘we are at the beginning, not the end’ of the process towards global polityness.

Our problem with this description is not what it says, but rather what it leaves out. We miss an account of the role of the ICTs and a conception of the changing beliefs and practices shaping statecraft as the global polity emerges. Thus, while basically in agreement with the specification of the five dimensions, and not least its rejection of conventional state-centric conceptions of politics, we would like to add a sixth characteristic, the ‘multiplication of

¹⁷ Higgott and Ougaard, ‘Introduction: beyond system and society – towards a global polity?’, 2-5

communication modes'. Moreover, drawing on governmentality theories, we would like to focus on the political rationalities and governmental technologies at the intersection of public sector organizations and transnational modalities of governance, not least in order to understand the transformation of statecraft from the vantage point of beliefs about and practices of governance.

First, we find it important to consider the role of the multiplication and intensification of communication modes, in particular the rise of ICTs, in the growing political interconnectedness, the rapidly expanding political networks and the hollowing out of the domestic polity – i.e. (1), (2) and (4) in the above conceptualization. This is a dimension of the globalization of politics which is rarely analyzed, if mentioned at all, in accounts such as the above. But as pointed out by Held and McGrew and Deibert¹⁸, the increasing spread of ICTs has dramatically heightened the speed and ramifications of political communication. Politics have been 'stretched out' in the sense that distant sites of decision-making and action have become linked, and it has 'deepened' because decisions made at the global level can have rapid local implications and vice versa. It is difficult to believe that these processes of stretching-out and deepening would have occurred without the rapid spread and increasing speed of ICTs.

Equally important for our purpose is how the changing communication modes, in particular the spread of ICTs, influence the processes of public sector reform at the domestic level. This is not only a question of how increasing connectedness may alter the conditions for administering or managing organizations, but also a matter of how the rise of new issue areas, such as ICT policies and implementation¹⁹, impinge on reform thinking and practices. In fact, the

¹⁸ Held and McGrew, *Governing Globalization. Power, Authority and Global Governance* ; Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia. Communication in World Order Transformation*.

¹⁹ The adaptation of ICTs in different social, economic and political realms has – like questions of human rights, pollution and terrorism - become a cross-cutting issue which to an increasing extent

diffusion of ICTs has increased in the same period as most governments and their bureaucracies at the domestic levels have tried to adapt to and manage demands for organizational change across different policy areas and levels. Public sector organizations have tried to move away from what reformers have identified as a rule-based, ineffective, bureaucratic, and unresponsive mindset towards one of efficiency, responsiveness and entrepreneurialism. The success of these reform visions is a subject of heated debate but their power to dominate the agenda is undisputed and is, we would argue, related to the general reconstruction of social life on a market basis, and by implication, to the reconfiguration of the roles of private and public authorities²⁰. Importantly, however, ICTs have often been envisioned as the very embodiment of changes towards managerialism. Moreover, the advent of ICTs seems to have intensified the import of and experiments with private sector ways of re-organizing the public sector at the national and

occupies the minds of policy-makers at all levels. One obvious example of this embryonic issue and policy formation at the transnational level is the upcoming World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS). Organized under the aegis of the UN, the WSIS aims at developing 'a common vision and understanding of the Information Society, to better understand its scope and dimensions and to draw up a strategic plan for successfully adapting to the new society' (www.itu.int/wsis).

²⁰ Bislev et al, 'The Global Diffusion of Managerialism: Transnational Discourse Communities at Work'; P. Du Gay, *In Praise of Bureaucracy* (London: Sage, 2000); P. Du Gay, 'Markets and Meanings: Re-imagining Organization Life', in *The Expressive Organization. Linking Identity, Reputation and the Corporate Brand*, eds. Majken Schultz, Mary Jo Hatch and Mogens Holten Larsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); H.K. Hansen and D. Salskov-Iversen, 'Managerialized Patterns of Political Authorities: Partners, Peddlers and Entrepreneurial People', in *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 44(3) (2002), 4-18.

subnational levels. But the introduction of ICTs have also frequently been viewed as a means to improve local and national democracy and thereby reinforcing the domestic polity.

These observations lead us to the correlation between the advent of the ICTs, the managerial reform of public sector organizations, and the rise of transnational modalities of governance. As pointed out in studies of governmentality, beliefs and practices of statecraft have undergone significant changes over the last couple of decades²¹. Rose and Dean speak of the governmentality of ‘advanced liberalism’²². This concept refers to the increasing tendency to develop markets where there used to be public provision, to the independence, responsibility and empowerment of hitherto welfare dependent institutions and individuals, to the increasing importance of accountability and evaluation in order to measure and ultimately regulate the performance of empowered agents, as well as to the generation of multiple and new organizational forms with the capacity of ruling within such a decentralized and participatory liberal model of society. In generating such new organizational forms – in this case transnational modalities of governance - two political technologies related to advanced liberalism are particularly important: ‘technologies of agency’ and ‘technologies of performance’²³.

Technologies of agency refer to those means and techniques that seek to enhance agency, such as the contracting-out of formerly public services, and the consultation with or representation of user groups whose ‘voice’ can enter into negotiation over needs, claims and rights

²¹ Burchell et al, *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality*; M. Foucault (1991)[1978], ‘Governmentality’, in Burchell et al., *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality*, 87-104; Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society*.

²² Rose, ‘Government, authority and expertise in advanced liberalism’; Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society*.

²³ Ibid, 177-180.

with the state and other authorities²⁴. Not limited to the realm of public sector organizations, technologies of agency stimulate the creation of novel and less formalized organizational forms that develop and thrive at the intersections of public sector organizations, international organizations, companies and civil society organizations, such as partnerships²⁵. Against the backdrop of what they identify as an increasingly complex world, individuals or organizations partner for one or more of the following reasons: to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of their activities by collaborating with others with complementary resources, to provide better solutions to complex problems, to create win-win situations and to open up decision-making processes and thereby maximize empowerment, representation and democratic processes.

Technologies of performance are designed to make individuals or organizations accountable. Performance indicators, schemes of best practice, benchmarking, auditing, competitions, awards and other modes of external verification, make up an ensemble of indirect means whereby people and organizational entities – some of which have been empowered and given voice by technologies of agency - can be regulated²⁶. By promoting the accountability, transparency and democratic control of the activities of a variety of organizations – ranging from

²⁴ Ibid, 168.

²⁵ J. Nelson, *Building Partnerships. Cooperation between the United Nations System and the Private Sector*, (New York: The United Nations Department of Public Information, 2002); J.M. Brinkerhoff, *Partnership for International Development. Rhetoric or Results?* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 6

²⁶ D. Salskov-Iversen, 'Institutionalizing Change: Competitive Knowledge Construction in the Field of (E-)Governance', paper presented at the International Studies Association 44th Annual Convention February 25th-March 1st 2003, Portland, Oregon; Du Gay, *In Praise of Bureaucracy*; DuGay 'Markets and Meanings: Re-imagining Organization Life'.

public organizations to private companies - these technologies of performance present themselves as ways of restoring trust, of stimulating learning and enhancing innovation and change.

As indicated, technologies of agency and performance can assume many shapes. Across the sub-genres that have mushroomed in recent years, this paper is particularly concerned with variations along two continua, i.e. the national-transnational continuum and the mandatory-voluntary continuum. The first feeds into our discussion of global political interconnectedness, the second allows us to reflect on the concept of soft regulation.

Transnational partnerships

Digital Partners (DP), the Global Digital Divide Initiative (GDDI) and the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) all focus on the issue of the new ICTs, and more specifically on a whole raft of technical, financial and political questions related to the dissemination of knowledge and ICTs to development contexts. Notwithstanding their differences, they provide a lens through which we can depict some important characteristics of the emerging transnational modalities of governance: they are to a large extent web-based, they are depending for their effectiveness on the technologies they propagate, they are dominated by either corporate, state or civil society members and, finally, they are actively seeking to stimulate and enhance the agency of members. Whereas DP and GDDI have a very marked corporate presence, the GKP seems more reliant on the backing from civil society organizations, governments and international organizations. The three partnerships engage participants in schemes of collaboration and coordination, operate as 'soft regulators' and are as such deeply involved in processes of political, social and economic coordination, with state organizations playing an important but not necessarily dominating role. Their growing presence on the global scene of ICT suggests that significant aspects of the formulation, implementation and

evaluation of these issues are now taking place in loosely organized network-based set-ups, involve discussions, knowledge exchange and sometimes more or less binding agreements between state professionals at the sub-state, state or inter-state levels, experts and specialist, corporate actors and NGO sectors.

The origin of Digital Partners goes back to a conference in November 1999, which brought together executives of top Internet companies, including Microsoft, and major international foundations and intergovernmental institutions, such as the World Bank, the WTO, and the UN. Today, DP describes itself as a nonprofit organization with a core team, chapter leaderships and regional advisory boards, physically anchored in Seattle and with chapters in a number of cities in the US, as well as in India. Digital Partners provides professional services and financial support related to the use of ICT, and runs major partnership-based projects in Latin America (Mexico), West Africa (Ghana) and South Asia. The organization defines its mission in the following way: ‘At Digital Partners we are harnessing the unprecedented momentum and potential of information technologies to enfranchise the millions of poor increasingly shut out of an information-driven world economy’²⁷. This view on ICTs as the single most important ‘fix’ for bringing the development economies and the poor into the world economy sets the stage for a number of more specific objectives.

One objective is to involve IT entrepreneurs in the service of the world’s poor, as IT entrepreneurship is believed to be successful in generating wealth. To that end, the organization has created a ‘social venture fund’ whose purpose is to ‘invest in and incubate new initiatives designed by IT and social entrepreneurs to trigger solutions to previously intractable problems of poverty’. Second, there is the question of making the poor responsible for their own lives. While ‘IT

²⁷ www.digitalpartners.org/what.html, June 27th 2003.

entrepreneurs’, and ‘visionary social entrepreneurs’ from poor regions, are regarded the principal human drivers of partnership activities, a very important role is also ascribed to the groups of people who are ultimately the target of partnership activities: ‘We believe that it is possible to use the market dynamics of the explosive Digital Economy to create new opportunities to empower the poor as agents of their own development’. In other words, the ‘proper’ use of digital economy’s market dynamics is envisioned as a precondition for the empowerment and self-development of the poor.

Third, in order to take advantage of the above mentioned market dynamics, it is necessary to ‘foster a global leadership movement in which the market-development acumen of IT entrepreneurs is linked with the poverty-alleviation activities of social entrepreneurs, foundations, and development institutions’. Important in the creation of such a global leadership movement is the foundation of, in the context of Digital Partners,

...a Brain Trust of expatriate entrepreneurs and their IT colleagues, social entrepreneurs, highly placed government officials, business leaders, and others that are committed to technology inspired poverty reduction. [The organization has already] ...succeeded in bringing together some of the world's leading intellectuals, development specialists, IT entrepreneurs and their colleagues in a virtual organization that spans the globe. This ‘Brain Trust’ has grown from a modest 100 individuals at its inception to over 500 by the start of 2002, and continues to grow²⁸.

Such technology inspired reduction of poverty, based on knowledge accumulation and dissemination in web-based partnership set-ups that operate in a global market matrix, is also the

²⁸ www.digitalpartners.org/what.html, June 27th 2003.

aim of our second example, the Global Digital Divide Initiative (GDDI)²⁹. But the GDDI goes beyond the somewhat cruder, more market-oriented and entrepreneurial discourse of Digital Partners to include notions of corporate social responsibility, values and ethics. While currently setting up an organizational infrastructure in its own right, the GDDI must be understood in the organizational context of the World Economic Forum (WEF)³⁰. The WEF was established back in 1971 as an independent organization, with the neat ambition of

...improving the state of the world. We embrace new challenges by developing initiatives which support our core principles and values, which are to: provide a collaborative framework for world leaders to address global issues; promote entrepreneurship in the global public interest; maintain a non-partisan and independent position³¹.

The WEF is funded by the membership fees of the approximately 1000 most influential global companies, and the organization works in partnership with government representatives, international organizations, labour leaders, academia, media, religious leaders and non-governmental organizations.

The GDDI was launched at the WEF Annual Meeting 2000 held in Davos, Switzerland, by top Information Technology and Media, Communications and Entertainment Sector executives and government officials. A Task Force was established to develop and enhance public

²⁹ www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Global+Digital+Divide+Initiative

³⁰ www.weforum.org

³¹ www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/About+the+Forum+Subhome, June 27th 2003)

and private sector initiatives to ‘transform the digital divide into an opportunity for growth’. In 2002, the Task Force proposed the ‘CEO Charter for Digital Development’, which is a

...private sector commitment to transparently allocate human, in-kind or financial resources to reduce poverty in developing countries and disadvantaged communities through the use of information and communication technologies. The CEO Charter is a signal that participating CEOs stand ready to partner and collaborate with governments, international organizations and civil society to find innovative solutions to help bridge the digital divide³².

As to the content of the Charter, there is a strong emphasis on the view that technology is a very significant tool for development, in particular ICTs:

The CEO Charter is focused on information and communication technologies (ICTs) because signers agree that they are important tools for improving people’s lives. They can improve access to education and healthcare, advance environmental goals, promote economic growth by generating local enterprise and increase citizens’ participation, transparency and good governance around the world³³.

³² www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Global+Digital+Divide+Initiative%5CCEO+Charter+for+Digital+Development, June 27th 2003.

³³ www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Global+Digital+Divide+Initiative%5CCEO+Charter+for+Digital+Development, accessed on June 27th 2003.

The Charter also links commitment to poverty alleviation and global development by means of ICTs to the notions of ‘corporate philanthropy’, ‘corporate citizenship’ and ‘social investment’, pointing to the necessity of identifying and establishing long-term business interests of companies:

This is a win-win situation that integrates socially-conscious business practices into a company’s overall business strategy. Corporate citizenship issues are fundamental to a company's core business operations, as they affect its relationships with stakeholders and society at large³⁴.

Thus, the signing companies are strongly encouraged to contribute financially to the activities developed in the spirit of the Charter and in the context of the GDDI. But, importantly, it is also emphasized that whether or not a company exceeds the terms or strives to meet the financial criteria, ‘the CEO Charter will result in useful information about corporate giving to ICT for development activities, which will facilitate more effective cross-sectoral partnerships in the future’.

With its creation back in 1997, the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) –our third example - is perhaps the first transnational partnership which emerges in the policy field of the new ICTs, and it seems at the time of writing to be far more established than partnerships such as DP and GDDI. Currently defining itself as an ‘evolving network of public, private and not for profit organizations’³⁵, the GKP counts about 70 partners from all over the world. Members are

³⁴ www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Global+Digital+Divide+Initiative%5CCEO+Charter+for+Digital+Development, June 27th 2003.

³⁵ www.globalknowledge.org, GKP Strategy 2005)

intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, national governments and civil society organizations, and include the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), W3, Internet Services (Canada), Bellanet (Canada), ProPoor Infotech Centre (India), Omar Dengo Foundation (Costa Rica), National Information Technology Council (Malaysia) and the Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC). Many of these partners have since the creation of the GKP also become deeply involved in slightly different arrangements, such as in DP and GDDI – a fact that the GKP views as a competitive challenge³⁶.

In the Annual Report from 2001, the GKP Executive Committee presents the following account of the origin of the GKP, the diversity of its partners, and the methods and visions of this organizational form:

From the inception of the GKP, its partner organizations served a wide range of different objectives and provided diverse products and services. But, they shared one common vision: to work in partnership to provide a full range of complementary products that would help people access knowledge and information in a way that would improve lives, reduce poverty, and empower people. Since they joined

³⁶ There are some formulations in the GKP Strategy 2005 which indicate a perceived competitive pressure in the policy field of the new ICTs, and as a consequence, steps have been taken to make the role of the GKP clearer: ‘Since the start of the GKP with the first global knowledge conference in Toronto 1997, the context has undergone considerable change. New initiatives have emerged recently and a number of members are involved in those other activities as well. GKP went through a vital process in 2001, refocusing and streamlining its role ?...? This strategy will sharpen the profile of our network and enable it to position itself in the dynamic context of ICT for development and empowerment’ (GKP Strategy 2005:3, accessible on www.globalknowledge.org, June 26th 2003).

together, their relationships have evolved into a pioneering network of people and organizations working together in a common purpose³⁷.

The common purpose is translated into more concrete objectives and areas of activity, such as facilitating advocacy in policy dialogues on a global scale on ICT for development - this includes the provision of fora for discussions and debate; providing services to improve partners' individual and collective efficiency and effectiveness by stimulating learning and collaboration; and, increasing the availability of information and knowledge for development and empowerment, among other things by promoting regional knowledge exchange. Importantly, the development of ICT-based communication between the partners is not only viewed as a means to transcending what may be obstacles to their joint participation in the GKP. It is also viewed as crucial to, if not inseparable from, the organizational mission of achieving sustainable development in the South. There is a heavy emphasis on 'soft regulation' within the organization: in the absence of clear-cut regulations and systems of sanction, partners and participants are themselves supposed to assume responsibility and act in the spirit of the GKP. 'The GKP is committed to flexible, efficient decision-making... decisions are reached through an open consensus-building process?...? Much of the consensus building and networking takes place informally, or via the GKP on line communication tools'³⁸.

In real-world transnational partnerships, equality- and consensus-seeking processes of an informal and network nature are seen as securing flexibility, efficiency and consensus. However, it goes without saying that some of the GKP partners, while being represented in the GKP, are powerful players in global politics and international business. While no longer appearing as partner

³⁷ *GKP Annual Report 2001*, 5

³⁸ *GKP Annual Report 2001*, 7-8.

in the formal sense of the word as stipulated in GKP's governance principles, the presence of Cisco - a leading and US-based Internet equipment developer and manufacturer - in the context of the GKP, provides an instructive example of a company that both contributes to and benefits from transnational partnerships. Cisco is considered one of the pioneers of the so-called networked business model that characterizes the Internet economy. Despite declines and instability in the financial and ICT markets, this model has allowed the company to dominate the global market of routers, the computers that direct and shape the traffic on the Internet³⁹. In collaboration with GKP partners, the company is working on a number of programmes, such as the Cisco Networking Academy Program. This programme is setting up so-called Networking Academies in countries such as Bangladesh, India Nepal and Sri Lanka. According to GKP, '...the Academies will provide students with advanced IT-curricula to leverage the enormous opportunities created by the Internet while creating a qualified talent pool for building and maintaining networks'⁴⁰.

In general, the GKP seems to serve as one among many launch pads for the company both in terms of expanding its activities and providing it with more opportunities and greater access to individuals and businesses on a global scale⁴¹. The GKP, however, also appears to have profited

³⁹ Castells *The Internet Galaxy. Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*, 68; Kraemer and Derick 2002. K.L. Kraemer and J. Dedrick, 'Strategic use of the Internet and e-commerce: Cisco Systems', *Journal of Strategic Information Systems* 11 (2002), 5-29

⁴⁰ *GKP Annual Report 2001*, 5, accessible on www.globalknowledge.org, June 26th 2003.

⁴¹ Cisco provides the following account of the GKP: 'As a cooperation of partnerships that actively works in developing countries, the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) parallels Cisco's vision of minimizing the digital divide among and within countries through the Cisco Networking Academy Program. The goal of this partnership is to spur economic development and increase individual opportunity through the power of information and knowledge...'

from the collaboration with Cisco in these partnership-like arrangements, not least have they mobilized private sector resources and organizational models, ideas and practices. For example, the GKP recommends implementation models in its own organization to mirror the structure of the networked business model introduced by Cisco: 'Many of the qualities of the current information infrastructure can be adopted as an implementation strategy, including network externalities, decentralization, cross cutting issues, self correction, and the importance of partnerships'⁴².

It is likely that ICTs, in particular the Internet, have greatly increased the reach, relevance and strategic value of transnational partnerships for individual organizations and institutions. Not only because of the knowledge to be accessed and shared: databases accessible on the Internet provide information, knowledge, and by implication, identity⁴³. But also because membership and participation in such partnerships can connote a global outlook, a will to learn, an appetite for change, and, not to forget, empowerment. At least, this seems to be one of the underlying rationalities of the technological investments made by transnational partnerships such as the GKP:

At the Second GlobalKnowledge Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Cisco Vice President for Strategic Technology Policy Christine Hemrick discussed the Cisco Networking Academy Program and empowering individuals through the knowledge-based economy'

([http://www.cisco.netacad.net/public/digital_divide/partners/WorldBankGkp.html+global+knowledge++partnership&ie=UTF-](http://www.cisco.netacad.net/public/digital_divide/partners/WorldBankGkp.html+global+knowledge++partnership&ie=UTF-8&site=CDC&output=xml_no_dtd&client=CDC&proxystylesheet=CDC&oe=UTF-8)

[8&site=CDC&output=xml_no_dtd&client=CDC&proxystylesheet=CDC&oe=UTF-8](http://www.cisco.netacad.net/public/digital_divide/partners/WorldBankGkp.html+global+knowledge++partnership&ie=UTF-8&site=CDC&output=xml_no_dtd&client=CDC&proxystylesheet=CDC&oe=UTF-8), June 27th 2003).

⁴² *GKP Annual Report 2001*, 17, accessible on www.globalknowledge.org, June 26th 2003.

⁴³ A. Wittel, 'Toward a Network Sociality', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18(6) (2001), 51-76.

The network raised awareness about the knowledge for development agenda through hundreds of events. And it gave voice to the voiceless through the development of tools such as the Global Discussion List (GKD) that provided a forum for sharing information and knowledge and putting together partnerships that make concrete projects possible. Many of these activities, which began almost as experiments, have since become a mainstream in many aspects of development⁴⁴.

Giving ‘voice to the voiceless’ – whether electronically or physically - paves the way for collaboration and projects that might leave an imprint on the world. It is, of course, also a matter of organizations in general – local or global, private or public – seeing themselves relying more and more on the inputs from laypeople. In this way, the question of management or governance in an organization such as the GKP becomes linked to and operates through the empowerment and capacity-building for self-governance among its partners and their networks.

In sum, both Digital Partners, the Global Digital Divide Initiative and the Global Knowledge Partnership operate through the lenses of a partnership matrix. By implication, it is emphasized that neither the state, nor market forces or civil society organizations and networks can resolve complex e- or ICT issues on their own. Thus ‘partnering’ between different forces and actors are needed, taking shape of loosely designed and softly regulating organizational arrangements, based mainly on voluntary participation. The insistence on ‘entrepreneurialism’, ‘corporate social responsibility’ and ‘empowerment’ in the organizational representations concerning the partners and their target groups points to the importance of self-governance and responsibility at both the individual and organizational levels, echoing the technologies of agency of advanced liberal governance.

⁴⁴ *GKP Annual Report 2001*, 5, accessible on www.globalknowledge.org, June 26th 2003.

Benchmarking: the BEGIX – and the accomplished performer circuit

The transnational modalities of governance that we investigate in this section epitomize the technologies of performance characteristic of advanced liberal governance. More specifically, we focus on the emergent best practice and benchmarking schemes in the field of e-governance/e-democracy at the transnational level, using the Balanced E-Government Index a) as an example of how one of these schemes works and the issues that it raises; and b) as a bridgehead for spotting and tracking some of the accomplished performers, with a view to getting a better idea of their participation in these schemes, whether ‘voluntary’ or ‘mandatory, and whether national or transnational, and how their participation in these schemes is being communicated.

The Balanced E-Government Index (BEGIX) was developed in a study funded by the German Bertelsmann Foundation⁴⁵, and conducted in cooperation with the management consulting

⁴⁵ The Bertelsmann Foundation has gained a reputation as one of the most energetic and influential advocates of modernizing government in Germany (and beyond) (Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform. A Comparative Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 236). The Bertelsmann Foundation is the largest private company-sponsored foundation in Germany and one of the largest in Europe. For an account of its activities and role in the sphere of government reform and its use of transnational networks, see Hansen and Salskov-Iversen, ‘Managerialized Patterns of Political Authorities: Partners, Peddlers and Entrepreneurial People’, Bislev, Hansen and Salskov-Iversen, ‘The Global Diffusion of Managerialism: Transnational Discourse Communities at Work.

firm Booz/Allen/Hamilton in the autumn of 2001 and reported in a publication from 2002⁴⁶. Based on sixty case studies (e-government portals belonging to governments, regions and local governments worldwide), twelve exemplary studies were selected for detailed examination, among them six northern American pathfinders: the City of Seattle, Fairfax County, the State of Virginia, and first.gov (the US government web portal), the province of Ontario and the Canadian government. The remaining cases included three British on-line services, i.e. two local authorities, Lewisham Council and Tameside Council, and UK-Online (the British government's web portal) while the rest of the world was represented by the governments of Sweden and Estonia and the city-state of Hamburg, Germany.

The benchmarking process was based on an ideal type of reference model, 'integrated e-government', which emphasizes the centrality for any online service of addressing simultaneously e-administration and e-democracy. The balanced E-Government scorecard established five key categories against which best practice was measured, i.e. benefits, efficiency, transparency, participation and change management⁴⁷.

Also the overall score reveals a clear Anglo-Saxon domination – North America and the UK appear to be more than a mouseclick ahead⁴⁸. Even if none of the sites reviewed earned the

⁴⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung in cooperation with Booz/Allen/Hamilton, *Balanced E-Governance. E-Government – Connecting Efficient Administration and Responsive Democracy* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation, 2002).

⁴⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Balanced E-Government. E-Government – Connecting Efficient Administration and Responsive Democracy*, 7.

⁴⁸ This is not to suggest that the reform experiences of the Anglo-Saxon world are alike. While they share a certain amount of ideological baggage, including a lot of public sector bashing (in Britain primarily during the days of the Thatcher and Major governments), the experience of the US and

top rating, the highest ranked online services were those of the British Government and the US city of Seattle (in that order, but almost a tie), both classified as ‘e-government offering extremely well placed services in all areas’ closely followed by the Canadian province of Ontario, the US Fairfax County, the Canadian government and the US State of Virginia (in that order), who were rewarded for ‘outstanding successes in particular aspects of e-government’. In the lowest ranking category where the finalists are rewarded for a ‘serious e-government program’, we find Lewisham, Estonia, Sweden plus Tameside (in that order but almost a tie) and, with the lowest scores, the US government and Hamburg⁴⁹. It could be argued that it is in the last category that we find some of the

Canada, both federal states, lacks the comprehensiveness of the reform programmes of the UK and New Zealand, both unitary governments (S. Borins, ‘New Public Management, North American Style’, in eds. K. McLaughlin, S. P. Osborne and E. Ferlie, *New Public Management. Current trends and future prospects* (London: Routledge, 2002), 182-194). This is also obvious when you consider the policies in place in the e-Governance area, with the UK central government clearly in front with regard to comprehensive e-Governance initiatives across policy areas and levels of government. Also, the UK experience (with the Canadian and the European) is characterized by facing a complex welfare state agenda. In the UK (and in other more welfare state orientated administrations), e-Governance is also brought to bear on so-called ‘wicked’ issues, like children, employment, senior citizens – while they may be just as or even more reform prone, they lend themselves less easily to straightforward technological intervention via IT than do repair of potholes, real estate assessment, renewal of vehicle registrations, report of vehicle sales, paying of taxes, etc.

⁴⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Balanced E-Government. E-Government – Connecting Efficient Administration and Responsive Democracy*, 18.

surprises: the inclusion of Estonia reflects that ensuring diversity was a central concern when selecting the twelve exemplary cases⁵⁰.

It is perhaps slightly surprising that the us.first does not compare so well with the other finalists, but it arguably redresses the otherwise strong Anglo-Saxon domination of the list a bit, making it more acceptable to come last, as does Hamburg. This benchmarking exercise, like the other transnational networks launched and funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation, has been devised not least with a view to influencing German and Eastern European government. Experience has shown the Bertelsmann Foundation that working on German (local) (e)-governance via the authority generated by tapping into international best practices can be counterproductive when relying too heavily on ranking and awards as organizational drivers⁵¹. These competitive modes may work well for participants for whom participation really can and does serve as external verification of their respective claims to excellence in their local contexts. In these cases participation becomes a way of working strategically with reputation management. But in essentially voluntary ranking exercises like the Begix, a mode which invariably leaves certain members at the bottom of the league may lead some to opt out. It is definitely something that has been the cause of simmering discontent among the German cities volunteering in the Bertelsmann transnational benchmarking and best practice projects. Thus, the BEGIX study makes an effort to anticipate instances of hurt feelings:

All of the online services subjected to detailed analysis here represent outstanding examples of the application of the principles of e-government. In the main, the values achieved are in close proximity to each other. There are therefore only winners.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁵¹ Interview with the Bertelsmann Foundation September 2002.

However in the case of particular criteria, it is indeed possible to identify differences which indicate the areas on which the decision-makers have focused so far⁵².

As all the participants in the Begix study were recognized as ‘outstanding’ prior to the ranking exercise, it should come as no surprise that several of them are seasoned and astute performers, for whom a mixture of national and transnational, ‘mandatory’ and ‘voluntary’ best practice and benchmarking schemes have become an integrated part of their governance structure. To illustrate this, we will briefly consider three such performers, i.e. the London Borough of Lewisham, and, somewhat more sketchily, Fairfax County and the City of Seattle. The homepages of these three local governments alert the visitor to a common feature: an apparent desire to project evidence of their claim to excellence by referring up front to various instances of external verification of their performance. There are references to both national and international awards, state and non-state fora, networks and organizations delivering ‘objective’ facts about the three authorities and, by implication, constituting them as pacesetters, as fully-fledged members of knowledge and information society.

Lewisham is a socially and economically challenged London Borough on the southern banks of the river Thames, trying to carve out an existence and *raison-d’être* in the shadow of the world city of London⁵³. Despite this, from the mid 1990s, Lewisham Council developed a reputation for its creative engagement with the local government regime introduced by the Conservative governments in the 1980s and 1990s. Carefully complying with the New Public

⁵² Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Balanced E-Government. E-Government – Connecting Efficient Administration and Responsive Democracy*, 18.

⁵³ Audit Commission, *Lewisham London Borough Council. Corporate Assessment* (London: Audit Commission, December 2002).

Management reforms of the Thatcherite political economy, Lewisham skillfully appropriated central government's reform discourse and used it to reclaim political legitimacy both nationally and locally⁵⁴. Long before it became the normal thing for an authority to do, Lewisham worked strategically with different types of external verification, proudly communicating its results and best practices.

When the incoming Blair government in 1997 introduced its new regime for English local government, Best Value, Lewisham was among the authorities that volunteered as pioneers. The Best Value structure is premised on the idea that councils review all their services on a 5-year basis against a framework known as the 4 Cs – challenge, compare, consult and compete – in order to decide whether they are delivered in the most efficient and cost effective way. Since 2001-2002, the Best Value Performance Indicators have included an indicator specifically on e-government. In Lewisham, corporate ICT, notably the outsourcing of its Corporate ICT services, was one of thirteen reviews being carried out in the first year of the programme while ICT services will be reviewed in 2004-05.

From the council's website you learn that Lewisham is a 'beacon council', a scheme introduced by the Labour Government in 1999 that, short of legislating, institutionalizes what all authorities ought to aspire towards (but which cannot, almost per definition, be specified in advance): new ways, cutting-edge knowledge. The scheme is designed as a mechanism to elicit best practice and disseminate knowledge, and, by celebrating innovation that flows from the sector itself,

⁵⁴ Dorte Salskov-Iversen, 'A discursive perspective on British local government's response to change: a tale of two cities', *Discourse & Society*, volume 8 number 3 (July 1997), 391-415 .

to create ownership of the new times amongst local authorities⁵⁵. By entering the Beacon Council Scheme, an authority subjects itself to benchmarking within different categories of its own choice, in Lewisham's case 'Accessible Services'(an e-government theme) and 'Better Access and Mobility'. The category 'Accessible Services' was included in the beacon scheme for the first time in 2001, and Lewisham together with three others was thus amongst the first English authorities to be identified as beacons of excellence in this area⁵⁶. Lewisham also did well in a mandatory central government ranking exercise, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, by the Audit Commission, the results of which were for the first time publicly announced in December 2002⁵⁷. All authorities receive an overall assessment score of excellent, good, fair, poor and weak, based on their scores of how council core services perform. Lewisham was rated as a 'good' authority.

On the council's website, the Mayor of Lewisham is quoted for the following comment: "This reflects well on the hard work and commitment of our staff and elected members. I am proud of their achievements, however, we need to do a lot more if we are to become an excellent authority". While pleased with the outcome of the mandatory exercise, the Council accepts the logics of the regime, which is to strive for excellence. Furthermore, Lewisham's appearance in the Begix study, just as its deputy mayor's visit to the annual conference of the Cities of Change, a Bertelsmann Foundation Network targeting the transition economies in Eastern and

⁵⁵ See also S. Martin, 'Best Value: New Public Management or new direction?', in *New Public Management. Current trends and future prospects*, eds. K. McLaughlin, S. P. Osborne and E. Ferlie (London: Routledge, 2002), 129-140.

⁵⁶ www.lewisham.gov.uk/Beacon/beacon2001_2002.asp, February 12th 2003.

⁵⁷ The Audit Commission, *Comprehensive performance assessment. Scores and analysis for single and county councils in England* (London: Audit Commission, 2002).

Central Europe, in Poland in 2001⁵⁸, is an example of ‘voluntary’ external verification. In no way mandated or controlled by central government, participation in these types of schemes and activities can be said to constitute the ultimate evidence of, in this case, Lewisham’s embrace of the new regulatory ways.

Fairfax County, Virginia, is located next door to Washington, D.C., and is displaying all the signs of a wealthy backdrop to the capital city of the US – clearly thriving in the shadow of big government and big business, which it feeds with well-educated and well-paid labour. When you access the county’s website, you will find a collection of external verification trophies – ‘Seal of Good Governance’, ‘Best Managed County in the USA/Governance Performance Project’ and ‘Begix Top Scoring Site’⁵⁹.

In April 2002, Fairfax County received a Seal of Good eGovernance Award by the National Academy of Public Administration in cooperation with the National Association of Counties. The National Academy of Public Administration is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organization chartered by the American Congress to help ‘assist federal, state and local governments in improving their effectiveness, efficiency and accountability’⁶⁰. The eGovernance award is based on voluntary submissions from various government institutions.

As the basis for the assessment, the Academy, which operates in the shadow of government, offers the following definition of eGovernance:

⁵⁸ The visit was proudly reported at Lewisham Online under the heading “Bringing Best Value to Europe”, with an enthusiastic quote from the deputy mayor: “It is a wonderful opportunity for us to help put Lewisham on the European map as a good practice model”.

⁵⁹ www.co.fairfax.va.us, July 28th 2003

⁶⁰ www.naco.org/naco/index.cfm, February 13th 2003.

eGovernance defines the process of enhancing government operations and service delivery to citizens by redirecting attention to people, process and policy. This notion of eGovernance holds great promise for reshaping decision-making processes and expanding ownership in government in a way that creative solutions to impending problems can be crafted in real-time. 'eGovernance' evokes an entrepreneurial spirit that encompasses the ability to use resources and digital technologies in new ways in order to maximize connectivity, productivity and effectiveness⁶¹.

Interestingly, in the official summary of Fairfax County's IT initiatives, there is special mention of the county's track record as an international networker who shares its experience with governments from around the world⁶². 'Best Managed County in USA' refers to the results in the County Grade Reports 2002 of the Government Performance Project (GPP). The GPP is a six-year research initiative and is located at the Campbell Public Affairs Institute at the Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs. It is funded in partnership with Governing magazine by the Pew Charitable Trust, one of America's largest private trusts. The results of the project are reported in the Governing magazine, as well as at the GPP and Governing magazine websites, and fed into further academic analysis at the Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs.

In 1999 GPP started out by measuring the performance of America's 50 states and 15 high profile federal agencies. In 2000 it did the 35 largest American cities, in 2001 it revisited the states, and in 2002 it looked at 40 of the USA's largest counties. Across the different levels of

⁶¹ Excerpt from application, www.napawash.org, February 13th, 2003.

⁶² www.napawash.org/pc_egovernance/seal, January 17th 2003.

government, evaluation is based on assessment of five management areas: financial management, human resources management, information technology management, capital management and managing for results. In each of these categories, the state/city/county under scrutiny will receive a grade (A – A-, B?, B, B-, C?, C, C-, D?, D, D-, F), and these will then be weighed together to an overall grade. Fairfax County, which was awarded an overall grade of A-, received the top score A for IT Management. While the evaluations depend on the cooperation of the different government institutions for their realization, the evaluations are, to our knowledge, not mandatory. However, with certain adjustments to the original design, such as not releasing the evaluation results right before Election Day, all governments approached appear to have accepted participation⁶³.

In its own words, GPP is an accountability and learning exercise, not about identifying best practice. It also justifies its activities using a bureaucrat bashing and anti-statist discourse, stressing the need to protect citizens against bad government and waste, to ensure that tax dollars are being spent effectively⁶⁴. Finally, GPP also stresses the strong media response to its operations, specifying the widespread media coverage of the evaluation results since the first round of evaluations in 1999⁶⁵.

Another accomplished – and routinely verified – performer is the City of Seattle, Washington. When you access its homepage, there is a special awards section, in mid June trumpeting that ‘Seattle and CityofSeattle.net continue to be recognized as leaders on the Web’. When you enter the awards section, you will find an amazing number of trophies⁶⁶. To name some

⁶³ Government Performance Project, *The 2002 Full Report. Paths to performance In State & Local Government. A Final Assessment from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs*, available on-line at www.maxwell.syr.edu/gpp/grade/2002full.asp, posted on April 16th 2003.

⁶⁴ www.maxwell.syr.edu/gpp/about/questions.asp, January 17, 2003.

⁶⁵ www.maxwell.syr.edu/gpp/about/history.asp, June 29th 2003.

⁶⁶ www.cityofseattle.net, July 29th 2003 and www.cityofseattle.net/html/honors, July 29th 2003.

of the American ones: MuniNet Top Picks 2002 (for the fourth straight year) - the MuniNet Guide and Review provides an online guide and directory to web sites for state, county and local governments and other municipal-related matters, including municipal investment and research, municipal bonds, regional economies, urban development and local public policy. In 2002, Seattle was ranked second in the Annual Urban E-Government Survey, a study of over 1500 city government websites in the USA's largest metropolitan areas, conducted by the Taubman Center for Public Policy at Brown University. Seattle ties for second in the Center for Digital Government, a national research and advisory institute providing government, industry and education leaders with decision support, research and educational resources to help them effectively incorporate new technologies in the 21st century. In 1999, the Seattle Municipal Court site on CityofSeattle.net was selected as one of the top ten court sites by Justice Served, a private court management consulting firm, whose top 10 now includes picks from abroad (i.e. the English speaking world). Interestingly, there is no reference to the GPP City Grade Report from 2000 where Seattle received the moderate grade of B, both overall and for its IT management.

Apart from Begix, Seattle also features prominently in another international best practice/benchmarking scheme (where the nominees are selected from the pool of voluntary entries, i.e. participation is not by invitation): the Stockholm Challenge, where it was among the 2002 finalists in the e-government category (the other categories are culture, health, education, e-business and environment). This is an awards programme, run by the City of Stockholm for pioneering IT projects world wide, though with a clear predominance of entries from the English speaking

world⁶⁷. Again the mediatization effect of participating in the Challenge is stressed. In the FAQ section, 'Why meet the Challenge?' is answered in the following way:

The Stockholm Challenge gives projects the opportunity to participate in a fantastic networking activity where IT entrepreneurs and enthusiasts from all over the world meet and showcase their best solutions. Through exposure to media, politicians and venture capitalists, the Stockholm Challenge gives excellent promotional opportunities for entrepreneurs, universities, cities, regions and countries⁶⁸.

In sum, this section has investigated different technologies of performance. While they can all be categorized as instantiations of soft regulation, some are considerably less soft than others. We have seen examples of how different levels of governments employ and meet different types of benchmarking and best practice regimes. Among the mandatory types we find the British government's Comprehensive Assessment Performance regime (a Danish case would be the Bedst på Nettet project⁶⁹), which exists alongside 'voluntary' regimes, like the British Beacon Regime. Some schemes are run in the shadow of government, like the 'voluntary' Seal of Good Governance programme, conducted by the Congress chartered National Academy of Public Administration. To

⁶⁷ In 2002, the number of participating projects was 517, with 71 from the USA, 49 from Australia, 41 from India, 40 from Sweden, 30 from Canada, 25 from Italy, 19 from the UK, 15 from the United Arab Emirates, 11 from Bulgaria and 11 from Spain

⁶⁸ http://www.challenge.stockholm.se/faq_right.asp, January 17th 2003.

⁶⁹ A benchmarking scheme initiated by the Danish Ministry of Research in September 2000, and conducted by the Ministry together with an IT government agency (IT- og Telestyrelsen) and a private consultant, PLS Rambøll Management A/S.

this can be added examples of governments commissioning or drawing on international benchmarking studies – a case in point is the Stockholm Challenge: while now run by the City of Stockholm, it owes its beginnings to the European Commission and the Bangemann Report. In early 2003, the European Commission contracted the European Institute of Public Administration to manage the eEurope Awards for innovation in eGovernment⁷⁰. The Begix, like several of the other schemes mentioned, are run by private sector actors who offer their expertise, sometimes as philanthropy, sometimes on a commercial basis.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have used the concept of ‘transnational modalities of governance’ to refer to the growing array of organizational forms which transcend conventional international, national and local systems and practices of authoritative rulemaking and implementation. We have exemplified various aspects of the ascending transnational modalities of governance by investigating a number of organizational forms which address new ICT policy issues while being fundamentally contingent

⁷⁰ Another example is The Information Age Partnership (a partnership between the British Government and the private sector in the UK) which in 2002 commissioned Booze/Allen/Hamilton, the consultants, in cooperation with the Office of the E-Envoy (a unit under the Cabinet Office commissioned to lead the drive to get the UK online) and the INSEAD Business School, to benchmark the UK against its top eight international competitors. The results of the study were published in Booze/Alle/Hamilton, *International e-Economy benchmarking. The World’s Most Effective Policies For thee-Economy* (London 19 November 2002), available on-line at www.e-envoy.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/00/08/19/04000819.pdf. See also United Nations, Division for Public Economics and Public Administration & American Society for Public Administration, *Benchmarking E-Government: A Global Perspective* (May 2002), available on-line at www.unpan.org/e-government/Benchmarking%20E-gov%202001.pdf

upon these ICTs in the maintenance and development of their own organizational structures and activities.

Importantly, while the cases of partnership and benchmarking are transnational instantiations of a particular variety of the political technologies dealt with in this paper – i.e. of agency and performance - they are also nodes through which the accomplished actors of these emergent organizational forms flow, mix and create alliances. These nodes are furthermore of interest both because of what they offer social actors in terms of knowledge about ICTs and their implementation in political, economic and social realms, and because they illustrate how the advent of ICTs interact with the current reordering and remodelling of statecraft.

As to the change of statecraft we would like to emphasize two things. First, insofar as it makes sense to speak of ‘political interconnectedness’ as a particular manifestation of the globalization of politics, it is imperative to consider the spread and application of new and extremely rapid ICTs that facilitate the organization of political action and the exercise of political power across vast distances, linking sites of political action and/or decision-making into complex networks of political interaction. The transnational modalities of governance that we have studied operate both physically and socially at very long distances: they are transnational and incorporate into their organizational structure a wide variety of actors from many countries. Their ability to achieve some degree of ‘government at a distance’ in practice, both with respect to their own, internal long-distance coordination and with respect to the enrolment of external actors and entities into their networks, relies on media and media use. According to medium theory, which takes the intrinsic properties of media into consideration and argues that different media may impose different limitations on the types of possible human communications while facilitating others, the new ICTs facilitate new capacities of information and communication flows within and outside

organizations, enabling new possibilities for networking and creating alliances⁷¹. More generally, the ways in which media permit knowledge to be stored, transmitted, and distributed by certain actors and not others, and the ways in which such knowledge can – or cannot - be accessed and appropriated through particular media will have serious implications for power relations and politics⁷².

Second, insofar as it makes sense to speak of advanced liberal governance as a rationality of rule, with its associated political technologies of agency and performance, we have seen partnership arrangements and benchmarking schemes interacting with domestic polities. But do the activities of such transnational modalities of governance qualify claims about the weakening of domestic polity? Our investigation cannot document the degree to which national as well as local governments strategically engage with these modalities – this is matter of future empirical research. But there are good reasons to believe that they do it more and more, and that when they do it, it is not only by way of self-management, but also in order proactively to pursue their own political objectives. Engagement can be a very effective organizational driver internally in the institution, it can translate into symbolic power in an institution's interaction with the rest of the world. But it is also a risky strategy: by partnering with a plurality of actors, by subjecting oneself to performance assessment, whether conceived and conducted by a state actor or by actors outside the traditional state sector the meaning and practice of authority is potentially up for grabs.

⁷¹ Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia. Communication in World Order Transformation*; Wittel, *Toward a Network Sociality*.

⁷² Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia. Communication in World Order Transformation*, 31.