Why Adding Democratic Values is Not Enough for Global Democracy

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Introduction

The social and political space is no longer entirely mapped in terms of territorial places and borders. What is characteristic of our globalizing era is the growth of problems that transgress traditional territorial boundaries and which are no longer addressed by nation-states alone (Scholte, 2000: 3). In fact, the pace of the political development of governance beyond the nation-state after the Second World War is without parallel in history, with the establishment of international organizations (IOs) such as the United Nations (UN), the European Commission (EC), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Up until the beginning of the 1990s, the justification of IOs was mainly measured in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, but since then the political climate has drastically changed. After this normative turn, scholars and practitioners have questioned the idea that the capacity to deliver effective policies is a sufficient requirement for legitimacy. There is wide agreement that international organizations suffer from a ‘democratic deficit’ and that prospects for democracy beyond the state need to be addressed in this context. It is argued that there is too wide a gap between governance as effective and efficient collective action problem-solving and governance as the democratic legitimation of policy-making. This gap has fueled the debate about making global governance institutions (GGIs) more democratic by strengthening their legitimacy, a demand which has placed civil society and transnational actors (TNAs) at center stage. Governance has become a hosting metaphor identifying non-state actors that participate as mobilizing agents broadening and deepening policy understanding beyond the traditional, exclusivist activities of states and their agents.
There has been general dissatisfaction among international relations theorists and civil society scholars about what normative political theory has to offer in dealing with questions of global democracy. In particular, cosmopolitan democratic theory has been under attack, accused of being too idealistic and detached from reality. Empirically oriented political scientists urge against drawing on the so-called domestic analogy, which presumes that democracy beyond the state should take a similar shape as liberal democracy within the state, and instead call for more imagination in the conceptualization and operationalization of democracy on the international political arena (Keohane and Nye, 2003). In this inventive spirit, numerous suggestions for how to rethink democracy globally and remedy the democratic deficit of international organizations have been proposed, in which transnational actors should participate more actively. A common characteristic of this civil society approach is a focus on how different TNAs – from social movements to interest groups and NGOs – can and ought to contribute to increased democratization and to the fostering of democratic transitions globally. Rather than emphasizing juridical and institutional aspects, it lays stress upon the ideal of inclusive participation, openness, contestation, and deliberation. Civil society offers a rich soil for re-formulating democracy globally since there is a growing range of social actors that create new political spaces, which are not delimited by territorial nation-state borders and therefore more suitable for confronting the globalized political problems that we face today. Another advantage of ascribing a major role to TNAs in global democracy is that they can do the work of crosscutting global power relations and hierarchies by giving voice to marginalized groups and local stakeholders.

This chapter is a theoretical and conceptual contribution to this debate. Starting from the presumption that we cannot investigate the democratic credentials of TNAs without studying the political circumstances in which they are supposed to contribute to more democracy, the chapter does not focus on different transnational actors but on their political context of action and on what democratic role they are ascribed in global democracy in the recent international relations (IR) literature, by which I mean the literature that focuses on the democratic deficit of global governance since the normative turn in the 1990s. The aim is to examine the conception of democracy in these proposals. More specifically, I discuss the major tendency within this literature to defend what I call, for lack of a better term, the additive view of democracy. If cosmopolitan theory has been the predominant view in normative political theory and political philosophy, I would say that the additive