Recipe for Tracing the Fate of Issues and their Publics on the Web.

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1. Taking to the Web, looking for 'public debate.'

A few years ago we took to the Web to study public debates on science and technology, but we found 'issue-networks' instead. Exploring the ways in which controversies around techno-scientific issues, such as climate change and genetically modified food, were being 'done' on the Web, we started off by following hyperlinks among Web sites dealing with these issues. In doing so, we first of all noted the great variety of formats in which the issue in question was being presented on the Web, from 'issue briefs,' to 'fact versus fiction' pages, visual and textual reports of in situ protests (such as the dump of genetically modified grain in front of a government office in the Netherlands), online petitions, and summaries for policy-makers. But as we surfed what we now call 'issue-spaces,' we increasingly came to rely on hyperlinks to *delineate* controversies around techno-scientific issues on the Web. Following hyperlinks among pages dealing with a given issue, we found that these links provided a means to demarcate the network that could be said to be staging the controversy in the new medium. Those Web pages which treated the issue, and which received a significant number of links from other pages presenting the affair, we decided, disclosed the controversy on the Web. Thus, we came to focus on sets of inter-linked pages that treated the affair in question, dubbing them issue-networks, as our most useful unit of analysis (see Figure 1).

As we began locating and analyzing issue-networks on the Web, first manually and later aided by software, our intuition told us that it wasn't quite right to characterize the online activity around our issues (climate change, and genetically modified food) as 'public debate.' For one, the Web pages that made up the issue-network couldn't really be said to be engaged in a 'great conversation': the relations among these pages were far too indirect to be able to say that they were 'speaking' with one and another. Acknowledgements of other sites, by way of hyperlinks, characteristically are one-
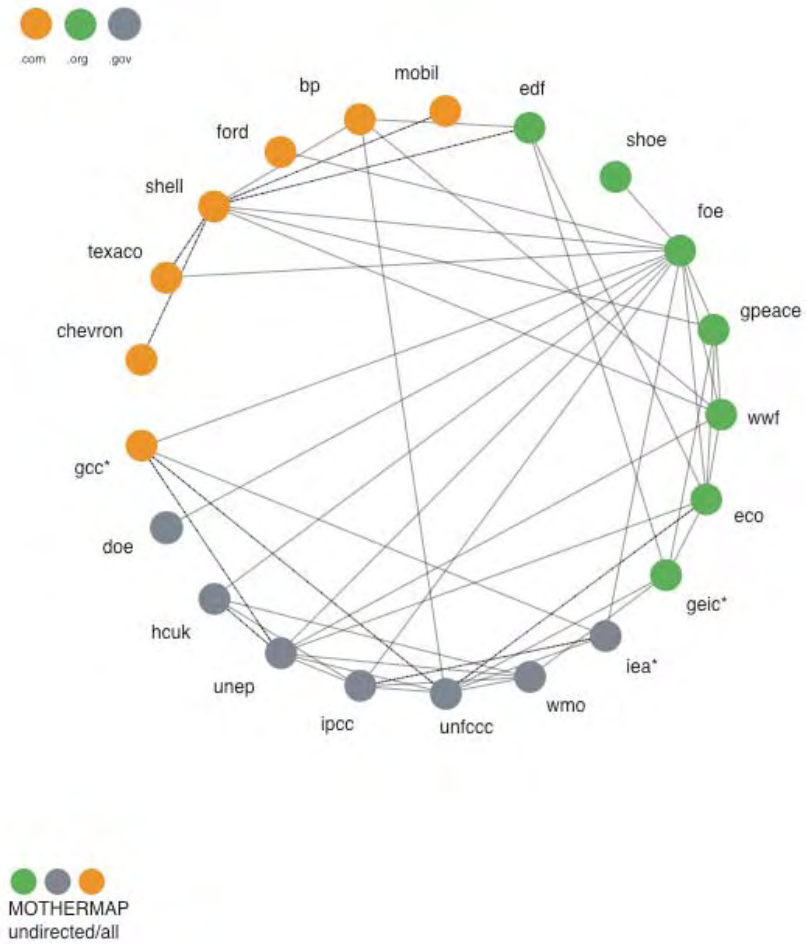
Figure 1. Climate Change Mother Map, Spring 1998. Map by Govcom.org.

way recognitions, whereby the sender of the link 'frames' the site of the receiver, as it presents the link under a particular heading, or as part of an overview of the issue, news item, protest report, or a review of a policy-event. Moreover, instead talking to each other, the pages in the network were rather defining the issue in question in ways that built from, and countered, issue-definitions presented on other pages in the network. That is also to say, these pages weren't exactly presenting 'points of view' on the matter at hand, as happens in a debate: first and foremost, they presented the issue, what is was about, and what should be done about it. Thus, we felt it necessary to acknowledge that we were looking not so much at public debates, but at a different set of practices, that of 'issues being done in networks,' by a variety of techniques, ranging from the action campaign to the release of policy documents, et cetera. So perhaps it shouldn't have surprised us that, when we finally looked up the term 'issue-network' in the scientific literature,[1] it turned out that this notion was originally developed to describe, not the democratic practice of public debate, but new forms of *lobbyism*.

2. The questionable origins of the 'issue-network.'

The term 'issue-network,' we learned, came to prominence in the context of the now classic 1970s critique of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The notion was employed in its day, in order to question the extent to which Washington, DC 'policy circles' - think tanks, scientists and activists as well as non-governmental organizations (working and networking on the same issue) - were increasingly constraining legislative outcomes. The American political scientist Hugh Heclo coined the "issue network" in 1978, in a scholarly publication by the conservative American Enterprise Institute. Its purpose, Heclo stated in his seminal article, was to facilitate the analysis and evaluation of a recent development (taking place under the democrat President Carter) that Heclo characterized as 'the broadening of organizational participation in policy-making.' More specifically, Heclo observed that, in Washington government circles, increasingly 'issue-activists,' 'issue-experts' and 'issue-watchers' were forming 'loose alliances' in which they came to 'define public affairs by sharing information about them.' Thus, Heclo's critique did not just foreground the presence and

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[1] Hugh Heclo, "Issue networks and the Executive Establishment," in American Enterprise Institute, ed., *The New American Political System*, Washington, D.C., 1978, pp. 87–124.

influence of 'policy pressure groups' but of 'webs of them'. Indeed, Heclo was the first to apply the notion of network in the field of politics.[2] The main problematic he highlighted was the rather classic one of the undermining of the representative system of government. However, the threat accordingly to him did not so much derive from the 'influence' of lobbyists on the voting-behavior of politicians and decision-making by officials. The problem was rather that *the "issue-people" got to define political affairs,* well before government officials, politicians and the general public became involved. Besides this, the critique of the 'issue network' was also caught up in the more general modernist problem, according to which a reliance upon social networks, on ties of kinship, and the informal, should not be made triumphant over formal political relations, and the properly bureaucratic.[3]

A Heclo-ian critique of issue-networking continues to find expression today in both highly politicized as well as more scholarly discussions about NGO influence on, and involvement in, decision-making and policy-making. These days, the American Enterprise Institute maintains the Web site www.ngowatch.org which provides detailed information on American progressive NGO's, from their address to a listing of initiatives, leadership structure and annual revenue. Its stated purpose is to "bring clarity and accountability to the burgeoning world of NGO's."[4] Commenting on this project, the spokesperson for social movements against corporate globalization, Noami Klein, scandalizes the critique of well-meaning NGOs that this sites makes. She quotes the site's claim that "the extraordinary growth of advocacy NGOs in liberal democracies has the potential to undermine the sovereignty of constitutional democracies," and asks since when the idea of "citizens getting together to try and influence their government" is considered a sinister idea. She wonders whether the critique of NGO's that the site makes, does not rather apply to the conservative think tank itself, observing that "as for influence, few peddle it like the AEI."[5]

Also in Europe, such criticisms of the lack of legitimacy of NGOs return time and again in both popular and scholarly debates. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom employed the language of 'democratic illegitimacy' when asked about protest groups at the Genoa G8 Summit in 2001, pointing out to the assembled press at the Genoa airport that 'the British

[2] Wayne Parsons, *Public Policy*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1997, p. 77
[3] Paul du Gay, *In Praise of Bureaucracy*, Sage, London, 2000.
[4] http://www.ngowatch.org/info.htm
[5] Naomi Klein, "Bush to NGOs: Watch your mouths," *Globe and Mail*, June 20, 2003

people are back home'. In Dutch discussions about the role of environmental organizations in public debates, the discursive and debating 'styles' of NGO's have been widely questioned. As part of these discussions, spectacular actions (banner hangings and digital witnessing of baby seal bludgeoning), overblown claims (Greenpeace's Brent Spar oil calculation mistake), tactically 'going to the press,' and the departure from formal settings to 'counter-settings' (as when Dutch NGO's working on the issue of food safety left the Dutch governmental debate and set up a counter debate) - these have been highlighted as 'out of order.'[6]

The issue-network critique of the 1970s, and contemporary criticisms of NGOs, can be said to revolve around three claims: issue-based groupings fail to represent the public, they are unaccountable to the public, and perhaps most seriously, they undermine established arrangements for public participation in politics. From the very beginning, issue-networks not only have been defined in opposition to the public, they also have been criticized for attempting to take the place of the public. Not only do these networks exert influence on decision-making and policy-making in the absence of the *restraint* brought about by how things are done publicly and properly. They also actually undermine the possibility for public involvement in politics, by introducing opacity, complexity and ready-made issue-definitions into the political process. Now of course these claims themselves can be subjected to critical scrutiny. Among others, we can question the allegations of opacity and informality, which are ascribed to the relations among NGO's and between NGOs and government, and have been made of their issue-making practices. For one, these days NGO participation in decision-making and policy-making is increasingly being codified, as accreditation mechanisms have put in place by (inter-)governmental organizations. Also, the practices of NGO's are increasingly being public-ized, for instance on the World Wide Web. In that respect, they have become legible to a degree, a point we'll return to below. But perhaps most importantly, we may question the implicit or not so implicit assumptions on which the critique of issue-networks relies, about what constitutes proper public involvement in politics.

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[6] Rein de Wilde, Niki Vermeulen, Mirko Reithler, *Bezeten van Genen, Een essay over de innovatieoorlog rondom genetisch gemodificeerd voedsel*, (*Possessed by Genes, An Essay on the Innovation War around Genetically Modified Food*), Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, Voorstudies en Achtergronden, SDU Uitgevers, Den Haag, 2003

The Heclo-ian critique of issue-networks suggests that such public involvement can be fully accounted for in terms of mechanisms for legitimacy and accountability (such as elections and objective reporting by the press). In discrediting the involvement of unelected and unappointed agents in the definition of the issues of politics and the formulation of policy, the critique assumes that public involvement in politics can happen without it. In doing so, we want to highlight here, the issue-network critique leaves out of account that issues do play a key role in getting publics involved and interested in politics.[7] Thus we say, something else is required besides mechanisms of legitimacy and accountability for publics to participate in politics: issues. Here we would like to address this aspect of public involvement in politics: the possibility that publics are at least in part organized by issues, and indeed, by issue-networks. This is the possibility we would like to explore in our research on issue-networks on the Web. Thus we ask, can the Web tell us whether and how publics are organized by issue-networks over the course of an issue's "life"? And what bearings, if at all, do these publics organized by issue-networks have, at particularly crucial junctures, on the fate of the issue?

In taking up these questions, we recognize at the outset that not all issues organize publics. But most publics, it seems to us, do care about issues. Similarly, we acknowledge that accusations directed at NGOs of a lack of legitimacy and accountability may or may not be justified. But, again, that does not mean that public involvement in politics can be accounted for solely in terms of mechanisms of legitimacy and accountability. Research on issue-networks on the Web provides a means to explore the role issues may play in getting 'the public' involved in politics. As such, it may be of help in addressing some of the shortcomings of our understanding of what counts as 'proper' public involvement in politics, and what it requires.

3. With the aid of Issue Crawler…
In taking to the Web to see whether and how issue-networks organize publics, we make use of a particular piece of software, Issue Crawler. This is a Web-based tool that was explicitly designed to perform the location of issue-networks.

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[7] The fate of issues in terms of how they come to be addressed in the architecture of public space is treated in Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, *In Search of the New Public Domain*, NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2001.

Issue Crawler begins by following hyperlinks from a set of starting points, Web pages provided by the user. It captures the outlinks from these pages, and keeps and analyzes the outlinks that two or more or the starting points have in common. Repeating the process several times, the results from each 'co-link analysis' provide the starting points for the next iteration. The choice of starting points is covered elsewhere.[8] But where the point is to locate an issue-network, the best starting points generally speaking are specific pages (link lists, preferably) that broadly disclose the substantive parties to the issue. If these starting points indeed disclose further Web pages that deal with the issue in question, and if these pages are sufficiently interlinked, then Issue Crawler can be expected to find an issue-network. In other cases, the crawler may find social networks or, in the "worst" case, no network at all. We call a social network a set of pages that acknowledge each other by way of hyperlinks, and which may have several things in common, such as geographical location, funding, political leaning, or the events in which they participate, et cetera, but not an issue. When our co-link machine finds no network at all, one may give it a second try, with a different set of starting points. But if there is no network according to crawler, this may also mean that the issue under scrutiny is not an issue, at least not according to the Web. In that case, Web pages dealing with the issue are not acknowledging one and another by way of hyperlinks, and may also in other ways fail to engage in collective practices of issue formation, on the Web.

This brief discussion of the workings of Issue Crawler makes clear that this tool principally relies, for the location of issue-networks, on the presence of hyperlinks among Web pages that deal with the issue. Now it is certainly not the case that the presence of such links can be taken as a sufficient indication that issue-networking activity is indeed going on, in the sense attributed to it by Hugh Heclo. Nor can the absence of an issue-network on the Web be taken as a sufficient indication for a lack of networking around the issue in general. As we sketched, Heclo defines issue-networking as the formation of loose alliances among issue-activists, issue-experts, and issue-watchers, who define issues by sharing information about them. It is obvious that many other techniques, besides exchanging hyperlinks on the Web, are available for doing so. To give one example, in an interview one of us did with the Webmaster of the Dutch-British oil company Shell, Simon May, he confirmed that Shell frequently consults with Greenpeace. However, Greenpeace on its Web site

[8] http://www.govcom.org/crawler_software.html See also: Richard Rogers and Andrés Zelman, "Surfing for Knowledge in the Information Society," in Greg Elmer, ed., *Critical Perspectives on the Internet*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2002, pp. 63-86. see also

does not acknowledge Shell by way of a hyperlink (even if Shell does link to Greenpeace). In this respect, we can say that hyperlinks among sites dealing with a common issue may disclose an issue-network, but a network located by way of hyperlinks does not reveal all the issue-networking practices that may be going on, on and off the Web.

However, the fact that hyperlinks provide an extremely partial perspective on issue-networking can also be seen as a key advantage, in as far we are interested in the ways in which issue-networks may organize *a public* for a given issue. The networks located on the Web by way of hyperlinks, disclose a particular type of issue-network: a network that is in the business of public-izing the issue. The Web after all is a generally accessible medium, where organizations and individuals direct themselves at a potentially very broad audience. (Having said this, it is of course not so surprising that we find in the issue-networks that we locate on the Web an occasion to criticize Heclo for characterizing the issue-network as an a-public or anti-public entity.) Thus we say that the sets of interlinking Web pages treating a common issue, that we locate on the Web, provide a particular trace of a particular mode of issue-networking: a generally accessible informational trace of a network in the business of public-izing the issue, as well as the networks that have adopted it.

4. Recipes for tracing the fate of issues, and their publics?

For the purposes of our research on issue-networks on the Web, we rely on this provisional definition of issue-network: a heterogenuous set of entities (organisations, individuals, documents, slogans, imagery) that have configured into a hyperlink-network around a common problematic, summed up in a key-word (such as climate change — but below we'll also discuss other examples such as the issues of the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia, and the Narmada dams in Northern India). Once such an issue-network has been located on the Web, with the aid of Issue Crawler, the network may provide clues as to the state of the issue, and the state of its public. When it comes to the state of the issue, one may begin by querying the network looking for indications on these three counts: the 'heat' of the issue, the life expectancy of the issue, and indeed, its fate. With respect to 'heat', one can ask, is the network active or passive? That is, are the pages fresh or stale? How frequently are they updated? If the pages in the network are old, the issue may already have been addressed, or, in a far more tragic case, the issue may have been deserted by the actors who previously had adopted it. As concerns life

expectancy, a key question is, are more actors attaching itself to the issue, or are actors detaching themselves from it? Are more documents, slogans, and imagery being released to the network, or fewer? Lastly, when it comes to the issue's fate, one may ask, has the network identified an address for the issue, an institution or collective that may take care of it, such as the UN, consumers, or the Dutch government? And if this is the case, has the addressee taken up the issue, or is the issue being denied address?

When it comes to the public-ness of the issue, we mentioned previously that the presence of an issue-network on the Web can be seen as indicative of a public-zing tendency of the network. Attempting to reverse engineer the genealogy of issue-networks that we located on the Web, we have often speculated on the type of issue-making events that take place in other (media-) spaces than the Web, such as boardrooms, protest events and email-networks. The move onto the Web of issue-networks may perhaps be understood as a 'going public' of networks that have been busy organizing in these other media-spaces. However, the presence of issue-networks on the Web does not necessarily mean that these networks are indeed organizing a public for the issue. How to determine whether this is the case?

In previous work, we have proposed that research on issue-networks on the Web may complicate and enrich our understanding of how more 'classical publics' come about: a TV-public, an election-public, or a protest-public. In one particular instance, we compared news media reports of a specific street protest event, a demonstration by French farmers in Milau, France, in 2001, with the ways the protest was presented on the Web. We found that what looked like "a bunch of angry farmers and protest tourists" to Dutch newspaper journalists present on the scene, took on a very different guise when we approached it via the Web. There we found a network of highly coordinated groups – organizing, info-sharing and doing issue-work on the Internet.[9] The issue-network on the Web presented the protest as part of a larger campaign against the U.S. ban on the import of French Roquefort cheese, and the pressure that the World Trade Organization exerted on the French government to relax its protectionist agricultural policies. In this respect, issue-networks on the Web may disclose the work of articulation and organization — the formatting of issues, the mobilization of actors, and the preparation of events — that enables and/or announces a public's eventual 'coming out' (whether it is on TV, during election time, or at a

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[9] Richard Rogers and Noortje Marres, "French scandals on the Web, and on the streets: A small experiment in stretching the limits of reported reality," *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 30, 2, 2002, pp. 339-353.

protest event, et cetera). However, in the case study of the Milau farmers protest, the presence of a public in the streets provided a starting point for tracing the issue-network which could be said to have organized this public, on the Web. But how to determine on the basis of the issue-network present on the Web, whether it has organized a public, or may do so in the future?

Looking for a way to conceptualize publics organized by networks, one of us turned to the work of the American philosopher, John Dewey. As others have also noted, his concept of 'the public' is particularly relevant in the context of the Internet.[10] In his one and only work on political philosophy, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), John Dewey defined the public as a set of actors jointly affected by a problem, for which no existing institution or community is currently providing a settlement. In these cases, Dewey proposed, affected actors organize into a public, so as to assure that the problem is addressed.[11] Drawing from Dewey, we may approach issue-networks on the Web, as disclosing such an assemblage of actors jointly implicated in an issue that no instance is effectively taking care of. We then say that issue-networking, as we can follow it on the Web, can be approached as a way for affected actors to get organized around an issue, and vice versa, for actors to organize the issue, so as to assure its settlement. As a way of finding out whether and how issue-networks may organize publics, we may thus start by posing these type of questions. Does the issue-network provide a means for actors to get involved in defining the issue by which they are affected? Do the issue-definitions provided by the network help to articulate the problems in which actors are implicated? And lastly, in which ways may the involvement of affected actors and the articulation of the issue by the issue-network, contribute to the issue's settlement?

4. Following the (dis-)organization of publics on the Web.
With respect to the involvement of affected actors in the issue-network, we wish to foreground here the constraints on bringing this about, as they can be gleaned from the Web. In many of the issue-networks we have located on the Web,

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[10] Stephen Coleman and John Gotze, *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation*, Hansard Society, London, 2001, pp. 5-7
[11] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Swallow Press, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1991 (1927) For a discussion of Dewey's concept of the public, see the piece by Noortje Marres elsewhere in this book

namely, the actors that are part of the issue-network, and those that are affected by the issue in question do not coincide. The nodes of issue-networks on the Web - URLs that have been identified by Issue Crawler - we call 'carriers of the issue'. The parties affected by the affair in question, as identified by the issue-network, we refer to as the issue's subjects. We found a particularly clear case of divergence between the issue's carriers and its subjects, in our research on networks on the Web thematizing the issues of the Ferghana Valley, a region in Central Asia, which lies on the borders between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. With the help of people familiar with the Central Asian issue-space, and assisted by Issue Crawler, we managed to locate several networks on the Web disclosing the Ferghana Valley's issues (see figure 2): an Uzbek governmental network, an Uzbek media network, an international media network, and a network of international organizations. Of organizations active in the region itself, however, we managed to locate little more than their names and addresses on the Web. Moreover, the network of international organizations thematizing the Ferghana Valley on the Web provides by far the most detailed accounts of the issues troubling the region (they provided information on border conflicts, drug trafficking, ethnic tensions, Islamic fundamentalism, poverty and women's issues, among others.) Also, we observed that in the case of the Ferghana Valley, which spreads out across countries with semi-dictatorial political regimes, it would obviously be a mistake to expect the issue-networks we located on the Web to draw affected actors from the region into the issue-network. Considering the political situation the people of the Ferghana Valley find themselves in, such attempts would probably rather compromise than enable the chances of the Ferghana Valley's issues being addressed.

Rather than asking whether affected parties are present in the issue-network, when it comes to issues like those of the Ferghana Valley, a better question is whether issue-networks on the Web can be said to mediate the concerns of affected parties, and in that sense organize these as a public. The crucial question is then whether the issue-definitions provided by the issue-network's capture the issues as affected parties (would) define them. We have not been able to answer this question for the Ferghana Valley, but in our Web analysis of another case, this question took center stage. In the case of the controversy over the construction of electro-hydraulic dams in the Narmada Valley in Northern India, we found a troubling disparity between the issue-definitions provided by the carriers of the issue and those provided by the issue's subjects. With Web pages dealing with the Narmada dams serving as starting points, Issue Crawler located an issue-network on the Web which consisted of a grassroots movement active in the region, international civil society organizations, and international
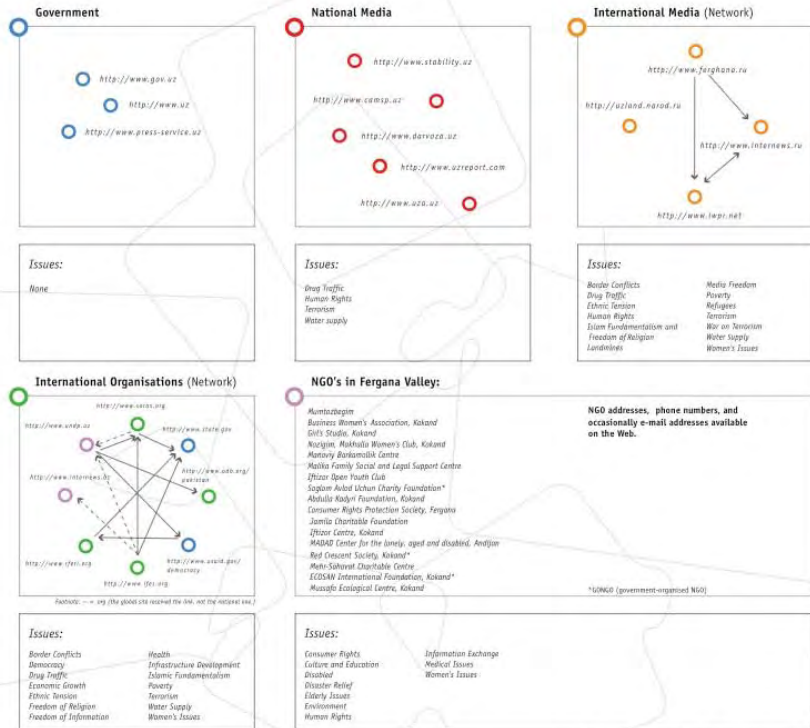
Figure 2. Issues in the Ferghana Valley, Autumn 2001.

institutions, such as the World Commission on Dams, among others (see figure 3). The page of the regional NGO, narmada.org, provides updates on the continuing submergence of villages, and the continuing absence of arrangements for resettlement and compensation for the affected population, going back to at least 2001. The international organizations present in the issue-network, on the other hand, provide information on dams all over the world, and present their mission in decidedly global terms. For instance, the mission statement of the World Commission on Dams says its task is "to review the development effectiveness of large dams and to develop internationally acceptable criteria, guidelines and standards for large dams."[12] In some crucial respects, the issue-definitions of the international issue-carriers and the regional one, we concluded, fail to meet up. Where the latter focus on basic arrangements of resettlement and compensation of affected populations, the former are dedicated to monitoring "development effectiveness." This situation is particularly troubling considering the pivotal role that grassroots protests against the Narmada dams have played in turning "large dams" into an issue of global concern. The protest by Indian NGO's and their diasporic counterparts in the United States, back in 1997, was the single most important occasion for international NGO's and institutions to define large dams as an affair which requires public involvement, if it is to be adressed.[13] However, even if "large dams" can now count on a large public of non-governmental organizations, UN bodies and other international instances, the issue of resettlement and compensation of affected populations in the Narmada Valley remains largely unaddressed up to this day. Here, one could say, the organization of a global public brought along a redefinition of the issue, which fails to capture the issue definition that sparked this process in the first place. Perhaps it is too soon to tell, but the organization of a public may here have resulted in the desertion of the issue by this public.

However, it is certainly not the case that the involvement of previously non-implicated actors in the issue, and related shifts in the issue's definition, should necessarily result in the desertion of the issue. In the case of the issue of climate change, we found contrariwise that the broadening of the range of actors involved in the issue-network, beyond an original 'core set,' actually opened up opportunities to bring the issue closer to a settlement. In the spring of 2004, we located a

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[12] http://www.dams.org/commission/intro.htm

[13] The World Commission on Dams mentioned hereabove, was founded largely in response to that event. Its succesor is the Dams and Development Project of UNEP http://www.unep-dams.org/ For a history of the controversy surrounding the Narmada dams, see S. Randeria, "Glocalization of Law: Environmental Justice, World Bank, and the Cunning State in India," *Current Sociology*, Vol. 15, no. 3/4, Sage Publications, London/Thousand Oaks, May/July, 2003, pp. 305 – 328.
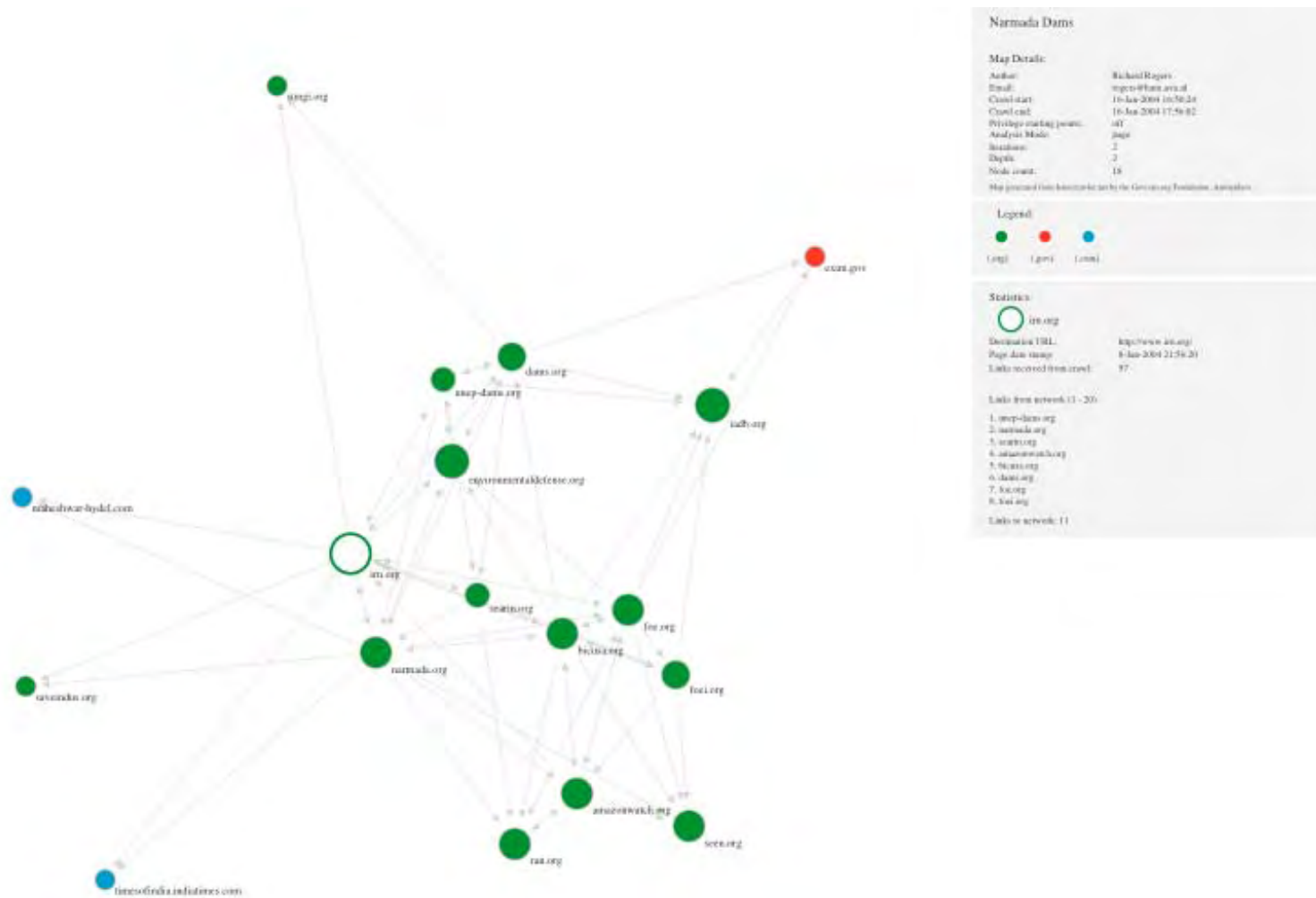
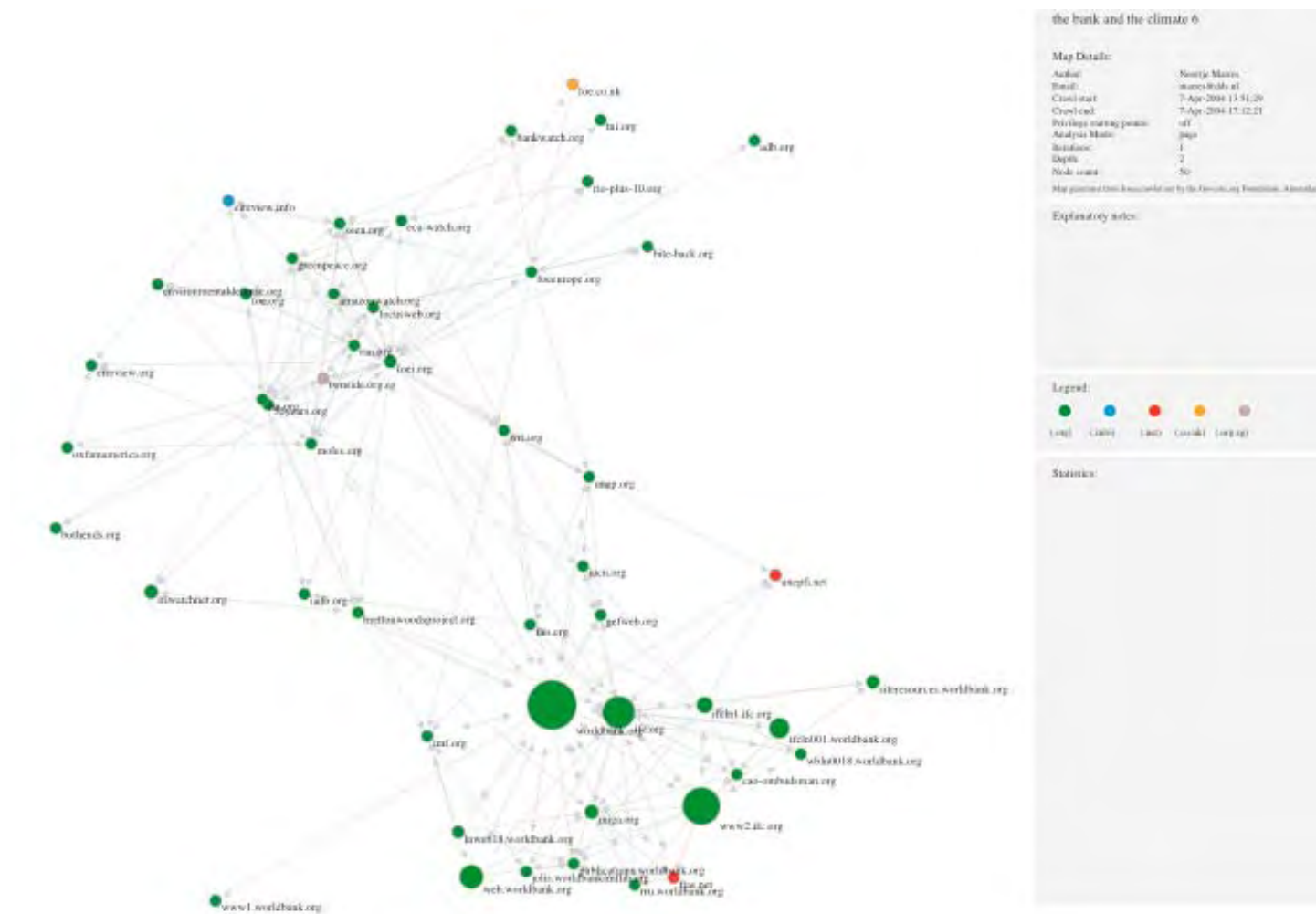Figure 3. Narmada Dams, January 2004.

Figure 4. Climate Change at the World Bank, April 2004.

climate change network on the Web, in which were present not only long time carriers of this issue, but also actors we hadn't previously encountered in issue-networks on climate change: besides Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth International, the network presented NGO's working on the issue of 'international financial institutions' (IFIs), and such an institution itself, the World Bank (see figure 4). Surfing this network, we observed that the issue of climate change was being inserted in a controversy surrounding the World Bank's policy on the funding of fossil fuel projects in developing countries. Referring to climate change, this network articulated a particular claim: that the World Bank phase out its funding of fossil fuel projects by 2008, and shift its funding to support renewable energy sources. This network definitively presented a shift away from climate change networks we had located on the Web over the previous years. Not only were NGO's working on IFI's drawn into the climate change-network (or the other way around). Climate change, in this network, also was articulated as an issue to be addressed by an international development agency, the World Bank. Climate change, in recent years, was defined most importantly by the Kyoto Protocol (and by criticism of the Protocol), and the UN figured as the principal addressee of the issue. Now the energy policies of an international financial institution was singled out as a key site where the issue's fate may be decided. However, the re-definition of the issue, in this case, certainly has not disabled previous issue definitions, and their publics. As part of the controversy over the energy policy of the World Bank, this institution reconfirmed its commitment to the Kyoto Protocol. And so did the European Commission, we learned from the issue-network on the Web, during a European Council meeting on the above demands made to the World Bank. The insertion of climate change in the controversy over the Bank's energy policy, we could perhaps say, added a new public to those already organized around the issue, and provided an opportunity for actors already implicated in the issue, to re-actualize the issue.

5. Conclusion
Many more aspects of issue-networking should be seriously looked at, if we really are to put the Web to use to account for the (dis)organization of issues and their publics, and do justice to the ways in which the fates of issues and publics intertwine. Among others, we should look much more carefully at how the political-geographical locations of issues

constrain their articulation, as well as the organization of a public. In the case of the Ferghana Valley, the issues were most notably being defined by international networks, at a great distance from the sites where the issues being articulated by this network were making themselves felt. This situation severely limits, of course, the possibilities of finding out whether these issue definitions are pertinent. On the other hand, the type of issues that arise in situations in which even the definition of problems proves a dangerous undertaking are likely to be among the ones which most urgently require address, and thus, a public that may attempt to assure this. Also, we should spend much more time looking into the enabling and disabling effects of various framings of an issue for the organization of its public, and for the possibility of its being addressed. For example, the framing of an issue in terms of 'development,' as happened in the case of the Narmada dams, but also in that of climate change, may have far-reaching consequences for the type of public that gets organized around the issue. It may have consequences, for instance, for the ways in which actors in the West and actors in the non-West may relate to one another in their capacity of members in these issues' publics. Here too, the danger is that organisations from the West end up defining the issues *for* people from the non-West. Lastly, there is the enormous question of how issue-networking and the organization of publics around the issue contributes or not to the issue being addressed at all. This question we have barely begun to inquire into.

But we have come some way. Looking for 'public debate' on the Web, we found 'issue-networks.' On the Web, we catch glimpses of the net-work of formatting issues and organizing actors that must be performed before something like a public may become involved in an issue, be it in the mode of debate, protest, or yet another way. Secondly, we no longer have to approach issue-networking as an activity that is inevitably pursued in the absence of 'the public.' We may give issue-networks credit, but also hold them accountable, for the ways in which they organize and fail to organize an issue's public. We may do so by following the configuration and re-configuration of issue-networks in the widely accessible medium of the Web. First, these networks can be queried for the extent to which they involve affected actors in the articulation of the issue. Secondly, we may determine to what degree the network's issue-definitions capture the ways in which actors are affected by it. And lastly, we can ask whether the articulation of the issue, and the organization of a public in the issue-network contribute to the issue being addressed. As the above discussion of our Web findings make clear, we frequently observe the failure of issue-networks to organize a public for the issue that they have adopted. However, some of

the issue-networks we located on the Web, like the one around climate change, did contribute to the organization of actors affected by the issue into collective. Its articulations of the issue may turn out to be decisive to bringing it closer to a settlement. Such rare achievements make clear, it seems to us, that the frequent failures of issue-networks to call a public into being cannot be ascribed to the intrinsic features of the 'issue-network,' as a form of political organization, as the inventor of this concept, Hugh Heclo, did. Instead, by locating and querying issue-networks on the Web, we may specify the constraints on the organization of an issue's public, and thus begin to see the contours of this challenge.