

Transnational Governance in the making – Regulatory Fields and their Dynamics.¹

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Introduction

On an experiential basis, many of us feel the impact of a “transnationalizing” world. What a European consumer gets when she buys chocolate in her local store has been defined and standardized by the European Commission. A German university professor is increasingly expected to belong to a transnational peer community and to adapt to career development standards highly at odds with German academic traditions. Companies around the world are going through multiple certification processes and are bound to various categories of standards – efficiency, quality, ethical or environmental ones.

As those examples suggest, a transnational world is not about the disappearance of rules and order. Rather, what appears striking about our times is the increasing scope and breadth of regulatory and governance activities of all kinds. The present world has been described as a “golden era of regulation” (Levi-Faur and Jordana 2005). The proliferation of regulatory activities, actors, networks or constellations leads to an explosion of rules and to the profound re-ordering of our world. Organizing and monitoring activities articulate with regulation and represent other important dimensions of contemporary governance. New organizations, alliances and networks emerge everywhere. Particularly salient is the almost exponential

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growth of international organizations (e.g. Boli and Thomas 1999). An important task for many of these organizations is to issue rules but they may also be involved in elaborating and activating processes to monitor adoption and implementation of those rules.

An increasing share of this intense governance activity takes place between and across nations. Regulatory boundaries do not necessarily coincide with national boundaries. National regulatory patterns can quickly get transnationalized and transnational initiatives are having a local impact. States are active but they are themselves embedded in and constrained by regulatory actors and activities. State agencies negotiate with non profit associations, international organizations, standard setters and corporate actors. Interactions between organizations in state and non-state sectors are complex, dense and multi-directional. The allocation of responsibilities between them is in flux and the borders between public and private spheres are increasingly fluid.

This paper focuses on governance in the transnational world and more precisely on transnational governance in the making. There is now a rich literature painting the features of a re-ordered world (e.g. Ayres and Braithwaite 1992; Cutler et al. 1999; Hall and Biersteker 2002; Slaughter 2004). There is often a sense in that literature that transnational regulations are out there and just come about – with an associated feeling of determinism and ineluctability. In contrast, we emphasize the complex, progressive and highly historical dimension of the re-ordering process that is still, very much (!), in the making. In fact, we propose to focus on the re-ordering process itself. In this paper, we are interested in the genesis and structuration of new modes of governance – rules and regulations and the organizing, discursive and monitoring activities that sustain, frame and reproduce them. We want to understand how they are shaped, get stabilized and change. We explore transnational governance in the making and the concomitant re-ordering of the world. We seek, in this way

to make sense of the complex and dynamic topography of our re-ordering world. Making sense, however, goes well beyond the description of what is visible (cf. Weber 1949) and topography means more than a surface collection of elements. We propose a re-visited field perspective to capture the multiple levels and dimensions of this dynamic topography. Beyond the apparent complexity and unruly nature of contemporary transnational governance, we search for those structuring dimensions and potential regularities that frame the visible landscape and its dynamics and allow for a deeper understanding.

Revisiting some key conceptual debates and definitions

Examples now abound that point to profoundly changing rules of the game across the world in many spheres of activities – be they social, economic or political. The very definition of “rules” and “regulations”, the nature of actors involved, the modes of regulatory and monitoring activities are evolving quite profoundly. In the meantime, the conceptual frameworks at our disposal for understanding processes of re-regulation are mostly inadequate. They often are mere extensions of the conceptual frameworks originally developed to understand rule-making and monitoring in a Westphalian world – where sovereign nation-states with supreme jurisdiction over demarcated territorial areas functioned in an essentially anomic international arena (Martin 2005). As such, they have a tendency to marginalize transnational regulation (Cutler 2002; Kobrin 2002). We propose that a contemporary frontier for social scientific research is to extend and reinvent our analytical tools in order to approach regulation as a complex compound of activities bridging the global and the local and taking place at the same time within, between and across national boundaries.

Transnational and not global

The label “globalization” is often used to refer to the rapid expansion of operations and interactions across and beyond national boundaries. This label has become such a catch-word that its meaning is highly blurred. In the end, it is quite unsatisfactory.

Transnational, we suggest in line with Hannerz (1996), is a more suitable and focused concept to make sense of the world we live in. Hannerz commented upon the two concepts as follows

I am also somewhat uncomfortable with the rather prodigious use of the term globalization to describe just about any process or relationship that somehow crosses state boundaries. In themselves, many such processes and relationships obviously do not at all extend across the world. The term “transnational” is in a way more humble, and offers a more adequate label for phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distribution, even when they do share the characteristic of not being contained within the state (Hannerz 1996:6).

Although the term “transnational” does not imply the disappearance of nation-states, it suggests that states are only one type of actors amongst others (Katzenstein et al. 1999). Many connections go beyond state-to-state interactions. As Hannerz (1996:6) again put it “(i)n the transnational arena, the actors may now be individuals, groups, movements, business enterprises, and in no small part it is this diversity of organizations that we need to consider”. This fits with our conviction that the exploration of a re-governing world should neither neglect states nor treat them as the only or central mainsprings of the re-governing process.

The label “transnational” suggests entanglement and blurred boundaries to a degree that the term “global” could not. In our contemporary world, it becomes increasingly difficult to

separate what takes place within national boundaries and what takes place across and beyond nations. The neat opposition between “globalization” and “nations”, often just beneath the surface in a number of debates, does not really make sense whether empirically or analytically. Organizations, activities and individuals constantly span multiple levels, rendering obsolete older lines of demarcation.

Transnational governance suggests that territorial grounds and national autonomy or sovereignty cannot be taken for granted. It also implies, however, that governance activity is embedded in particular geopolitical structures and hence enveloped in multiple and interacting institutional webs. Kobrin (2002:64) saw parallels between present governance structures and medieval states. “Although medieval “states” occupied geographic space, politics was not organized in terms of unambiguous geography. Borders were diffuse, representing a projection of power rather than a limit of sovereignty. In the context, power and authority could not be based on mutual exclusive geography”. With reference to Ruggie (1983), Kobrin characterized such political structures as “patchwork”.

“Patchwork” political structures mean interdependence and entanglement. Actors converge across fluid boundaries in the ways they structure themselves, connect with others and pursue their interests. Interdependence and entanglement reflect in part re-regulation while driving it even further. Greater interdependence and entanglement foster the need for systematic comparisons and benchmarks and thus make it necessary to increase coordination across countries and regions. This in turn generates even more regulatory activity.

A re-regulated world

Together with the expansion of regulation has come an explosion of studies and theories (see Baldwin et al. 1998; Levi-Faur 2005). Different definitions and conceptions of regulation run

through these studies. Baldwin et al. (1998: 3-4) differentiate between three conceptions: (1) regulation as authoritative rules (2) regulation as efforts of state agencies to steer the economy, and (3) regulation as mechanisms of social control. This categorization certainly corresponds to a need for conceptual clarification in an expanding area of research (see Jordana and Levi-Faur 2004). Still, and based on our characterization of the transnational world, we find it necessary to refine further this conceptual categorization to capture the complex dynamics of contemporary re-regulation.

The categorization by Baldwin et al. points to an evolution from a narrow conception of regulation to a much broader one both in theory and practice. As we read this categorization, it tells us about four different dimensions. First, it tells us about who is regulating. Narrow conceptions suggest the centrality of the state. The broader conception points to the multiplicity of regulatory actors fighting for attention, resources and authority in multi-centered and fluid arenas. This rapid demultiplication of regulatory actors is particularly characteristic of recently regulated or re-regulated spheres – such as education, the environment, firm interactions, corporate ethics or state administration (e.g. Cutler et al. 1999; Kirton and Trebilcock 2004; Sahlin-Andersson 2004).

A second dimension bears on the regulatory mode. Rule-making has traditionally been associated, in a Westphalian world, with the coercive power of the nation-state. As such it has generally been expressed in “hard laws” and directives. A broadening conception implies a move towards legally non-binding “soft” rules such as standards and guidelines (e.g. Mörth 2004). This move follows and comes together with the explosion of regulatory actors but it also impacts upon states. The latter increasingly turn to less coercive regulatory modes as complements to more traditional coercive pressures. A third dimension is that of the nature of rules where a narrow conception assumes formal rules and a broader conception points to

more informal rules. Informal rules are more flexible and thus open to interpretation and adjustment by those being regulated (cf. Kirton and Trebilcock 2004; Sahlin-Andersson 2004). Standards and guidelines are in principle voluntary and non-coercive but not always informal, as documented in this volume and elsewhere (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000). Standardization is in fact often associated with formal reporting and co-ordinating procedures that can be heavy and constraining. A fourth dimension, finally, has to do with compliance mechanisms where the issue at stake is why those regulated do or do not comply. Even though many rule-makers do not have the type of regulatory authority traditionally associated with states, they can develop and structure regulatory sets that can be more or less coercive for example, through the connection between certain rules or standards and access to membership, resources or certifications. The evolution, there, is away from the traditional association of compliance with the threat of sanctions. Compliance can also rest on socialization, acculturation or normative pressures (cf. Scott 2004).

In everyday language, a lot is being made of the contemporary trend of “de-regulation” The conceptual elaboration above, though, shows that what is at work is not so much de-regulation (in the sense of moving towards no regulation) as a profound transformation of regulatory patterns (see also Braithwaite and Drahos 2000; Levi-Faur and Jordana 2005). We witness both the decline of state-centered control and the rise of an “age of legalism” (Schmidt 2004). New regulatory modes – such as contractual arrangements, standards, rankings and monitoring frames – are taking over and are increasingly being used by states too (Hood et al. 1999). Interestingly, the proliferation and expansion of those new regulatory patterns is both shaped by market logics and has a tendency to introduce and diffuse market principles everywhere (see Djelic 2006).

Transnational regulation is not new but has changed and expanded, with diffusing logics going particularly from economic to social spheres (Jordana and Levi-Faur 2004). Transnational regulation is a mode of governance in the sense that it structures, guides and controls human and social activities and interactions beyond, across and within national territories. However, transnational regulations are embedded in and supported by other modes of governance. As a concept, therefore, governance captures better than regulation the re-ordering patterns of our contemporary world.

Governance with and without government

Governance in a world where boundaries are largely in flux is being shaped and pursued in constellations of public and private actors that include states, international organizations, professional associations, expert groups, civil society groups and business corporations. Governance includes regulation but goes well beyond. Governance is also about dense organizing, discursive and monitoring activities that embed, frame, stabilize and reproduce rules and regulations.

Theories of governance emerged in reaction to the dominant perspective that social control was mobilized by and confined in states. This was particularly striking in the political science and international relations literatures (Keohane 1982; Baldwin 1993). The catch phrase “governance without government” (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992) was precisely coined to express that reaction and as such should not be taken literally. Theories of governance do not suggest that states and governments disappear (e.g. Pierre 2000). They emphasize, rather, that the study of governance should not start from an exclusive focus on states. The role of states and governments in contemporary processes of governance should not be taken for granted (Rose and Miller 1992; Kohler-Koch 1996; Moran 2002). Rather, it should become the object of serious scholarly scrutiny (e.g. Zürn 2005).

Governance spaces are formed as new issues arise and networks of actors mobilize to be involved, have a say or gain control (Hancher and Moran 1989). These networks are open to and inclusive of state actors but they also challenge state control (Knill and Lemkuhl 2002). Hence, research on governance needs to document the changing role of states and governments in addition to focusing on the identity of new governance actors – how they emerge, construct or transform themselves to play in the new governance game; how they interact and are interrelated.

The networks mentioned above are networks of actors – individuals and organizations – but they are also discursive networks (Marcussen 2000; Kogut and Macpherson 2004). Knowledge claims and various forms of expertise shape the authority of governing actors and the legitimacy of governance activities. In other words, networks and governance processes are all institutionally embedded. Hence, research on governance needs to be sensitive to this institutional contextualization (cf. Lynn et al. 2001; Johnston 2001). Theoretical frameworks should be able to capture not only the embeddedness of particular actors or governance activities but also the entanglement resulting from multiple and multidirectional connections between actors and activities.

Exploring the rise of transnational governance: existing theoretical repertoires

There is a rich collection of theoretical repertoires that talk to the issue of transnational governance in the making. Some of those theoretical repertoires take on the issue or deal with some of its important dimensions in an explicit manner. Others are more tangentially related but our reading suggests a contribution. We organize our review of a selection of those

theoretical repertoires in three clusters, each of which relates to an important dimension of transnational governance in the making. The first cluster talks to the issue of governance actors. A second cluster centres on the nature of contemporary governance processes. The third cluster focuses on embeddedness and on those cultural and institutional logics that shape and drive the re-governing process.

Governance actors

Traditionally, issues of governance and regulation have been approached in political science and in the International Relations literature from a state-centered perspective. The idea that states are the central pillars of regulation and governance within but also across national boundaries is still shaping quite a share of that literature (Martin 2005). The influence of states can be direct, through law making or other forms of regulatory activity. It can also be more indirect, through delegation at a subnational or supranational level. A number of scholars have reacted to and started to modify such state-centered perspectives, including within the International Relations community. Other contributions, talking from different disciplinary and theoretical traditions can also be mobilized for the debate around governance and its actors.

The transformation of states

A first line of reaction has been to point to the progressive “retreat of the state” in a globalizing world (Strange 1996). Many contemporary regulatory reforms have been associated with privatization and the partial dismantling of public services and welfare states (e.g. Vogel 1996). This has sometimes been interpreted as reflecting the exportation/importation of an American mode of governance that progressively assumed quasi-universal applicability. This mode of governance diffused around the world in parallel

and close interaction with the diffusion of organizing and discursive principles, particularly those associated with marketization ideas and reforms (see Djelic 2006).

In the process, states have in fact not withered away. Granted they may be changing, potentially quite significantly. As used by Majone (1996) and others (for a review see Moran 2002), the concept of “regulatory states” points to a significant evolution of states and the way they control and influence activities and actors. Regulatory states are not less influential or powerful than more interventionist states but they are increasingly embedded in complex constellations of actors and structures (e.g. Higgott et al. 2000; O’Brien et al. 2000). As such, their input and identity is difficult to disentangle and separate from the inputs and identities of other actors involved.

Furthermore, it becomes less and less acceptable to treat states as monoliths. State institutions are complex patchworks and this complexity becomes all the more striking that the porosity of state institutions has increased significantly albeit differentially. In fact, boundaries may now be tighter and more rigid between sectors of state administration than between particular state agencies and other actors in the same sector or field. Going one step further, Moran (2002) argues that the concept of “regulatory state” itself may be somewhat misleading – in that it still potentially sends the signal of a central role for states in regulation and governance. Along the same line, Scott (2004) criticized a state-centered bias and introduced the idea of “post-regulatory states”. The defining characteristic of “post-regulatory state” thinking is a blurring of the distinction between public and private actors, states and markets, and the introduction of a much more de-centered view of regulation that relies on mechanisms not directly associated with state authority or sanctioning power (see also Black 2002).

A related discussion is a methodological one. Many studies focus on regulatory developments in individual countries, with rare extensions into cross-national comparisons. Cross-national comparisons are enlightening because they show great variation across the globe with regard to the emergence and transformation of regulatory patterns. Still, because these studies are articulated around the nation-state as the basic unit, they tend to disregard or play down the many governing efforts that cut across and transcend national boundaries. Cross-national comparisons hence only have limited value for exploring the rise of transnational governance.

Bringing in multiple actors

Along with the idea of a retreat and transformation of states, there has been a focus on the widespread expansion of various forms of private authority (Cutler et al. 1999; Hall and Biersteker 2002). There is an interesting parallel with pre-modern (i.e. pre-nation-states) times when private authority spanning local communities was an important source of regulation and governance; the *lex mercatoria* (or merchant law) being a striking example (Berman and Kaufman 1978; Milgrom et al. 1990; Lehmkuhl 2003). The modern concept of private authority is wide and encompassing, referring to a multiplicity of governing and regulatory activities that emerge and are structured outside states. The notion of regulatory or governance networks has been a structuring intellectual common thread although the word “network” is used to mean different things.

Some contributions within the International Relations literature pointed already in the 1980s to the importance of transnational social networks. Using the concept of “social networks” in its descriptive and first level sense, Kees van der Pijl and the Amsterdam school explored the sociology and political economy of transnational class formation (Van der Pijl 1984, 1998). They unearthed in the process important mechanisms of transnational governance that

reproduced the class power of particular groups and associated structures of dominance – both reaching progressively a transnational scale and scope.

Haas (1989, 1992) also pointed to the importance of social networks as key mechanisms of governance crossing over state boundaries. Haas' concept of "epistemic communities" makes reference to communities of expertise and practice that are increasingly transnational while individuals in those communities retain some form of local or national influence and authority (Haas 1992). This mix can allow those groups to be powerful mechanisms at the interface between transnational and national governance activities. The understanding of "social networks" here is a more complex one. Epistemic communities are "faceless" and members generally have direct interactions only with small subsets of the community. Those communities are nevertheless powerfully connected. More than through direct and regular contacts, the "glue" is generated by common cognitive and value schemes, often associated with complex socialization processes and generally translated into "expertise", shared interests and projects (see for examples Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006).

More recent contributions talk about regulatory networks, underscoring the wide variety of public and private actors involved in rule-making and monitoring. As Schmidt puts it, "though the hangover of the traditional focus on the state's legal commands has been felt in the study of regulation, both European and American scholars of policy networks have advanced perspectives on regulation rooted more firmly in institutional dynamics and political behaviour" (Schmidt 2004: 276). The idea of regulatory networks points to complex interconnections between a multiplicity of individual and organizational actors – interconnections that can be direct or mediated. The idea also suggests organizational, cognitive and normative frames or arenas in which those interactions take place and are structured. Finally, with a focus on regulatory networks comes a question about their

legitimacy and more generally about the legitimacy of private authority. With a broadening set of rule-makers, the way of authorizing rules is likely to broaden as well. Coercive rules that rest on the monopoly of states over legal authority and physical violence or on citizens' habitual obedience come to represent only one among several forms of authorization.

In the background to many of these contributions, an important question is still the role and place of states. Whether perceived as strong or weak, states are pictured as clearly distinct from "non-state" actors. There is even a sense that the game being played around regulation and governance is a zero-sum game. If the role of non-state actors becomes more important, the expectation is that the power and influence of states will decrease in parallel. Those studies contrast state and non-state actors in the governance game. However, they do not tell us about reciprocal influence and interaction or about the transformation and reinvention that is likely to follow from regular interaction. There is no sense either of how, in the process, all those actors may in reality increase their regulatory powers – in a "win-win" kind of game.

Soft actors

The multiplicity of actors involved calls for tools that make it possible to capture complex interplays and interactions. These many actors are embedded and partly structured by other actors but they are also themselves contributing to the structuring of other actors. The concept of "soft actors" captures quite well this idea of multiple identities in flux and always somewhat blurred. With this concept, Meyer (1996) emphasized a view of actors – be they organizations, states or individuals – as culturally and institutionally constrained and dependent (see also March 1981).

Hence, transnational re-regulation should not be looked at only through the prism of network connections or patterns of interaction. Activities, relationships but also actors or the

development of actorhood itself are constituted and shaped by more diffuse and general cultural and institutional processes. Those cultural and institutional frames are often not directly visible but they can be studied through their effects and expressions. They can be revealed in particular if we shift our attention towards governance activities and processes.

Governance processes

Rule-making is exploding everywhere – in organizations (March et al. 2000) and in society in general, at the national but also at the transnational level (e.g. Ayres and Braithwaite 1992). A quick look at the websites of international organizations is illustrative in this respect. The OECD pays a great deal of attention to regulatory reforms. The World Trade Organization (WTO) develops regulatory schemes and the European Union is largely about regulation. Not only is regulatory pressure becoming denser and more complex in those realms where it existed before in simpler forms; it is also extending to and reaching new realms of social and human life (see Braithwaite and Drahos 2000; Kirton and Trebilcock 2004; Levi-Faur and Jordana 2005). If we take a broader view of governance, as proposed above, we can note the more general expansion not only of rule-making but also of monitoring, evaluating and auditing activities. In fact, Power (1997) characterized contemporary society as an audit society where audits explode everywhere and operations and organizations are increasingly structured in ways that make them “auditable” (see also Strathern 2000; Shore and Wright 2000).

As noted above, the rise of governance is not simply the consequence of a weakened state or of a transformed economic order. In fact, there is evidence that those latter trends may themselves be driven in part by exploding governance on a transnational scale (see Djelic and Quack 2003; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006). Power (1997, 2003), Hood et al. (1999) and Moran (2002) propose an alternative explanation; they suggest that expanded monitoring and

auditing activities are associated with a decline in trust. Auditing and monitoring reveal and make transparent. Rather than building trust, though, transparency may in fact undermine it further, leading to still more requests for auditing and monitoring (Power 1997; 2003). This may be particularly true for processes of self-regulation that are prone to questioning. Thus self-regulation tends to be replaced or developed into regulated and framed if not controlled self-regulation (Ayres and Braithwaite 1992).

Hence, behind exploding governance activities there is evidence of a distrust spiral. This distrust spiral reveals profound ambivalence in our societies about the role of expertise, science and measurement. New modes of governance are largely expert-based; they are often legitimized by references to science and expressed in terms of measurements (Power 2003; Wälti et al. 2004). A general societal trust in science and expertise is undeniably a driving force behind transnational governance (Drori and Meyer 2006). In parallel, Hood et al. (1999) and Moran (2002) point to distrust in experts, expertise and measurement as one driver for extended governance. For example, scandals around health, safety, environmental and other issues generate profound distrust and a demand for even more regulation and closer monitoring. This contemporary ambivalence towards expertise and science does not only stimulate denser governance activities. It also favors more universal types of rules as abstract expertise tends to be highly legitimate while practicing and individual experts often suggest distrust instead.

Governance and Institutional Embeddedness

Actor-centered explorations of transnational governance underscore the highly complex interplays between interdependent regulating and regulated actors. Studies focusing on regulatory processes point to evolving dynamics – the activities and drives behind particular processes that create self-reinforcing pressures and loops. Institutional theories, however, tell

us that it is not enough to look at observable flows, connections and dynamics. It is also important to understand how those flows, connections and dynamics are themselves shaped and permeated by culture, norms and institutions. There is now an abundant literature from which we can draw insights about the ways in which institutional embeddedness shapes exploding governance and governance, in turn, progressively transforms institutions and hence the nature of institutional embeddedness.

Towards a world society

The importance of bringing in cultural processes to understand how states in particular, but also organizations or individuals, change has most clearly been shown by Meyer et al. (1997). World society is not only a society of powerful actors; it is a society permeated by and permeating actors with cultural values or institutional frames (Meyer et al. 1997). These frames are shaped and diffused as global models and blueprints along which states (and other actors) are benchmarked and possibly transformed (Finnemore 1993; 1996). There is no global state but the alternative to state power is not anarchy and chaos. Meyer et al. (1997) convincingly argue that the cultural and institutional web characteristic of world society can be, at least in part, a functional equivalent to a centralized, state-like global power. The stateless but rational, organized and universalist character of world society may in fact add to rather than detract from the speed of diffusion and the global pervasiveness of standardized models and blueprints (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

This line of research and its elaborate theory of world society are enlightening. They bring cultural perspectives and explanations into the analysis of states, organizations and their transformation and provide evidence that actorhood is of the “soft” kind. Studies within this tradition show that states remain important regulators but that they are embedded in, shaped and fashioned by a powerful world society and its associated templates (Meyer et al 1997;

Jacobsson 2006). This research has also contributed to our knowledge about key carriers of global models and blueprints (Boli and Thomas 1999, Finnemore 1996). These studies, however, focus mostly on how global models and blueprints are diffused, potentially shaping localized discourse and/or structures and activities. We learn less on the construction, and negotiation of global models. We also lack an understanding of actual processes and mechanisms of diffusion and local reception. Finally, there is room for more work – both empirically and conceptually – on carriers. There is an extremely rich and diverse “biosphere” out there that has only recently started to be studied in and for itself (Boli and Thomas 1999; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002; Djelic and Quack 2003; Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006). In particular, little attention has been paid to the double issue of power and interests. Studies combining an analysis of the activities and interests of carriers with an account of their institutional embeddedness help us capture power interplays and processes of interest formation in highly institutionalized settings with a transnational scope.

Processes of institution building

Another strand of institutional arguments draws our attention to the fact that contemporary governance does not start from scratch but sets itself in reaction and relation to earlier, mostly national, systems of rules and modes of governance (Whitley 1999; Maurice and Sorge 2000; Hall and Soskice 2001). Hence, we also need to analyze how previous governing efforts pave the way for and lead to new types of governance, how different rule-systems interact and interplay. Contemporary economic sociology builds upon the recognition that human activities, more particularly in this case economic activities, are embedded within larger institutional frames (Weber 1978; Polanyi 1944). An important share of that literature has underscored the historical significance of the national level in defining and shaping these institutional frames (e.g. D'Iribarne 1989; Fligstein 1990; Dobbin 1994; Whitley 1999; Maurice and Sorge 2000; Hall and Soskice 2001). This argument has had the merit of

showing the contingency of arrangements and institutions, making it possible to introduce the idea of contextualized efficiencies. There are, however, contemporary challenges to this type of argument.

In a world where transactions and interactions increasingly take on a transnational dimension, a conceptual framework that interprets action merely as the expression of national logics becomes too restrictive. Transnational pressures – the multiplication of multinational companies, the progress of Europeanization, the intensification of transnational competition, the increasing number of international organizations and institutions, and the explosion of transnational regulation – challenge national business systems and their systemic complementarities (Djelic and Quack 2003). Recent contributions show that multidirectional interactions across national boundaries associated with the multiplication, particularly since 1945, of international organizations and institutions, contribute to the emergence and the progressive structuration of transnational social spaces and transnational (“soft”) actors. An important research agenda in this stream today is the transformative impact of those transnational challenges on national business systems (e.g. Morgan et al. 2001; Morgan et al. 2005; Thelen and Streeck 2005).

Djelic and Quack (2003) suggest another angle of approach. We should be considering how, in reverse, national institutional frames contribute to shaping and structuring transnational social spaces. The multiple (“soft”) actors involved in transnational governance – corporations, state agencies, NGOs, civil society groups, professions and epistemic communities, standardizing bodies, international organizations – are themselves to various degrees associated with, embedded in or in close interaction with national regulatory traditions and institutional frames. Those actors can mobilize bits and pieces of their national legacies in the negotiation around transnational governance. Some of them may even be

purely and simply fighting for the transformation of a national regulatory set into a transnational one (see Botzem and Quack 2006; Djelic and Kleiner 2006). Transnational governance in the making has a “patchwork” dimension that should not be neglected.

The Travel of Ideas – Translation and Hybridization

The world society perspective drew our attention to the homogenization of those institutional and cultural frames that structure the process of governance. Recent extensions of state-centered institutionalism wondered about, on the other hand, the reciprocal and mutually constitutive interplay of national and transnational institutional frames. A complementary question is that of the situated and micro mechanisms by which frames and ideas travel and negotiate or struggle with each other. There is a rich existing theoretical repertoire from which we can start.

Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) propose that ideas and institutions do not flow or homogenize spontaneously but that the “travel of ideas” is an active social process of translation. Ideas are picked up by actors, packaged into objects, sent to other places than those where they emerged, and translated as they are embedded into new settings (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). Similar notions of activity are alluded to with terms such as hybridization (Djelic 1998), performative processes (Sevón 1996), editing (Sahlin-Andersson 1996) or creolization (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). These studies take into account space and local institutional settings, embedded (or “soft”) actors and time, to get a deeper understanding of how ideas, institutions and knowledge flow. They provide a vivid picture of the dynamic interplay between homogenization and variation.

The travel metaphor directs our attention to travel routes and carriers. Connections between certain actors can explain in part the routes followed and account for the speed of diffusion

(Rogers 1983; Djelic 1998). In fact, some ideas or frames could become popular and powerful not because of their intrinsic properties but because of the ways in which they have been formulated and packaged and because of who transports and champions them (Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, Røvik 2002; Westphal et al. 1997). With the structuring of transnational networks and organizations, we can expect smoother diffusion and at least partial homogenization of ideas and frames on a transnational scale (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002; Djelic 2004). While the term “travel” may give the impression that ideas flow via direct interaction, ideas can also spread as they are broadcasted from one mediating source to a wide set of possible users (March 1999:137). For example, many international organizations serve both as arenas where ideas can be told and shared and as powerful broadcasters (Sahlin-Andersson 2000).

The travel of ideas is an active process and ideas are shaped and translated differently in different settings. Carriers are active in structuring flows and patterns of diffusion but they are also translating the ideas they mediate, reflecting in the process their own projects and interests (Sahlin-Andersson 1996). Carriers that operate transnationally and global broadcasters tend in particular to generalize and theorize the ideas they champion, thus making them abstract and universally applicable (see Strang and Meyer 1993).

The theoretical repertoire around the “travel of ideas” was originally developed to describe what happened to management ideas as they spread. We propose that this repertoire can easily be extended to other types of ideas, in particular those shaping governance frames and practices. This makes all the more sense as there is an important direct connection between management ideas and transnational governance. We noted above that transnational governance largely builds upon soft law – standards, norms and guidelines. Many of those standards, norms or guidelines relate to organizational, administrative or management issues

and quite a number in fact derive from popular management ideas (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000, Beck and Walgenbach 2002). Ultimately, it is often not easy to distinguish between management ideas and soft regulation. As an illustration, the package of reforms known as New Public Management (NPM) started out as a “management idea” along which countries reformed their state administration (Hood 1991, 1995). After being appropriated by many countries and key international organizations, such as the OECD, the World Bank or the IMF, NPM turned into a standard (Sahlin-Andersson 2000). When ideas and practices associated with NPM became strict requirements that countries had to meet to receive IMF loans, a management idea had turned into a harder form of regulation.

Combining the Repertoires to Revisit the Field Perspective

The theoretical repertoires discussed above gave important, but partial, insights into the dynamics at play behind transnational governance. Actor-centered repertoires underscored the importance of actors, interests, initiatives and power interactions in processes of transnational regulation and governance. Studies of regulatory processes showed that regulation, once in progress, displayed its own dynamics. The contribution of institutional theories, finally, was to draw our attention towards embeddedness. Actors, interactions, regulatory and governance processes are framed and constrained by and even shaped through powerful institutional and cultural forces. Models and blueprints spread around the world and generate partial homogenization of governance forms and activities across sectors, levels and territorial boundaries. At the same time, institutional or cultural frames are not simply out there – a key question is that of their origins and emergence. Transnational blueprints and institutional frames develop historically through processes where national tool-kits and actors play important roles.

Capturing multi-level institutional dynamics

The multi-level character of transnational governance is undeniably quite striking. If we want to capture this multi-level character, we suggest that it is important to overcome an analytical differentiation between macro, meso and micro processes. We need to approach evolving patterns of governance both as particular situations and configurations of actors and resources and as reflections of broader templates and forces that shape and structure our transnational world. We need, in other words, a conceptual framework that can make sense of the multi-level institutional dynamics of transnational governance.

The concept of field has been used to explore interplays across levels. Although it has become immensely popular in social sciences, this concept is rarely scrutinized in details (but see Martin 2003; Mohr 2005). In practice, many studies tend to reduce fields to networks of actors and interactions. This, we argue, is neither enough nor satisfying. We need to find ways to combine and integrate studies of individual behaviors, studies of interactions and processes, together with studies of institutional and cultural forces – the latter shaping and structuring both patterns of behaviors and patterns of interactions. We find guidance and insights by ploughing through the many different but complementary meanings of the field concept that have been developed and used in social sciences.

Fields as Spatial and Relational Topographies

Variants of the field concept betray inspiration from different disciplines. Kurt Lewin (1936, 1951) was a pioneer of the introduction of the field concept into the social sciences. His socio-psychological conceptualization built upon a combination of insights drawn from *gestalt* theory and theoretical physics. Striving to embrace the complexity of the world, he defined

fields as the “totality of coexisting facts which are conceived of as mutually interdependent” (Lewin, 1951: 240). Physics inspired him to develop a topological model—a spatial view—that could depict this mutual interdependence and enable him to identify “everything that affects behaviour at a given time” (1951: 241).

From there, one line of development has been towards the modelization of topographies understood essentially as relational fields. While we certainly acknowledge the methodological contribution of complex mathematical modelization (see also Martin 2003 and Mohr 2005), we argue that it is important not to close the conceptual black box too early. Premature formalization may lead us to disregard rather than embrace complexity, all the more if this complexity is dynamic.

The introduction of the notion of organization has been another way to go. A topography populated by organizations is – to use a concept developed by Emery and Trist (1965) – a “ground in motion” and should not be reduced to a mere geographical and relational space. Warren (1967), following upon Emery and Trist (1965), coined the concept of interorganizational field and outlined the complex texture of interactions and relations in fields where organizations shape and structure individual decisions and behaviors. With a focus on community-level planning organizations in three cities, however, his field concept became closely associated with the notion of territory and geographical space. His topography remained mostly a relational one.

Bringing in the Missing Dimension – The Notion of Force

On the whole, this limited understanding of topography – in its spatial and relational dimensions – has had a tendency to prevail in social scientific uses of the concept of field. However, if we take the notion of field seriously, then this limited understanding is not

satisfying. We need to develop a theoretical toolbox allowing us to find how spatial and relational dimensions in field topography relate to the other key notion running through field theories in physics – the notion of force. In physics, the notion of force goes back to Newton’s work on gravity and Maxwell’s formalization of the electromagnetic field (Pire 2000; Martin 2003). In social sciences, this notion was creatively blended with a focus on cultural and meaning aspects – first by Kurt Lewin and Pierre Bourdieu, soon relayed by certain strands of neo-institutional theory.

Bourdieu (1977, 1984) argued that fields were held together by common beliefs in the importance of certain activities. Coherent patterns of action and meaning thus developed, even without any single actor or group of actors intentionally striving for coherence or conformity. Fields, however, are also systems of relationships and resources where dominant actors occupy central positions whilst peripheral actors continuously seek greater influence and a more central position. The struggle is in great part about and around what are and/or what will be the structuring patterns of meaning and action, the dominant frames and understandings in the field. Peripheral actors challenge dominant understandings, which they try to modify and/or displace. Central actors have a tendency to protect and defend the status quo. They may envision to bend and adapt dominant understandings somewhat, if only to anchor and stabilize them further.

When the notion of force was brought into the neo-institutional theoretical fold, it was often in association with Weberian ideas of rationalization, “iron cage” and spheres of value. Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the latter explicitly using the terminology of iron cage and field, emphasized that organizations may have a great deal in common and develop in similar ways without ever being in direct contact with one another. Thus, the analysis of organizational and institutional change should not focus only on

interactions between organizations but also on those cultural and normative forces that foster homogenization in a more indirect and diffuse manner. Scott and Meyer (1983) revisited and recombined Warren's (1967, 1972) work on interorganizational fields to talk about the duality of space and meaning associated with the organization and development of societal sectors.

The neo-institutionalist project has from there evolved essentially in two directions. On the one hand, in a significant number of studies, the focus on meaning has been lost. As Mohr (2005:22) put it, commenting on this evolution:

While the project as a whole is conditioned on the assumption that it is the meaningfulness of space that matters, in its implementation it is the space itself (seen now as system of communicative structures) which is actually revealed through empirical analysis. Demonstrations of the homogenization of organizational structure are used again and again as a way to prove the existence and efficacy of these communicative pathways. The meanings embedded inside these institutional objects are left unexamined.

A partial explanation to this evolution is probably a methodological one. Territories, interactions and relationships are (relatively) easy to observe and measure while cultural frames and patterns of meaning are more complex to capture. As a consequence, there is a distinct tendency in neo-institutional literature to “create a spatial metaphor that privileges the structures of communication over the actual meanings that flow through these structures. As a result, the communicative channels in an organizational field are not analyzed in a way that enables these meanings to be treated as constitutive of the field itself” (Mohr 2005:22).

While this has clearly been the dominant trend, there is nevertheless another path – and this is to focus on meanings. Certain institutionalists have tried, in particular, to understand how cultural frames, ideas or patterns of meaning shape and constitute new structures and new modes of action and interaction across the world (e.g. Meyer and Scott 1983; Thomas et al. 1987; Meyer et al. 1997). The risk there, as Mohr also notes, is for spatial and relational dimensions to disappear and be evacuated. The very existence of a spatial field and the role of networks and relational patterns are in a sense wiped out by the strength and power of diffuse cultural and meaning templates. Ultimately, it seems that we still lack the conceptual tools to investigate the duality and interplay of meaning and space as constitutive of fields.

Revisiting the Field Perspective

We propose here to revive the institutionalist focus on the duality of space and meaning. In fact, we would like to go one step further. We understand fields as complex combinations of spatial and relational topographies with powerful structuring forces in the form of cultural frames or patterns of meaning. Hence, we see the need to integrate and combine three (and not two) dimensions as constitutive of fields – the spatial, the relational and the meaning dimensions.

We propose to look at transnational governance in the making through a revisited field perspective. The theoretical repertoires identified above help us precise our perspective further. Fields do have spatial dimensions. However, in fields of transnational governance, spatial topographies are both complex and fluid. Spatial topographies in this context cross over traditional territorial boundaries, rendering obsolete older lines of demarcation in particular between local, national and transnational spaces. Spatial topographies in fields of transnational governance look like patchworks, or even better, kaleidoscopes. They are fragmented rather than unified; a juxtaposition of multiple sub-topographies that collide and

sometimes overlap. They are also highly fluid and constantly evolving. Furthermore, those spatial dimensions are not necessarily territorial. There is, for example, a spatial dimension to negotiations structured by international organizations that is by nature extra-territorial.

Fields of transnational governance are also relational topographies. They imply, reflect and are partly constituted by and through networks. In that context the meanings of “networks” and “relational topographies” are broad and highly encompassing. First, networks do not connect only individuals, but also organizations, groups or even networks. While we should not disregard the importance of interpersonal networks, including in a transnational world, we should also wonder how those interpersonal networks articulate with other types of networks (connecting organizations, groups or networks) – the result being complex and multi-dimensional relational topographies. Moreover relational topographies can imply varying degrees of direct contact and interaction. In fields of transnational governance, relational topographies could be combinations of tightly-knit kin or family clans with virtual networks where members may never meet or exchange and are only indirectly connected.

Fields of transnational governance are also battlefields. Building upon Bourdieu, we want to move away from the idea of benign cooperation generally associated with the concept of networks. Instead, we underscore the power and struggle dimensions of relational topographies where dominant actors occupy central positions and peripheral actors constantly struggle for greater influence and power.

Finally, fields of transnational governance are fields of forces. Those fields are crossed and structured by powerful institutional forces that altogether constitute a transnational culture or meaning system. Our reading of transnational regulations in the making allows us to identify five such forces (see Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006).

The Institutional Structure of Transnational Governance

The first such institutional force is scientization – the “extraordinary and expansive authority of modern scientific rationalization” as revealed in the overwhelming role and presence in our contemporary world of scientific agencies, scientists, scientific products and argumentation (Drori and Meyer 2006). As a result of its expanding authority, scientization encourages the constitution of various social entities as organized, rule-making and empowered actors that find legitimacy in references to science. Science becomes a paradigmatic umbrella, in terms of which every aspect of the universe can and should be interpreted and framed. A sub-dimension of scientization is the strong drive towards measurement and quantification. Expertise and the legitimacy of science have a tendency to express themselves in figures, measurement and statistical relations. The ontology, methods and models characteristic of mathematics, physics, and natural sciences have all but triumphed. They have a tendency to be purely and simply conflated with “science”, marginalizing as it were alternative understandings of the scientific endeavor.

A second institutional force, increasingly shaping fields of transnational governance, is marketization (Djelic 2006). The powerful contemporary marketization drive reflects a belief that markets are superior arrangements for the allocation of goods and resources and this in every sphere of economic, social or even cultural and moral life. This “belief” in markets is itself institutionalizing fast and, as a consequence, markets are increasingly defined and perceived as the “natural” way to organize and structure human interactions. Market logics have moved in about a century from reflecting marginal ideas in a few liberal intellectual centres to becoming a structuring force of the transnationalizing world. Today we find that marketization permeates and structures policies, reforms, discourses and ideologies in many

places in the world. This progress of marketization comes, furthermore, under a highly scientized guise, particularly reflected in the professionalization of economics.

Organizing is a third institutional force highly structuring of fields of governance. Organizing is a way to create order transnationally in the absence of a world state and of a world culture (Ahrne and Brunsson 2006). Organizing in our transnational world often takes the particular form of “meta-organizing”, where organizational members are organizations. Standardization and socialization are important mechanisms that reconcile transnational ordering and the perception of autonomy that often defines member organizations.

A fourth institutional force is a widespread moral rationalization (Boli 2006). Rationalized and scientized assessment and celebration of virtue and virtuosity become increasingly prominent in the transnational public realm and act as a powerful sustaining and structuring force of transnational governance. Celebrations of virtue and virtuosity (and blames as negative counterpoints) become increasingly prominent in the global public realm via ritualized performance displays – world competitions, award ceremonies, rankings, accreditation processes. Virtue is the embodiment of goodness; virtuosity is the embodiment of excellence. Celebrations tend to be highly rationalized – with the assumption that virtue and virtuosity can be (scientifically) assessed, measured and compared.

A fifth powerful institutional force that shapes and structures the ground for transnational governance is democracy. Rather than traditional representative democracy, the transnational world is increasingly permeated by a view of democracy that emphasizes dialogue and deliberation and the autonomy of the participating actor (Mörth 2006). A sub-dimension associated with deliberative and participative democracy is the explosion and expansion of soft forms of governance.

When characterizing these as institutional forces, we refer to four meanings of “institutions”. First, institutions are constitutive of actors, interests, relations and meanings; they push and pull activities in certain directions. This is precisely why we can conceive them as “forces” (cf. Hoffman and Ventresca 2002). Institutional forces should not be treated as external to the actors, as representing an environment to which actors are merely adapting. Second, institutional forces generally become taken for granted as the “natural” way of being and doing; they turn transparent for actors themselves (cf. Douglas 1986). Third, institutional forces are self-reinforcing. As these forces shape relations, interests and bases for activities, the actions taken carry inscribed meanings and drive activities further along the same path. Fourth, these institutional forces constitute the “rules of the game” in the transnational world, providing frameworks for judging which behavioral, organizing, discursive, and interaction patterns are appropriate.

Going one step further, we find that the institutional forces identified above foster a governance culture that heavily relies on soft rules – rules that are voluntary and to which formal legal sanctions are not attached. Those types of rules often leave considerable space for editing the rules according to particular situations, settings and practices. In this sense, those rules can really be said to be transnational – they are generally elaborated so that they can be applied in different settings while leaving some degree of autonomy to localized settings and actors. Institutional inscription is not an automatic or smooth process. It implies elaboration and negotiation of rules, diffusion, translation, appropriation and rejection, potentially stabilization and socialization. All these steps and dimensions are in themselves battlefields. They are highly dynamic processes, full of tensions and struggles. They involve multiple actors and interests that are both increasingly under pressure of – if not constituted and shaped

by – the same powerful transnational institutional forces and still fighting and contending with each other around and about those forces and their various implications.

Those five institutional forces and the two associated sub-dimensions are closely intertwined; in fact they nurture and foster each other. Scientization, for example, is often an important background to the contemporary elaboration of soft regulation or the rationalized celebration of virtue and virtuosity. Meta-organizations rely on soft regulation – standardization in particular, often quite closely coupled with measurement and quantified objectives. Deliberative democracy and discussions around soft regulation generate “markets” for rules – and therefore reinforce the marketization trend. The progress of marketization has, in turn, a tendency to rely on both formal organizing and scientized expertise as a two-dimensional backbone. The spread of markets and marketization in many different spheres of social life also suggests open participation and “free” or competitive involvement, pushing even further the trend towards deliberative democracy and soft regulation. The disclosure and transparency associated with deliberative democracy and soft regulation are often further rationalized and can even be articulated with formal celebrations of virtue and virtuosity. As to moral rationalization, it is generally revealed and expressed through sustained organizing efforts.

The close and mutually reinforcing interplay between those institutional forces generates, we propose, a highly structured and ordered world. Despite the absence of a world culture and political order, we find in fact a tight and constraining frame. Institutional forces should not be treated as external to the actors – as representing an environment to which actors are merely adapting. Rather, they are constitutive of the actors. Institutional forces frame and constitute organizations and individuals – their interests, values, structures, contents and meaning, activities and the nature and form of their interactions. There is another sense in which institutional forces are not external to actors and activities. If one adopts a long term

perspective, they reflect and express the aggregation of strategies, interests and activities. They have been historically and progressively constructed, even if they tend today to function as an external and progressively hardening “iron cage” (Weber 1978).

Concluding Remarks: From Battlefields to Stabilization?

Ultimately, though, we are still talking about battlefields. The five institutional forces identified above and their two associated sub-dimensions are sometimes colliding and conflicting with other institutional sets – generally structured at a national level. Those national institutional systems are still powerful systems of constraints – localized ones for the most part but with a potential reach in other geographical spaces (Westney 1987; Djelic 1998). Building again on the physics metaphor, we view this as the confrontation of different fields of forces. In some cases, forces will work in parallel or similar directions. In other cases, they will counter each other and there will be powerful resistance. Contributions to this volume nevertheless seem to suggest three things. First, the progress of the institutional forces identified above is quite fast on the whole and probably only accelerating because of the mutually reinforcing dynamics described before. Second, this institutional frame is not potent and powerful only in fields of transnational governance – its impact is progressively being felt, in both direct and indirect ways, in governance processes that remain for various reasons still strongly national or local. Third, behind those institutional forces, their competition and their struggles, there are individuals, groups, organizations or networks; sets of colliding and conflicting interests; interactions and power plays.

A structuring institutional backbone

When considered together and in their interaction, these institutional forces are increasingly turning into meta-rules of the game for governance and rule-making in our world. The structuring we are talking about is essentially of a normative and cognitive kind. This meta-institutional frame sets and defines a “meaning” or “cultural” system that constrains the way we think and talk about governance, the way we undertake, negotiate and structure it, the way we sustain and reproduce it – across, between, but also, increasingly, within national boundaries. This institutional frame, this meaning or cultural system, and its components as we described them in this volume, follow the route of all institutional sets. They progressively become taken for granted and as it were fade in the background and become “invisible”. This transnational culture increasingly sets and defines the “natural” way of doing, acting and being – and even resistance, reaction and protest activities tend to express and inscribe themselves within rather than outside the institutional frame.

A dynamic transnational topography

Transnational governance spaces are densely populated. There is a large and in appearance always increasing number of actors involved in regulation and associated organizing and monitoring activities. Regulation and governance breed even more regulation and governance. This in itself explains in part the explosion in the sheer numbers of actors involved. Moreover, the evolution of regulatory modes, leading to the widespread diffusion of softer types of rules, fosters regulatory competition – and as such is also a factor explaining the multiplicity of actors involved.

Out of this diversity and multiplicity, we can still differentiate between four broad categories. The first category contains those actors that are parts of or directly associated with nation states and political administrations. States and political administrations are feeling the

marketization impact and are in part reorganizing as internal “markets”, in part reconstituted as actors – or organizations – that compete on a transnational regulatory market. Hence, multiple agencies, administrative departments, public networks or group are active quite independently in many different governance spaces. States and administrative units have undeniably lost their monopoly position over regulation. Nevertheless, they remain powerfully involved in regulatory and governance processes. We even find two particular and quite consequential roles for those types of actors. First an endorsement by states and/or administrative units gives much greater clout and strength to a set of rules, particularly when it comes to local and national adoption and implementation. Second, the threat of coercion undeniably remains a power resource in the hands of states even in times so clearly characterized by soft and interactive forms of regulation and governance.

In the second category, we can put international organizations of a public nature and transnational political constructions – the IMF, the World Bank, the GATT and later the WTO, the OECD, or the various avatars of the European Union amongst others. It is undeniable that the role, place and clout of this second category of actors have increased powerfully and significantly, particularly since the end of World War II. The progress of this category of actors on the world scene has been tightly associated with the increasing density of transnational governance. And this has gone in two directions. Those international or transnational arenas and organizations have fostered and stimulated the generation of transnational governance. The explosion of transnational governance has in turn stabilized and reinforced those actors, their power and reach.

A third category brings together what we call here “reinvented old actors”. A general trend is for former “rule-takers” and “rule-followers” to increasingly be involved in governance processes. A consequence is that many economic and societal actors have to reinvent

themselves as active participants in transnational governance. Universities, corporations, the media or professions are striking exemplars of those actors who reinvent themselves. This reinvention is sometimes so profound as it give rise altogether to new types of actors. The horizon is changing radically and requires adaptation to new meta-rules of governance. From rule-takers and rule-followers, who sometimes tried to bypass and go around externally imposed regulation and constraints – those actors have to turn into governance co-constructors in spaces that span multiple levels. This, of course, has profound implications for the features and competences that those actors need to develop.

The fourth category contains what we broadly call “new” actors. By “new” we essentially mean two things. Those actors – organizations, networks or entities – can be “new” in terms of their structures, features and qualities. They can also be “new” in the sense of having stood until then quite far away from regulatory and governance activities. They could as well naturally be “new” on both counts. Non governmental organizations, whether national or international, enter into this category. They are becoming increasingly important and powerful actors of transnational governance (Boli and Thomas 1999; Cutler et al. 1999; Mörth 2004). Standards or experts organizations, here again with a national and/or a transnational dimension, have also exploded (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000), following upon and reinforcing at the same time the scientization trend identified above.

We would also point to another type of “new” actors that we propose to call the “transnational community of interest”. The transnational network of central bankers (see Marcussen 2006), the International Competition Network (see Djelic and Kleiner 2006), the International Accounting Standards Committee (see Bozem and Quack 2006), the AACSB or efmd (see Hedmo et al. 2006) or the Forest Stewardship Council (see McNichol 2006) are all illustrations, we suggest, of “transnational communities of interest”. This type of entity is

somewhere in between an epistemic and expert community, a profession and a meta-organization and a combination of all those. It has a transnational nature and dimension by construction and it spans and bridges national boundaries. Just like the Banyan tree, it has at the same time an overarching identity and multiple deep and solid local roots. The overarching identity tends to be more cognitive, normative and cultural than physical and structural. In fact some of those transnational communities of interest can be close to virtual networks and organizations.

We propose that this type of actor is increasingly present and involved in processes of transnational governance. It has a tendency to bring its members together around a project, often a regulatory one. This type of entity or actor can bring together only public or state-related members – as in the case of the transnational network of central bankers. It can also bridge the boundaries between public and private spheres and actors – as the cases of the International Competition Network, the International Accounting Standards Committee and the efmd all illustrate. Finally, it can also bring together many different non-state members. Those transnational communities of interest can be more or less open or closed. They tend, though, to be expansive and missionary in the sense that their *raison d'être* is to rally around a project not only their members but also potentially well beyond. Interestingly, the expansive and sometimes highly inclusive nature of those “actors” means that they can turn, from regulatory actors, into regulatory spaces.

Transnational governance is both highly structured by powerful institutional forces and a richly populated spatial topography. This combination generates a partly paradoxical situation – where activities, interplays and interactions are extremely intense in what is ultimately a fairly constrained and rigid landscape.

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