Transnational communities are social groups that emerge from mutual interaction across national boundaries, oriented around a common project or “imagined” identity which is constructed and sustained through the active engagement and involvement of at least some of its members. Such communities can overlap in different ways with formal organizations but, in principle, they do not need formal organization to be sustained. This book explores the role of transnational communities in relation to the governance of business and economic activity. It does so by focusing on a wide range of empirical terrains, including discussions of the Laleli market in Istanbul, the institutionalization of private equity in Japan, the transnational movement for open content licenses, and the mobilization around environmental certification. These studies show that transnational communities can align the cognitive and normative orientations of their members over time and thereby influence emergent transnational governance arrangements.

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Transnational Communities

Shaping Global Economic Governance

Marie-Laure Djelic

Sigrid Quack
# Contents

*List of figures* page viii  
*List of tables* x  
*List of appendices* xi  
*Notes on contributors* xii  
*Preface* xix

## Part I  Introduction

1  Transnational communities and governance  
   Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack  
   3

2  Global structures: markets, organizations, networks – and communities?  
   Renate Mayntz  
   37

## Part II  Classical communities with a transnational extension

3  The multiple layers of a transnational “imagined community”: the notion and reality of the ethnic Chinese business community  
   Heidi Dahles  
   57

4  From cross-border exchange networks to transnational trading practices? The case of shuttle traders in Laleli, Istanbul  
   Mine Eder and Özlem Öz  
   82

## Part III  Professional communities with a transnational extension

5  Transnational boards and governance regimes: a Franco-British comparison  
   Charles Harvey and Mairi Maclean  
   107
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Private equity in Japan: global financial markets and transnational</td>
<td>Glenn Morgan and Izumi Kubo</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Formal organizing and transnational communities: evidence from global</td>
<td>Asma A. Hussain and Marc J. Ventresca</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>finance governance associations, 1879–2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Promoting transnational professionalism: forays of the “Big Firm”</td>
<td>Carlos Ramirez</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accounting community into France</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part IV Virtual communities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gift-giving, transnational communities, and skill-building in</td>
<td>Anca Metiu</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>developing countries: the case of free/open source software</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Epistemic communities and social movements: transnational dynamics</td>
<td>Leonhard Dobusch and Sigrid Quack</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the case of Creative Commons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part V Transnational interest- or issue-based communities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The transnational temperance community</td>
<td>Mark Lawrence Schrad</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Industrial democracy in the European Community: trade unions</td>
<td>Thomas Fetzer</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as a defensive transnational community, 1968–1988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The making of a comprehensive transnational discourse community</td>
<td>Dieter Plehwe</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Global warming, transnational communities, and economic entrepreneurship: the case of carbon capture and storage (CCS)</td>
<td>Åge Mariussen</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
vii  Contents

15  Communities of practice as cause and consequence of transnational governance: the evolution of social and environmental certification
    Tim Bartley and Shawna N. Smith 347

Part VI  Conclusion 375

16  Transnational communities and their impact on the governance of business and economic activity
    Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack 377

Index 414
Figures

4.1 A truck being loaded with shuttle traders’ purchases at the end of a shopping day

7.1 Global finance association foundings, 1879–2006
7.2 Cumulative foundings of professional and business-oriented global finance associations
7.3 Cumulative foundings of “pure” business, development-oriented, and professional global finance associations
7.4 Proportion of governmental and non-governmental global finance associations, 1879–2006
7.5 Proportions of governmental and non-governmental, pure business, and development-oriented global finance associations
10.1 Number of jurisdictions that completed the license porting process per annum and over time
10.2 Types of affiliate organizations, grouped into early and late adopting jurisdictions
10.3 Usage of Creative Commons licenses in different fields of application by number of works available in content-hosting services
10.4 Formal structure of Creative Commons after hiving off iCommons in 2005
11.1 Gauging network depth: attendance at international temperance conferences, 1885–1934
11.2 Gauging network breadth: number of countries represented at international temperance conferences, 1885–1934
11.3 Number of countries and American states under prohibition, 1900–40
15.1a Environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2001
15.1b Environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2006
15.2a Social certification associations and intermediary organizations, 2001
List of figures

15.2b Social certification associations and intermediary organizations, 2006 365
15.3a All social and environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2001 366
15.3b All social and environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2006 367
Tables

5.1 Nationality profiles of the business elites of France and Britain in 1998  
5.2 Foreign directors of top 100 French and British companies in 1998, by director type  
6.1 Size of the private equity market as a proportion of GDP, 2005–07 (billion USD)  
6.2 Allocation of alternative investments by institutional investors, 2007 (in % of total investments)  
6.3 Major participants in largest PE deals in Japan, 1998–2006  
6.4 Board members of large private equity funds  
7.1 Summary of results  
9.1 Linux user groups  
9.2 LinuxChix activities  
9.3 Debian mailing list statistics  
9.4 The role of free/open source skills in people’s careers (in %)  
9.5 Local communities: registered users and projects in local forges and SourceForge  
10.1 Comparison of key features of epistemic communities and social movements  
10.2 Case study database  
14.1 Transnational communities, institutions, and global markets  
14.2 CO2NET members, 2000–09  
15.1 Dedicated social and environmental certification associations (founded before 2001)  
15.2 Most-central intermediaries in the transnational space of social and environmental certification, 2006
Appendices

3.1 Overview of (planned or operational) cross-border ventures of the sample Singaporean Chinese businesses  page 63
3.2 Overview of (planned or operational) cross-border ventures of the sample Malaysian Chinese businesses  64
7.1 Modeling finance association foundings: results of negative binomial analysis predicting founding rates of professional global finance associations, 1879–2006  166
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Preface

This volume explores the role of transnational communities in economic governance. Transnational communities are social groups emerging from mutual interaction across national boundaries, oriented around a common project and/or “imagined” identity which is constructed and sustained through the active engagement and involvement of at least some of its members. Transnational communities can overlap in different ways with formal organizations but, in principle, they do not need formal organization to be sustained. Transnational communities imply transnational networks, but they are more than that since the notion of community connotes a sense of belonging to a common “culture” in the broadest sense. The sociological literature has had a tendency to attach positive civic values to the concept and reality of “communities.” In contrast, we take, in this volume, a more agnostic stance. As social formations, transnational communities can pursue benevolent and collectively useful goals as well as more particularistic and self-serving ones. They can engage in legal but also in illegal or “gray” activities. As a result, the functions they perform will be judged as desirable in some cases and from certain perspectives but will appear as radically undesirable in other cases or from other perspectives.

The various contributions to this volume explore transnational communities in different empirical terrains – from the Laleli market in Istanbul to private equity in Japan; from the transnational movement for open content licenses to the mobilization in favor of environmental certification or against global warming. Throughout, these diverse studies show that processes of transnational community-building can be closely connected to and interact with the dynamics of transnational economic governance. Transnational governance involves an expansive set of dynamic processes and a complex array of activities crossing many boundaries. The contributions to this volume show that transnational communities, which often cut across formal organizations, networks, and national boundaries, can align the cognitive and normative orientations of their members over time and thereby influence
emergent transnational governance arrangements. In addition to highlighting the role of community-like social formations in transnational economic governance, the authors in this volume shed new light on the general nature and workings of transnational communities.

The idea for this book arose when we were collaborating on an earlier edited volume, *Globalization and Institutions* (Edward Elgar 2003). Taking stock in the book’s conclusion, we identified what we then called “self-disciplining transnational communities” as one of three main scenarios for institution-building in a transnational context. The insight that there was something like “transnational communities” playing a role in processes of transnational governance was strongly reinforced as we drew the lessons from a second collaborative project that culminated in the publication of *Transnational Governance*, which Marie-Laure Djelic co-edited with Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson (Cambridge University Press 2006). We were convinced by then that there was a need for a much more systematic exploration and understanding of the role of community in transnational governance processes, particularly as they impact upon business and economic activity.

We launched the new project when we convened a conference subtheme on the subject at the annual Colloquium of the European Group of Organization Studies (EGOS) in Vienna in July 2007. The quality of the contributions and the intensity of the discussions quickly convinced us that there was indeed rich material for a joint publication. We were adamant from the start, however, that we wanted to construct a tight and closely integrated volume. So we planned a second meeting that took place in April 2008 in Cologne with the generous support of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG). Working toward this volume has involved several rounds of comments and revisions. We are grateful to all the authors for their patience, diligence, and good spirits throughout this process. The MPIfG has been a tremendously supportive environment for the production of this book. We are very grateful for the substantive encouragement and infrastructural support we received from Jens Beckert and Wolfgang Streeck as the directors of this institution. At an early stage, Christina Glasmacher was very helpful in organizing the workshop at the MPIfG and following up on the correspondence with the contributors. As for the later stage of preparing the volume for publication, we do not really know what we would have done without the insistent but flexible support of Cynthia Lehmann, who held all the strands together while adapting flexibly when the editors missed self-determined deadlines. James Patterson and Dona Geyer did a terrific job of language editing all the chapters. Thomas Pott gave the figures a consistently
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As always, along the way, we benefited from stimulating discussions with many members of our intellectual community – or rather of our multiple, overlapping intellectual communities. John Meyer, as always, has been a profound source of insight, which we deeply appreciate. We would also like to thank Lars Engwall, Kerstin Sahlin, and the Uppsala team to whom we presented early versions of the introduction. In alphabetical order, our thanks also extend to Laszlo Bruszt, Barbara Czarniawska, Jürgen Feick, Royston Greenwood, Peer Hull Kristensen, James March, Marc Schneiberg, Dick Scott, Arndt Sorge, David Stark, Richard Whitley, and Jonathan Zeitlin.

Like its predecessors, this project has stolen time from our respective families. We thank Alma, Milena, Nepheli, and Philippe for their patience and understanding. When we dedicated our last joint book, *Globalization and Institutions*, to our daughters, they were too young to read it. It might still be a bit early this time, too! Nevertheless, we dedicate this volume to Alma, Milena and Nepheli in the hope that it will spur their appetite for social inquiry and lure them – and others of their generation – to develop an interest in deconstructing the complexities of the transnational world we live in.