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978-0-521-51878-9 - Transnational Communities: Shaping Global Economic Governance

Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack

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Transnational Communities

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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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

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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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professional, high-quality look. At Cambridge University Press, we are deeply indebted to the support of Paula Parish, who always believed in this project and generously led it through its various phases from birth to adolescence and, finally, maturity.

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.