World Politics and Organizational Fields: The Case of Transnational Sustainability Governance

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Transnational rule-making organizations have proliferated in the area of sustainability politics. In this article, we explore why these organizations share a set of core features that appear overly costly at first sight. We argue that norms that evolved out of the social inter-action among transnational rule-making organizations account for this phenomenon. Thus, in the early 1990s, an organizational field of transnational rule-making has gradually developed in the field of environmental politics. Responding to a broader social discourse about global governance that stressed a need for innovative forms of cooperation among different societal sectors, this organizational field gained in legitimacy and strength. A set of commonly accepted core norms, the increasing density of interaction among the field's members, and the success and legitimacy ascribed to the field's key players by the outside world helped to solidify the organizational field until it eventually developed a 'life of its own'.

KEY WORDS ♦ global governance ♦ non-state actors ♦ organizational field ♦ sustainability ♦ transnational organizations

Introduction

Without technical standards such as those devised by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the World Wide Web could not run as smoothly as it does. Without credible certification schemes for legally mined diamonds such as the Kimberley Process scheme initiated by the activists of Global Witness and the world's largest diamond seller

De Beers, it would be much more difficult to cut off the parties to lasting civil conflicts in countries such as Sierra Leone or Liberia from their most important source of income. And without mediation by the World Commission on Dams (WCD), the decades of fierce battling between proponents and opponents of large dams would continue not only to exhaust the resources of both groups, but also to increase the costs of development aid and prevent many reasonable projects from being implemented at all.

The proliferation of private organizations whose primary goal is to devise transnational rules is a pervasive trend in contemporary world politics (see Biermann and Pattberg, 2008). As the Appendix to this article illustrates, such organizations have multiplied over the last one and a half decades, offering a variety of more or less voluntary standards that structure and give meaning to the behaviour of numerous addressees across the globe (cf. Brunsson et al., 2000; Bernstein and Cashore, 2007). They also exemplify a strategic shift of transnational non-governmental organizations from lobbying rule-makers to making and implementing the rules themselves (Pattberg, 2005). While shifting organizational strategies and forms of global governance alone would warrant closer analysis, two further observations are noteworthy. First, transnational rule-making organizations not only proliferate, they are also remarkably similar in their organizational design, processes and rhetoric, even where such similarities are costly. Second, their almost simultaneous appearance — nine of the 13 organizations listed in the Appendix were created between 1997 and 1999 — extends across several policy fields ranging from environment to human rights, trade, finance and security.

This article examines the proliferation of transnational rule-making organizations in one policy area, namely social and environmental sustainability. In particular, we explore *why transnational rule-making organizations in the area of sustainability politics share similar and relatively costly organizational features*. To answer this question, we offer an explanation based on social interaction and the evolution of social norms at the micro-level. Our explanation complements dominant accounts of private governance beyond the state as based on power, efficiency or ideology. In contrast to the first two, we hold that social interaction and the norms that follow from it are central. In contrast to the third, we maintain that micro-level dynamics are crucial to making sense of private authority beyond the state. More specifically, we argue that in the early 1990s, an *organizational field* of transnational rule-making gradually developed in the issue area of global sustainability politics. Responding to a broader social discourse about appropriate means of global governance that stressed a need for innovative forms of cooperation among different societal sectors, this field quickly gained in legitimacy and strength. A set of commonly accepted core norms, the increasing density of interaction among the field's members, and the success and legitimacy ascribed to the

field's key players by the outside world helped to solidify the organizational field until it eventually developed a 'life of its own'.

Our findings add a more explicitly micro-sociological explanation to the literature on private authority beyond the state. Moreover, our analysis illustrates that the notion of *organizational fields* provides a powerful tool for research on world politics more generally. It enables us to broaden our scope beyond the analysis of single organizations while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls of highly generalized system-level explanations (Davis and Marquis, 2005). With its focus on 'societies' or 'communities' of organizations that regularly interact with each other and perceive each other as peers or like units in some important sense, organizational field analysis can provide new insights about the behaviour of states, intergovernmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations and a host of other organizations that populate the wider field of global governance.

Transnational Rule-Making Organizations

When addressing the participants of one of the regional consultations of the World Commission on Dams, South African Minister of Education and WCD Chair Kader Asmal (cited in WCD, 1999: 3) noted that:

> The Commission is a prototype for what I like to think of as the real New World Order. It is not dominated by any one agency or by one government, or by the UN or the World Bank. The Commissioners are eminent persons from the forefront of the dams debate and as a group they represent all the worlds that intersect therein: international business, NGOs involved in environmental and social activism, academia, government, and the engineering profession.

Beyond the WCD, a larger number of similar processes illustrate the existence of a broader field of non-state processes in which issues are defined, rules are made and compliance with these rules is monitored. The following is only a small selection intended to give the reader a better idea about the phenomenon:

- The *Global Reporting Initiative* (GRI), formally a foundation under Dutch law, but in practice a global organization of business corporations, civil society groups, academics, accountants and consultants, has recently launched the third generation of its *Sustainability Reporting Guidelines*. The *Guidelines* specify how organizations — usually corporations — should structure their sustainability reports. They are widely recognized as the leading global standard in the field of non-financial business reporting. Governments in Australia, Canada, France and the Netherlands have issued national-level reporting frameworks based on GRI *Guidelines* and

several mainstream and Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) funds request reporting on the *Guidelines* (Dingwerth, 2007).

• The *Forest Stewardship Council* (FSC), a private non-profit organization with a heterogeneous membership that includes environmental and social NGOs, business corporations, academic institutions, religious organizations and individual members from over 60 countries, has established a fully-fledged certification scheme for responsibly managed timber and for products made of such timber. Since the establishment of the organization in 1993, over 80 million hectares of forests have been certified worldwide. In addition, the FSC has inspired a number of industry organizations to come up with their own certification schemes (Cashore et al., 2004; Gulbrandsen, 2004; Meidinger, 2003).

• The *Marine Stewardship Council* (MSC) is an independent non-profit organization that emerged out of a collaboration of Unilever — the world's second largest food corporation and largest buyer of frozen fish — and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Modelled on the success of the Forest Stewardship Council, its goal is 'to harness consumer purchasing power to generate change and promote environmentally responsible stewardship of the world's most important renewable food source' (MSC, 2006a). Wal-Mart, one of the world's largest supermarket chains, recently announced that it would exclusively buy and sell MSC-certified fish and fish products in its North American stores within three to five years (MSC, 2006b).

Calling the above-mentioned organizations referents of 'the real New World Order' may be an exaggeration. Yet they are illustrations of a pervasive trend — the activities of several more could be added to the list of transnational organizations set up to develop norms, rules and standards.[1] In this article, we identify 13 rule-making organizations in the field of global sustainability alone (see the shaded area in Figure 1). We have selected the cases on the basis of their fit with our initial definition of transnational rule-making organizations in the issue area of sustainability politics (see below). Organizations were thus included (a) when they were transnational, (b) when they established relatively specific rules, (c) when their rules were at least minimally effective, and (d) when their goals were framed in terms of social and/or environmental sustainability. In contrast, our analysis excludes organizations with unspecific principles such as the Caux Roundtable of Business Leaders (CRT) as well as organizations whose agenda is not primarily framed in terms of sustainability. The latter criterion led us to exclude organizations like the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) or the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) that are framed in terms of good governance and anti-corruption policies, but also organizations like the Fair

Figure 1

Transnational Rule-Making Organizations on Sustainability Issues[2]
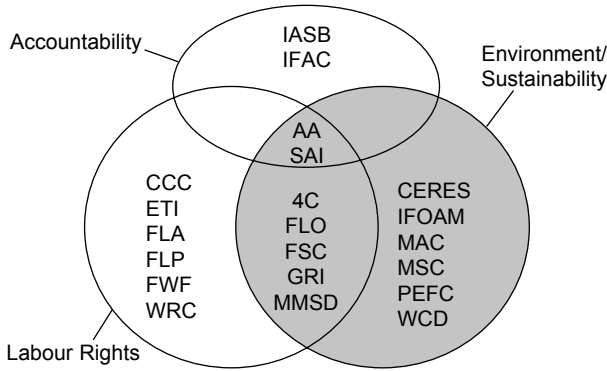
Labor Association (FLA) or the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) who frame their rule-making activities in terms of labour rights, but without any explicit link to the notion of sustainability.

The Nature of Transnational Rule-Making Organizations

If we conceptualize rules as 'relatively specific commands for behaviour whose normative authority warrants the expectation of at least a minimum level of compliance' (Dingwerth, 2007: 7), transnational rule-making refers to a process in which non-state actors from more than one country generate behavioural prescriptions that are intended to apply across national borders.[3] This working definition has two key elements that distinguish organizations engaged in transnational rule-making from other transnational organizations. First, to qualify as a rule-making organization, the organizational output needs to include explicit behavioural commands that are sufficiently precise to allow for a distinction between compliant and non-compliant behaviour. Second, as a result of the voluntary nature of transnational rules, it only makes sense to speak of rules if the behavioural commands they express are at least minimally effective.

It can hardly be disputed that the primary output of some transnational organizations is fairly precise behavioural prescriptions. For instance, while the 10 principles issued by the Forest Stewardship Council have been described as 'gospel-like verities that have emerged from a variety of processes in the worldwide discussion on sustainable development' (Meidinger, 1999: 135), the accompanying criteria are quite specific. They demand that 'sites of special cultural, ecological, economic or religious significance to indigenous

peoples shall be clearly identified in cooperation with such peoples, and recognized and protected by forest managers' (Criterion 3.1) or that the 'use of genetically modified organisms shall be prohibited' (Criterion 6.8). The criteria themselves are further specified in the form of certification standards. These standards contain measurable indicators and verifiers that enable certification bodies to evaluate individual forest units. For instance, the US standards contain 20 sub-criteria, 138 national indicators, 17 applicability notes and 25 so-called verifiers (Meridian Institute, 2001: 26). The German national FSC standard illustrates the high level of specificity when it demands that (FSC Working Group Germany, 2004: Article 6.3.c3):

> Trees with woodpecker holes or other natural cavities are exempt from forestry use and left to age and decay naturally, insofar as the trees in question are not of exceptional economic value, or are in a forest site (e.g. subsection) where more than 10 trees per hectare would have to be protected.

In practice, transnational rules are often highly influential. The recommendations of the WCD have become the primary frame of reference for thinking and talking about large dams. The principles formulated by the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) have paved the way for environmental responsibility to enter the agenda of big business. The *Sustainability Reporting Guidelines* developed by the Global Reporting Initiative are considered to be the leading standard according to which corporations account for their non-financial performance. And the FSC's *Principles and Criteria* constitute the global benchmark for sustainable forest management practices (Dingwerth, 2007; Gulbrandsen, 2008; Pattberg, 2006, 2007).

The organizational strategies vary to some extent. While some transnational rule-making organizations promote voluntary benchmarks or guidelines, others are organized as associations that can oblige their members to comply with particular rules.[4] At a more general level, however, all transnational rule-making organizations rely on a mixture of three strategies to induce adherence to their rules — (quasi-)coercive pressures, rational incentives and appeals to social appropriateness. For instance, the FSC builds on the social pressure that environmental activists have long exerted on wood retailers that sold wood from non-sustainable sources, in particular from tropical regions. It combines these pressures with an instrumental 'do X to get Y' logic — in this case, comply with the *Principles and Criteria* to obtain a certificate — and a presentation of its *Principles and Criteria* as a guideline for appropriate forest management. Similarly, the GRI spends a significant share of its resources on promoting sustainability reporting as a constitutive element of socially responsible — in other words, appropriate — business

behaviour, while at the same time stressing the economic benefits of corporate reporting. In contrast, the WCD's normative framework relies more strongly on notions of social appropriateness to become effective. The WCD's *Policy Principles* help to determine whether a given large dam project is acceptable, but they neither provide a basis for certifying large dams as 'sustainable', nor does the successor of the WCD, the Dams and Development Project hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), maintain an inventory of large dam projects that have used the WCD guidelines as a basis for their decision-making. In short, transnational rule-making organizations are clearly shaping the behaviour of their addressees, but the mechanisms at work differ from case to case.

The Similarities between Transnational Rule-Making Organizations

The commonalities of transnational rule-making organizations on sustainability issues frequently go beyond their defining characteristics. In fact, there is something akin to a standard model around which the *design*, *rhetoric* and *processes* of transnational rule-making organizations converge.

In terms of their *design* most transnational rule-making organizations operate based on a division of labour between three governing organs: a board of directors that legally represents the organization and oversees its policies, a permanent secretariat that coordinates the organization's day-to-day activities, and a larger stakeholder body that is most often assigned a consultative status within the organization. The fact that transnational governance organizations have a board of directors and a secretariat is, of course, not very surprising. A board of directors is usually mandated by the national laws under which these — as well as many other — organizations operate, and secretariats are very useful devices for managing organizations. The more striking similarity is the inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders, often in quasi-parliamentary bodies that serve as a third governing organ of the organizations. Thus, of the 13 organizations included in Table 1 and in the Appendix to this article, 11 have a strong stakeholder body, while only two have weakly institutionalized stakeholder representation. This resemblance is particularly striking given the high costs of stakeholder councils in terms of money, secretariat staff work time and organizational autonomy.

Second, the *rhetoric* of transnational rule-making organizations displays further similarities. Most strikingly, the public communication of transnational rule-making organizations frequently focuses on process rather than substance. For instance, transnational rule-making organizations usually put a strong rhetorical emphasis on inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and deliberation and spend a significant share of their resources on public

relations activities that stress the participatory and open character of the organization. This distinguishes transnational rule-making organizations from other international non-governmental organizations whose communication policies usually focus on substance — for instance on their activities to address environmental problems, human rights abuses or poverty. This strong focus on process is striking because it tends to increase the governance costs and to decrease the organizational autonomy of transnational rule-making organizations.

As a third feature, the similarity in organizational rhetoric often translates into similar *participatory elements* such as public comments periods for policy documents, regional stakeholder consultations or expert deliberations on particular policy issues. These elements serve various purposes. They are used to raise awareness, to generate legitimacy with different constituencies and to improve the informational base of decision-making. As a result, the spread of similar process elements across different schemes may be explained in functional terms, an explanation that would fit with rationalist social theories that are commonly used to account for the emergence and effects of transnational rules. Alternatively, similarity may also be interpreted as the result of normative dynamics that make it seem increasingly appropriate for transnational governance schemes to include public comments periods, stakeholder consultations and expert deliberations.

To determine the strength of the three organizational features described earlier, we used the following coding rules:

- Stakeholder bodies were classified as *strong* when they were open to different stakeholder groups and had been assigned formal rights within the organization or had effectively acquired such rights in practice; we classified their strength as *moderate* when their membership was limited to a particular constituency and/or when their role was factually limited to consultation. The value *weak* (or *absent*) was assigned when the activities of stakeholder bodies were largely ceremonial or when no stakeholder body existed.
- We classified an organization's communication policy as having a *strong* process-oriented rhetoric when communication on procedures was more or about as central as communication on substance. The value *moderate* was assigned when communication on procedures was relevant, yet subordinate to communication on substance. Finally, we speak of a *weak* process rhetoric where communication on procedures was marginal or absent. The evaluation is based on the self-description of the organizations on the introductory pages of their Internet pages ('About us' and related pages).

- We classified an organization's participatory elements (e.g. public comments periods for policy documents, regional stakeholder consultations, expert deliberations on specific policy issues or annual conferences that are open to stakeholders) as *strong* if more than one element could be observed. We assigned the value *moderate* when at least one element was present and *weak* when none of the above-mentioned elements were present.

Highlighting our general assumption about interesting similarities among rule-making organizations, the right-hand column in Table 1 is strongest in relation to all three features of the 'standard model' of transnational rule-making. Eleven out of 13 organizations listed in Table 1 have moderate or strong stakeholder bodies and process-oriented communication policies,

Table 1

Quality of Stakeholder Councils, Process Rhetoric and Participatory Elements of 13 Transnational Rule-Making Organizations in the Field of Global Sustainability Politics[5]

|	Weak or Absent	Moderate	Strong
Stakeholder council	CERES MAC	WCD MMSD SAI PEFC	AA 4C FLOI FSC GRI IFOAM MSC
Process rhetoric	CERES MMSD PEFC	4C AA MAC	FLOI FSC GRI IFOAM MSC SAI WCD
Participatory elements	4C PEFC	FLOI SAI MAC CERES	AA FSC GRI IFOAM MSC WCD MMSD

while 10 of 13 share moderate or strong participatory elements. Moreover, while four organizations score 'high' in all three categories, none scores 'weak' or 'absent' across the board.

This observation is striking since all three features of the standard model involve considerable costs. They cost money, raise the expectations of those that are invited and limit the autonomy of other governing bodies and of the organization's initiators who frequently hold seats in these bodies. It is important to note that the costs to convey an organizational image of inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and deliberativeness are by no means restricted to the salary of the communications officer and a few dollars for a public relations campaign. In contrast, value-oriented talk — in particular if values are related to organizational processes — is itself costly, because stakeholders expect the organization to live up to its own stated values (Risse, 1999; Schimmelfennig, 1997).[6] Instruments to increase inclusiveness and accountability thus need to be developed, even if they may cost money (e.g. regional consultations), time (e.g. public comments periods) and organizational autonomy (e.g. when stakeholder forums recommend a specific course of action). Moreover, similar organizations in other issue areas such as workers' rights seem to be much less enthusiastic about these governance features. This leads us to a simple question: why and how did a majority of transnational rule-making organizations in the issue area of sustainability come to choose relatively costly governing mechanisms and processes such as stakeholder bodies, public consultations and a visible procedural rhetoric roughly around the same point in time?

Conventional approaches commonly refer to power, interests or ideology as key explanatory variables (see below). Taking a different path, we argue below that an explanation based on social interaction and the norms evolving from it may be equally capable of accounting for the similarity among transnational rule-making organizations. Such an explanation would lead us to expect that organizations that interact with each other frequently are more likely to converge on a common model than organizations that interact less frequently. Figure 2 presents a first plausibility probe for this claim. It sketches how the 13 organizations analysed in our study perform in terms of two variables — their interaction with other organizations, and their proximity to the 'standard model' of transnational rule-making.

In Figure 2, the proximity to the standard model is measured in terms of the combined scores for *design*, *rhetoric* and *process*. Organizations with a 'weak' score in all three categories would have found themselves in the lowest row, while those organizations that scored 'high' in all three categories are placed in the highest of the seven rows.[7] To measure interaction levels, we distinguished between three indicators of interaction with other transnational rule-making organizations: (a) membership in a meta-organization of

Figure 2
Quality of 'Model Features' of Transnational Rule-making
Organizations in Relation to the Interaction with Other
Transnational Rule-Making Organizations
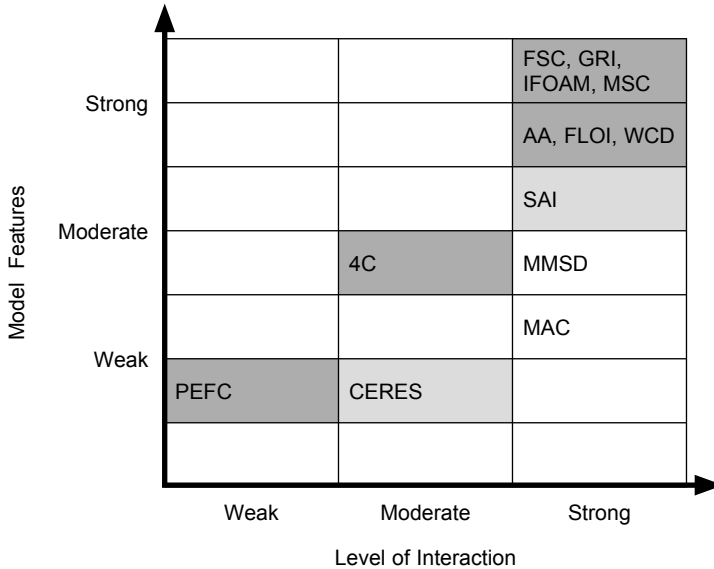
transnational rule-making organizations;[8] (b) the presence of board members that are also serving or have also been serving on the board of other transnational rule-making organizations; (c) the presence of explicit references to other transnational rule-making organizations in official documents and/or public communication, or of explicit references to an organization in official documents of another organization. We classified an organization as interacting *strongly* with other organizations if (a) applied or if both (b) and (c) applied. Organizations that fulfil criteria (b) *or* (c) were classified as *moderately* interacting with other transnational rule-making organizations. All other organizations were classified as interacting *weakly*.

The distribution of organizations in Figure 2 illustrates that those transnational rule-making organizations that interact more frequently with other transnational rule-making organizations are more likely to have meaningful stakeholder bodies, to stress due process in their communication to the outside world and/or to have some participatory elements (e.g. FSC, GRI and IFOAM). In contrast, those organizations that interact less with other transnational rule-making organizations have comparably weaker stakeholder bodies, process communications and/or participatory elements (e.g. CERES

and PEFC). For nine of the 13 organizations — the darkly shaded area in Figure 2 — the results are as predicted by the model. Their level of interaction matches their level of conformity with the standard model. For two further organizations — the Coalition of Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) and Social Accountability International (SAI) — the results are relatively close to the model predictions. The remaining two organizations — the Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development Process (MMSD) and the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) — are outliers in the sense that their level of interaction would have led us to expect higher conformity to the standard model. Overall, this plausibility probe confirms our assumption that it may be worthwhile to explore the role of social interaction and norms in more depth. We engage in this task in the following two sections.

Understanding Transnational Rule-Making Organizations

Efficiency, Power and Ideology

Following a distinction made by Claire Cutler and colleagues, private authority has usually been accounted for in terms of efficiency, power and historical macro-trends (Cutler et al., 1999: 336–53). Efficiency-based approaches have highlighted the possibility of realizing mutually beneficial agreements among cooperating partners and of reducing transaction costs. Seen in this way, the Forest Stewardship Council, for instance, is an institution in which NGOs grant legitimacy in exchange for influence on the behaviour of wood retailers. For the latter, the equation is the reverse — they give others a say in determining their corporate behaviour and receive an increase in social acceptance and reputation. For both sides, cost–benefit calculations are positive. Provided that neither of the two sides has a better alternative, this explains why they cooperate. In this view, a particular organizational design may be seen either as a compromise between NGOs' desire for influence and corporations' desire not to be influenced too much — in other words, as the price to be paid for the level of legitimacy they seek — or simply as the most efficient means to fulfil the organization's functions, including to raise awareness, increase social acceptance and improve the substantive quality of decisions.

Power-based approaches similarly base their explanations on the interests of actors involved in transnational rule-making. Yet they highlight the power disparities between different (types of) actors and interpret them as the most central driving force for private governance. Both the formation and the eventual form of transnational rule-making organizations are thus understood to reflect and serve the interests of the most powerful actors. Where less powerful actors subscribe to the rules of transnational governance

organizations, they do so primarily because the more powerful actors are able to manipulate their cost–benefit calculus. On this account, the FSC is the result of a coalition of Northern environmental NGOs, producers, consumers and retailers that have successfully managed to force Southern producers into accepting a set of principles and criteria for 'sustainable' forest management (Smouts, 2002). The specific form of cooperation — including the strong role for the general assembly, the process-oriented rhetoric and the participatory elements — may be regarded as a mere disguise of these power differences that facilitates the acceptance of the FSC with a wider range of audiences both in the North and in the South without having a substantive impact on the policies of the organization.

Finally, a third group of authors has referred to historical macro-trends such as economic globalization, the revolutionary development of communication technologies or shifting ideologies as the key drivers of transnational rule-making. On this reading, the FSC is interpreted as the result of a shift towards neo-liberal ideology and the related use of market mechanisms to achieve environmental policy goals (Bartley, 2003). From this perspective, the convergence on a particular organizational model would therefore need to be explained by reference to larger ideological shifts such as the rise of democratic norms or of market liberalism (Bernstein and Cashore, 2007).

No doubt, all three approaches have their merits. Yet they also face difficulties. While power-based theories face the difficulty of identifying the powerful agent who is driving transnational organizations to adopt costly governance models, interest-based approaches need to show how the concrete benefits that might accrue from stakeholder councils, communication on process and participatory decision-making exceed their costs. Finally, explanations based on ideology need to explain why similar organizations on issues such as workers' rights do not adopt the same features to the same degree even though they are subjected to the same overarching ideological pressures. Moreover, our data suggest that an important element may be missing in the three predominant accounts, namely the role of social interaction at the micro-level and the norms that evolve from such interaction. In the following, we seek to fill this gap by reconstructing how interaction among organizations led to the adoption of particular social norms — 'collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity' (Katzenstein, 1996: 5) — that promote similarity. Norm-based approaches should be particularly valuable in a case such as ours where organizations converge on a governance model that — at least at first sight — involves high costs. Complementary to Bernstein and Cashore's (2007) macro-sociological explanation of transnational regulation as driven by ideology, our own reconstruction thus highlights the micro-foundations of a sociological approach to transnational governance. In the following

section we introduce the notion of *organizational fields* as developed by Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell. In applying the idea of organizational fields to the case of transnational rule-making on sustainability issues, we seek to gain a better understanding of the dynamics that promote similarity among organizations. In addition, our study of a particular organizational field should allow us to explore the analytical value of an organizational fields approach for the study of world politics more generally.[9]

Transnational Rule-Making as an Organizational Field

The Notion of Organizational Fields

The concept of an organizational field has been developed in organization theory where it refers to 'those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 148). An organizational field includes communities of organizations with similar functions or roles insofar as these organizations are aware of each other, interact with each other and perceive each other as peers or 'like units' in some important sense.[10] Examples of organizational fields include hospitals within a specific region, art museums, universities or transnational commercial arbitration organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Scott, 2001).

The theoretical value of the concept of an organizational field lies in the alternative it offers to earlier concepts, in particular the more passive notion of an organizational environment. In contrast to the latter, as Richard Scott has noted, the notion of field 'reminds us that environments of organizations are not random collections of resources and schemas, nor are they constructs defined by disembodied dimensions, such as complexity and munificence; rather, they are themselves organized' (Scott, 2001: 136). While environments are given, fields are made — although the making of a field is not necessarily the result of conscious and intentional activities.

Organizational fields are usually treated as independent variables, that is, 'as a collection of contextual factors or conditions affecting organization structures or processes' (Scott, 2001: 136). This is also the role in which we see the organizational field in our case. Once the organizational field of transnational rule-making had been established, it shaped the structures and processes of its members. Both the emergence of the field and the subsequent independent effects it generated will be described in more detail in the following section. The general logic behind organizational field arguments is that isomorphism is likely to occur within delimited organizational fields independently of whether or not it is functionally mandated. Instead of a functional imperative, external pressure (*coercive isomorphism*), 'social fitness' or 'the acquisition of a form regarded as legitimate in a given institutional environment' (*mimetic isomorphism*), and professional norms (*normative*

isomorphism) are regarded as the most important driving forces for homogenization within organizational fields (Scott, 2001: 153).

Isomorphism within Organizational Fields

DiMaggio and Powell identify three mechanisms that promote homogenization within delimited organizational fields — coercive isomorphism, mimetic processes and normative pressures. The authors stress that these mechanisms are only analytically distinct. In practice, two or all three may operate simultaneously, thus making it difficult to empirically identify which mechanism is at work in a concrete situation (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 150; see also Mizruchi and Fein, 1999: 657).

Coercive isomorphism. As a first mechanism, isomorphism may be induced by regulation through government agencies or other authorized bodies. Yet, coercive isomorphism may also take on more subtle forms, for instance when dependence on a single or on similar donor agencies induces a preference for specific organizational structures. For instance, community organizations frequently face difficulties in maintaining their participatory structures. DiMaggio and Powell thus summarize that, 'in general, the need to lodge responsibility and managerial authority at least ceremonially in a formally defined role in order to interact with hierarchical organizations is a constant obstacle to the maintenance of egalitarian or collectivist organizational forms' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 151). Finally, organizations may be pressured 'to conform to the expectations of the larger society' (Mizruchi and Fein, 1999: 657). For organizations involved in making rules, these expectations may for instance include adherence to democratic norms of decision-making.

Mimetic processes. As a second mechanism, mimetic processes — imitations of a specific organizational model (or elements thereof) by other organizations — are frequently observed within organizational fields, but much less frequently across them. In terms of the specific mechanisms in place, DiMaggio and Powell clarify that 'models may be diffused unintentionally, indirectly through employee transfer or turnover, or explicitly by organizations such as consulting firms or industry trade organizations' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 151). To illustrate their argument, the authors cite Japan's imitation of its perception of institutions of the modern Western state in the 19th century and the reverse imitation of successful Japanese business models by US corporations in the 20th century.

In its most general formulation, this second mechanism thus contends that 'organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 152). Beyond this general statement, several factors are conducive to mimetic isomorphism, including a broad or diverse customer

base, ambiguous or contentious goals, and uncertainty about the relationship between means and ends.

Normative pressures. As a third social mechanism, normative pressures induced by professionalization are a further source of isomorphism. On this account, homogenization occurs as professionals working within an organizational field develop definitions of their own positions, the content and methods of their work, and a 'cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy' (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152) — in other words, as specific *roles* develop within an organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). DiMaggio and Powell identify university education and professional networks, including professional associations, as the two key channels through which such roles subsequently become enacted. Overall, the authors (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 152) argue that:

> Such mechanisms create a pool of almost interchangeable individuals who occupy similar positions across a range of organizations and possess a similarity of orientation and disposition that may override variations in tradition and control that might otherwise shape organizational behavior.

In the following section, we apply the notion of organizational fields to transnational rule-making organizations in the area of sustainability politics. In particular, we show how an organizational field incrementally developed, how it gradually led to the development of a social norm that specified how transnational rule-making organizations ought to be designed, and how this new norm inspired homogenization that, in turn, reinforced the organizational field itself. As a result of these dynamics a new organizational model of transnational rule-making emerged and soon became a global frame of reference — a kind of a *new default option* — for all kinds of actors and policy problems. The dynamics within the organizational field theoretically drew on and practically supported discourses about appropriate global governance, about public–private partnerships and about multi-stakeholder governance. Organizational fields are thus embedded in broader social contexts, but their development may also help to alter these contexts. We will discuss the particular relation between the organizational field of transnational rule-making on sustainability issues and the broader social context in which this field is embedded in the concluding section.

The Organizational Field of Transnational Rule-Making: Empirical Evidence

In this section, we empirically illustrate how the notion of an organizational field helps to understand the proliferation and similarity of transnational rule-making organizations. We discuss three distinct phases in the development

of the organizational field, namely the formation of a core organizational model, the institutionalization of the field and the maturation of the field, including the spillover of some of its elements into neighbouring fields. In all three phases, we identify coercive, mimetic and normative dynamics.

Phase 1: Emergence of an Organizational Model

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), established in 1993, and the Coalition of Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES), founded in 1989, can be considered as early examples of transnational rule-making organizations. While the early history of the FSC and of CERES illustrates that organizational models are embedded in a broader social context, it clearly shows that in the early 1990s an organizational model for making transnational rules did not yet exist.

The latter point is most evident in the case of the FSC. When the organization was established in 1993, participants at the founding assembly in Toronto discussed almost every conceivable aspect related to the design of the organization. They argued about whether to establish the FSC as a foundation or as a membership association; whether or not to include business representatives in the governing bodies of the organization; whether or not to establish quotas for different interests, for women or for developing country stakeholders; how decisions should be taken internally; and how board members would be held accountable by their constituencies. In fact, the largest part of the founding assembly was devoted to a relatively open — a less benign observer might say: chaotic — debate among participants about appropriate governance structures for the organization (FSC, 1993).

When the decision was taken to establish the FSC not as a foundation, but as a membership association, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM) served as a blueprint.[11] Continuity between IFOAM — which had already existed for two decades — and the FSC was further strengthened by including a former board member of IFOAM in the first board of the FSC, thereby incorporating existing knowledge about how to best operate a transnational rule-making organization. Moreover, IFOAM also provided the institutional model for certification as the primary policy instrument used by the FSC and later on also by a variety of other transnational rule-making organizations (Maser and Smith, 2001: 83).

CERES initiators approached their task in a similar way. They adopted elements from organizations they perceived to be both successful and related to their own case. Two ideas, one practical, the other more visionary, provided particular guidance in the formative phase of CERES. First, there is the system of standardized financial accounting that emerged in collaboration between public and private actors in the United States and is controlled

and monitored by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB). As Nash and Ehrenfeld (1997: 512) comment: '[CERES] ambitiously aspired to play a role like that of the Financial Accounting Standards Board and to eventually formulate generally accepted principles for environmental reporting'. The second idea was the approach of using shareholder petitions to change corporate behaviour, as in the case of the Sullivan Principles applied to US companies operating in South Africa under the apartheid regime. The Sullivan Principles originated in 1977 when Reverend Leon Sullivan, a Baptist minister, issued his code of conduct in an attempt to end discrimination against black workers in South Africa oppressed by the nation's policy of apartheid. This initiative helped to focus attention on the issue of racial injustice in South Africa within international business by promoting criteria for socially responsible investment practices. This strategy used by activists and concerned consumers to pressure corporate behaviour in South Africa served as 'the basic blueprint for CERES' (Nash and Ehrenfeld, 1997: 513). Similar to the provisions made in the Sullivan Principles, CERES organizers sought to establish an independent monitoring body to report compliance with their principles.

Over time, as organizations such as the IFOAM, the FSC, CERES and a handful of others become aware of each other, a harmonization of governance processes evolved. For instance, CERES evolved from a US-centred organization to the GRI as a global organization, extended its substantive scope from environment to sustainability, and built up a fully-fledged multi-stakeholder governance system. Generally speaking, a set of standard organizational features for transnational rule-making organizations emerged. They primarily included a global outreach, decision-making procedures that follow a 'multi-stakeholder approach' and guaranteed inclusiveness, transparency and accountability, and a separation of rule-making and rule implementation. Until the mid-1990s, these features constituted little more than a toolbox for initiators and managers of transnational rule-making processes. The elements of this toolbox were vaguely defined and could be adopted and adapted to specific environments. That they nevertheless constituted the nucleus of an organizational model for transnational rule-making organizations is illustrated by the fact that the organizations discussed in this section began to converge on a common model, and that numerous new organizations made use of the toolbox when designing their own structures and procedures. The use of this toolbox by new organizations not only strengthened the model, but also increased the density of the field, thereby promoting further interaction among field members. Out of these developments an organizational field gradually emerged. The emergence of this field allowed the isomorphic dynamics discussed in the previous section to unfold.

In conclusion, the early years of transnational rule-making organizations were characterized by some degree of mimetic behaviour — the FSC copied from IFOAM, CERES from financial accounting organizations and from the Sullivan Principles — while significant coercive and normative pressures for a particular institutional design were largely absent. The organizations themselves interacted only weakly and their organizational models converged only gradually and to a limited extent.

Phase 2: Institutionalization of the Organizational Field

The expansion of CERES and its development into the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) illustrate the increasing strength of the organizational model. The GRI was set up in 1997 to harmonize and integrate existing non-financial reporting schemes. Several companies had approached CERES and raised concerns about the fragmented scope of reporting and its limited geographical reach. At the same time, the Tellus Institute, a major North American think tank in the field of sustainability, published its report *Green Metrics*, a study that compared existing reporting schemes and their requirements in a single matrix and identified overlaps between various schemes (White and Zinkl, 1998).[12] Based on this input, initial discussions on establishing a broader and harmonized reporting framework began, leading to the successful establishment of a GRI Steering Committee in December 1997. Shortly after, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) could be won as a partner institution. The inclusion of UNEP not only enhanced the organization's public recognition, but also broadened its funding base. Through cooperation with UNEP, the GRI had access to funds from the United Nations Foundation that proved vital in the early years of the organization.

When the GRI Steering Committee — playing the role of an interim board during the early stage of the organization's development — had to decide on a governing structure for the new organization, it commissioned a report from the consultancy Arthur D. Little Ltd to evaluate possible options for the organizational design of the future GRI. The study compared nine existing transnational organizations. In doing so, it identified an organizational core that all of the organizations analysed shared in one way or another — most notably, the triangle of a board of directors, a secretariat and a stakeholder body (Arthur D. Little Limited, 2001).[13] The example of the GRI thus shows how consultants, by establishing and disseminating cases of 'best practice', help to institutionalize an organizational field. They did so first by identifying 'peers' or 'like units' and thereby drawing the boundaries of the field, and second by comparing the organizational design and success of field members.

A further illustration of the increasing acceptance of a standard organizational model is the establishment of the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance in 1999. Comprising a membership of currently seven organizations, the ISEAL Alliance not only strongly promotes interaction among its members, but has also established a 'Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards' that specifies 'general requirements for the preparation, adoption and revision of standards that address social and environmental practices' (ISEAL Alliance, 2006a).[14] It thereby codifies a standard model for transnational rule-making organizations. The ISEAL Alliance portrays its individual members as 'international leaders in voluntary standard-setting and conformity assessment … in sectors ranging from forestry and agriculture to fisheries, manufacturing and textiles'. As a group, ISEAL members are said to represent 'a fast-growing movement to create a world where ecological sustainability and social justice are the normal conditions of business' (ISEAL Alliance, 2006b). This portrayal can be seen as an active attempt to promote mimetic processes — the seven member organizations classify themselves as best practice and invite others to join.[15] Although the direct effects of the ISEAL Alliance are likely to be limited, the organization is highly relevant as an example of the efforts of transnational organizations to create and implement a standard model of transnational rule-making. In terms of the legitimacy of standard setting, ISEAL acknowledges that its members do not have a monopoly, but that adherence to the ISEAL Code is essential to be credible (ISEAL Alliance, 2006a: Foreword):

> ISEAL does not consider its members to be the only bodies that can legitimately develop environmental and social standards and conformity assessment procedures. Legitimacy in this area of work is determined by the suitability of the processes through which these standards are developed, adopted and implemented. The ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards provides a benchmark to assist standard-setting organizations to improve how they develop social and environmental standards.

Beyond the ISEAL Code and the evolution of the GRI, a number of further examples show how a standard model for organizational transnational rule-making gradually evolved and how the density of interaction among field members gradually increased:

- The Marine Stewardship Council is explicitly modelled on the stewardship idea of the FSC. Yet the organizational design differs from that of the FSC. The MSC has a more restricted membership policy and is board-driven rather than member-driven. Moreover, stakeholder participation was initially limited to a small advisory board. This last difference, however, became problematic when the MSC was increasingly targeted

by transnational activists for its allegedly clandestine and non-transparent operations. In response to these pressures, a stakeholder council has now replaced the original advisory board. The fact that activists were able to put pressure on the MSC thus makes visible that a standard model for how transnational rule-making ought to be organized had gradually gained recognition among both activists and their audiences. It is an example of the combined force of coercive and mimetic pressures in which activists are able to exert pressure on the basis of an organization's deviation from 'standard practice'. Following this 'standard practice' is then often the most efficient way to repair an organization's legitimacy (Suchman, 1995).

- Industry-driven certification schemes such as the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC) and the North American Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI) were originally conceived to counter the influence of the FSC in the area of forest certification. Yet, in response to outside pressures, these schemes also needed to become more inclusive and transparent and incorporate at least some key elements of the standard organizational model. As a result, even activities that were meant to block the efforts of transnational rule-making organizations eventually served to stabilize the organizational field.

- With a fixed and strict timeline for the consultations, a stakeholder forum, regional workshops and public comments periods for official documents, international multi-stakeholder consultations in the Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development Process (MMSD) were closely — and explicitly — modelled on the experience of the World Commission on Dams (WCD). Here, building on an existing model serves both as a means to avoid the costs of inventing an entirely new model and as a means to draw on the legitimacy ascribed to the organization whose model is copied.

At a more general level, these illustrations are indicative of a consolidation of a standard model of transnational rule-making processes that encompasses a strong role for stakeholder bodies, a focus on procedural rather than substantive rhetoric and the use of similar, yet relatively costly, participatory elements. Observing convergence around this model, it remains an open question which mechanisms are at work. Does convergence result from coercive or normative pressures, from mimetic processes or can it be best explained in terms of transaction costs?

In terms of coercive pressures, the high level of dependence 'upon a single (or several similar) source of support for vital resources' identified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 155) is a case in point. As relatively new organizations on the scene of world politics, many transnational rule-making organizations receive funding from similar sources, most notably government

agencies and a handful of private foundations predominantly based in North America. For example, the FSC generated over US$14.3 million in the period between 1996 and 2003, but only 17% was generated through membership fees and accreditation billings, while roughly 77% came from donations by, among others, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the Wallace Global Fund. A similar pattern is characteristic for most of the organizations listed in the Appendix to this article. If we assume that the funding criteria of different private foundations and government agencies share some commonalities — most importantly, applicants will need to convince funding agencies that their project is likely to succeed — then this is a powerful mechanism of coercive isomorphism. Applicants that can point to similarities with (perceived) success cases stand a better chance of being funded. In that way, project-oriented external funding almost by necessity promotes isomorphism.[16] Tim Bartley's (2007) analysis of forest certification illustrates the central role of foundations who purposefully coordinated their grant-making and engaged in 'field-building' activities to channel the policies and activities of social movement organizations. As 'foundations' enthusiasm for the FSC became quickly apparent' (Bartley, 2007: 243) to other organizations in the field, these organizations made efforts to become 'more FSC-like' (Bartley, 2007: 235). Finally, beyond the dependence on funding agencies, the case of the Marine Stewardship Council illustrates how expectations of other relevant groups or of society at large may also constrain the range of organizational models a transnational rule-making organization may adopt.

Mimesis seems at least equally relevant. In cases like the MMSD, elements of a successful organizational model — in this case the World Commission on Dams — was simply copied by others (Danielson, 2006). In other cases, external organizations facilitate or actively encourage mimetic processes. Such a service may be delivered by private or public organizations. For instance the ISEAL Alliance strengthens the standard organizational model of transnational rule-making organizations by requiring member organizations to take part in peer review processes to verify conformity with its code of conduct (ISEAL Alliance, 2001). Moreover, the explicit comparison of transnational organizations by think tanks, consultancies or academics helps to bring about a consensus on what constitutes best practice in this new field. Examples include the UN Vision Project on Global Public Policy Networks that draws practical conclusions from a comparison of several transnational governance processes, a report by the Meridian Institute that compares the governance systems of certification schemes and several research projects that examine the effectiveness and legitimacy of transnational governance schemes (Meridian Institute, 2001; Reinicke et al., 2000; see also Witte et al., 2003). Finally, best practice awards, so-called 'Teaching Cases' developed

for executive education seminars and 'handbooks' and 'practical guides' for managing multi-stakeholder processes further promote standardization (Beffert and Benner, 2004, 2005; Eckl, 2006; Hemmati et al., 2002; Steets, 2006; see also Brunsson et al., 2000).

Third, normative pressures may not play a strong role in the sense identified by DiMaggio and Powell, namely as professional norms infused into the environments of transnational organizations. The initiators and managers of transnational rule-making organizations hardly constitute a homogeneous 'class' or 'elite' educated in the same business schools and university departments. On the contrary, individual backgrounds are highly diverse. Nonetheless, interpersonal networks and an emerging profession of 'global sustainability managers' are conducive to isomorphism. Interpersonal networks, for instance at the level of board memberships, link organizations to each other. Thus, the first board of the FSC included a former board member of the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), and GRI chairperson Judy Henderson had previously gained experience as one of the 12 commissioners of the World Commission on Dams. Even more importantly, the prominent involvement of single actors in a variety of transnational rule-making organizations also promotes convergence. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the contributions of the WWF as a key player in many environment-related NGO–business partnerships — among them the Forest Stewardship Council and the Marine Stewardship Council — and of consultancy firms as drivers and participants in a variety of certification schemes. Last but not least, there is a growing sense that a profession of 'global sustainability managers' is emerging, revolving around the notions that the social, economic and environmental dimensions of business conduct are inseparable and that sustainability 'has to pay off'. For the members of this new managerial class, societies can only move towards sustainability when environmentally, socially or economically sustainable behaviour creates added monetary value — an idea that lies at the heart of many, if not most, transnational rule-making organizations and that illustrates once more that organizational fields do not develop independently of broader social contexts.

Phase 3: Maturation and Spillover into Neighbouring Fields

That the field of transnational rule-making organizations has matured is best illustrated by the increasing attraction of its standard organizational model beyond the narrow confines of transnational rule-making on sustainability issues. Elements of the model are thus found in non-sustainability areas of transnational rule-making (beyond *sustainability*), in intergovernmental rule-making schemes (beyond *transnational* rule-making) and in transnational

governance schemes that do not make, but implement, rules (beyond *rule-making*).

Recent developments in transnational resource governance illustrate our first point. Here, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) is a joint initiative of the non-governmental organization Global Witness and the world's leading diamonds seller, the London-based multinational De Beers, to halt the trade of conflict diamonds and to thereby limit the financial resources of rebel movements in several countries, including Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone. The scheme was explicitly modelled on certification schemes established in other sectors, but allowed for some differences in organizational design and in the decision-making process, in which governments gradually took over from non-state actors.

The Kimberley Process itself served as a blueprint for the design of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), a multi-stakeholder attempt to curb corruption in the extractive industries and in the bureaucracies of resource-rich countries. The knowledge transfer from the Kimberley Process to the EITI was promoted by the role which the international NGO Global Witness played as a core member in both initiatives. When the International Advisory Group (IAG) of EITI discussed the future management structure of the organization, its first step was to commission a report to identify comparable institutions. Among the eight comparable initiatives identified were two from the field of transnational sustainability politics, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (EITI Secretariat, 2005).[17] In a second step, the IAG discussed what it could learn from these initiatives in view of its own goals. For instance, the GRI's 'active feedback programme on Guidelines', the multi-stakeholder structure of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) — which itself comes fairly close to the standard model identified in this article — and the regular conferences held by the ETI were identified as elements that could be implemented in the EITI as well (EITI Secretariat, 2005).[18]

Beyond these private organizations, public intergovernmental organizations experience a similar pressure induced by the (perceived) success of the 'multi-stakeholder' model of transnational rule-making. As a result intergovernmental organizations increasingly open up their decision-making processes to non-state actors. It is difficult to understand this development from a purely functional perspective and to overlook the normative appeal of a 'multi-stakeholder model' of governance beyond the state. 'To engage stakeholders' in one's own decision-making processes, it seems, has become a norm that intergovernmental organizations can nowadays disregard only at their own peril. With its tripartite structure that — at least rhetorically — gave equal weight to governments, civil society and business, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva (2003) and

Tunis (2005) exemplifies this new global governance norm (Dany, 2006). The emergence of this norm can essentially be traced to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, if we leave the particular structures of the International Labour Organization aside, the first implementation of the stakeholder participation norm at the international level did not occur until 1997 when the World Commission on Dams was initiated as a tripartite body. This international precedent served as a reference point for many other initiatives. It thereby strengthened the stakeholder participation norm and contributed to its diffusion into other thematic areas of inter- and transnational governance.

Finally, the costly standard model is occasionally also applied to cases that do not include rule-making at all. Illustrative cases are provided by the increasing number of multi-sectoral partnerships that gained currency after the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. Although these cooperative arrangements predominantly engage only in the implementation of widely accepted and internationally agreed goals such as the Millennium Development Goals or Agenda 21, some of them have modelled their governance schemes on the organizational blueprint of transnational rule-making organizations and adopted governance structures that seem overly complex given their relatively straightforward mandates (Bäckstrand, 2006; Hale and Mauzerall, 2004).

Conclusions

The literature on *international governance* has established quite clearly that power, interests and norms are crucial factors in accounting for the emergence, functioning and effects of international institutions (Hasenclever et al., 1997). In the literature on *transnational governance*, two of these factors — power and interests — have attracted significant interest, while the third has been defined rather narrowly in terms of ideologies. As we show in this article, this narrow view is unwarranted. Using the notion of organizational fields as a point of departure, our analysis illustrates how social interaction and the development of norms that result from such interaction can account for important facets of transnational rule-making organizations, in particular where the governance models of these organizations are relatively costly.

At a more general level, the arguments presented in this article not only shed light on the particular field of transnational rule-making, but also illustrate the value of an organizational field perspective for the study of world politics. Overall, we see three major benefits.

First, the notion of organizational fields provides a valuable heuristic for exploring contemporary structures and processes of global governance. A field perspective allows us to shift attention away from individual

organizations — such as the United Nations, Greenpeace or Wal-Mart — without having to rely on highly generalized system-level approaches. More specifically, it allows us to examine the dynamics and patterns of interaction within particular organizational fields in world politics — the fields of inter-governmental organizations, international judiciaries, transnational social movements, multinational corporations or issue-specific inter- and trans-national organizations. In addition, through studying interactions between organizations, it allows us to identify fields whose existence or relevance has long escaped our attention and to explore the historical emergence and more recent development of individual fields as a whole. Mapping how organizations interact in world politics, identifying the shapes and dynamics of organizational fields of global governance and exploring the independent effects of these fields on their members as well as non-members thus presents itself as a first set of potentially fruitful tasks for an organizational field perspective on global governance.

Second, a field-level perspective provides a tool for examining processes of horizontal norm diffusion. In contrast to the diffusion of national science policies through UNESCO (Finnemore, 1993) or the diffusion of an organizational model for local chess clubs through national chess federations and the International Chess Federation (Lechner and Boli, 2005: 14–15), the emergence and diffusion of a standard model for transnational rule-making organizations on sustainability issues occurred in the absence of a central organization that would be able to set, promote and enforce a new standard. In that sense, our analysis is also an illustration of how agents and structures interact. The structure — the standard model of transnational rule-making — only develops through the activities of the agents. At the same time, these activities solidify this structure so that it gradually becomes a social fact that determines the identities of actors as well as their conceptions of both what they consider appropriate and what they consider to be in their interest. Given our analysis, it thus seems wrong to reduce agency — as world polity scholars commonly do (see for instance Lechner and Boli, 2005: 15) — to only those instances in which actors challenge a given structure. In contrast, as critical approaches to world politics have long demonstrated, the activities of social agents may just as well solidify social structures. When and how they do so are not only empirically open, but also highly intriguing, research questions. Moreover, the dynamics that unfold when ideas travel from one organization and from one organizational field to another — that is, how organizations *amend* ideas that come their way and how they *adapt to* new ideas — deserve to be analysed in greater depth (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). The organizational field perspective again provides a useful lens for doing so.

Third, organizational research points us to the fact that, *as organizations*, transnational rule-making organizations often share similar characteristics and similar environments with other kinds of organizations (Drori et al., 2006). In our case, transnational rule-making organizations can, for instance, be seen as elements of a broader organizational field, namely that of global governance. Understanding transnational rule-making organizations as *global governance organizations* helps us to see the many ways in which organizations such as the World Commission on Dams or the Global Reporting Initiative study, interact with and, in fact, copy specific elements of intergovernmental governance organizations. At the same time, transnational rule-making organizations capitalize on the current legitimacy crisis of intergovernmental organizations. By putting a strong emphasis on values such as inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and deliberativeness, they portray themselves as approaching the normative ideal of global governance organizations more closely than actual intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. In this way, transnational rule-making organizations not only respond to, shape and enact a specific conception of their own identity. They also mould and reflect a more general conception of global governance organizations and the changing norms to which the latter are subjected. At a more general level, the organizational field perspective thus also allows us to explore the interaction of different, and partially overlapping, organizational fields as well as the embeddedness of particular fields in broader organizational structures.

This last point hints at the complex relation between organizational fields and their social environments. When we argue that the *micro-dynamics within the field* have contributed to convergence on a standard model of transnational rule-making and that this model has gained appeal even outside the boundaries of the organizational field in which it has been developed, others might interpret the same phenomena as resulting from *macro-dynamics outside the field*. In particular, they might contend that convergence follows from a more general shift from government to governance, from a political rhetoric focused on 'stakeholders' rather than 'citizens' and from a shift from public politics to private management (Bernstein, 2001; Bernstein and Cashore, 2007). An organizational field perspective would be well advised to take these broader contexts into account. Yet it views the external context as a structure that constrains and enables rather than determines the way in which particular organizations act. Moreover, the actions and interactions among these organizations are capable of generating and amending (some of) the structures within and beyond the confines of particular organizational fields. Methodologically, it is particularly difficult to separate the independent effects of structures at the micro- and macro-level because, in practice, both levels are more often interdependent than independent.

In other words, it is particularly difficult to resolve whether the phenomena we have sketched in the section 'The Organizational Field of Transnational Rule-Making: Empirical Evidence' are correctly described as a spillover of a norm from one field into another (*horizontal diffusion*), or whether they are more adequately interpreted as a response to more general shifts that affect several organizational fields at the same time (*vertical diffusion*). The examples we have given in our case study of one particular field, however, provide ample support for our idea that dynamics at the micro-level are indeed relevant to explain and understand transnational regulation and that such dynamics should be incorporated into the analytical models we use to study processes of global governance. The notion of organizational fields is well equipped to serve this function.

Appendix: Transnational Rule-Making Organizations on Sustainability Issues

Organization (Founding Year)	Area of Activity	Interaction with Other Transnational Rule-making Organizations
Accountability (1999)	Accounting	• Collaborates with the Global Reporting Initiative; • The standard is 'intended to complement other standards in which stakeholder engagement is an important element … as well as issue-specific standards on, for example, labour, human rights and corruption (e.g. GRI Sustainability Reporting Guidelines, ISO standards, SA8000, IAASB standards and ISEAL member standards).'
Coalition of Environmentally Responsible Economies (1989)	Corporate sustainability	• Precursor to and initiator of the Global Reporting Initiative; • Strong personal ties between CERES initiators and GRI Steering Committee/ Board.
Common Code for the Coffee Community (2003)	Agriculture/ Coffee	• Relatively low interaction (the initiative is only just getting started); • Only a few of the partner organizations and of the organizations represented on the Steering Committee are also taking part in other initiatives (World Bank; Rainforest Alliance; International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations;

Organization (Founding Year)	Area of Activity	Interaction with Other Transnational Rule-making Organizations
		International Institute for Sustainable Development); • The plan to establish national Common Code Bodies to support implementation essentially builds on the FSC model.
Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (1997)	Fair trade	• Member of the ISEAL Alliance.
Forest Stewardship Council (1993)	Forestry	• Modelled on the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements, including personal ties to former Board members of IFOAM; • Strong participation of the WWF as a central actor in many transnational rule-making organizations; • Member of the ISEAL Alliance; • FSC itself serves as a model for both certification organizations and for membership associations.
Global Reporting Initiative (1997)	CSR	• Expands on the ideas of CERES (see above) both thematically and geographically and was initiated by the same people; • Organizational model was based on a consultant's study of different multi-stakeholder organizations, including the World Commission on Dams, the Forest Stewardship Council and others; • Personal ties (at Board level) with the World Commission on Dams; • Collaborates with AccountAbility in view of its AA1000 standard.
International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (1972)	Organic farming	• Member of the ISEAL Alliance; • Served as a blueprint for the Forest Stewardship Council; • The first FSC Board of Directors included a former IFOAM Board member.
Marine Aquarium Council (1999)	Conser-vation	• Member of the ISEAL Alliance; • Inspired by the Forest Stewardship Council and by the Marine Stewardship Council.

Organization (Founding Year)	Area of Activity	Interaction with Other Transnational Rule-making Organizations
Marine Stewardship Council (1997)	Fisheries	• Member of the ISEAL Alliance; • Partly built on the model of the Forest Stewardship Council, including personal ties among Secretariat members; • Central role of the WWF as a key player in several transnational rule-making organizations.
Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development (1999)	CSR/ Mining	• The MMSD process, including its mandate and governance structure, is essentially built on the organizational model of the World Commission on Dams. • Individuals and organizations represented in the governing bodies of the MMSD process were also represented in the governing bodies of other transnational rule-making organizations (e.g. UNEP representatives were also involved in the Global Reporting Initiative). • Collaboration with the Global Reporting Initiative in joint workshops (August and November 2001).
Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (1999)	Forestry	• PEFC is a business initiative founded in response to the success of the Forest Stewardship Council. Organized as a membership association with 35 national forest certification systems as its members, the General Assembly acts as the highest authority; • No meaningful interaction with other transnational rule-making organizations.
Social Accountability International (1997)	CSR	• Member of the ISEAL Alliance; • Organizations represented on the advisory board are also represented in other initiatives (e.g. the Ethos Institute of Business & Social Responsibility is also active in the Global Reporting Initiative).
World Commission on Dams (1998)	Large dams	• Personal ties (at the Board or Commission level) to the Global Reporting Initiative; • The attention given to the WCD as a model for global future decision-making created a momentum for many subsequent initiatives; awareness of the WCD process reached an extraordinary level; • The MMSD (see above) was explicitly modelled on the WCD.

Notes

1. See Bernstein and Cashore (2007), Cashore (2002) and our Appendix for further examples.
2. For information on the organizations in the shaded area, see the Appendix. The other acronyms stand for the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), the Fair Labor Association (FLA), the Flower Labelling Program (FLP), the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB), the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) and the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC).
3. The attribute 'transnational' traditionally applies to transboundary interactions in which at least one actor is a non-state actor; transnational rule-making organizations may thus also include governments or governmental actors among their members; see Keohane and Nye (1971); Risse-Kappen (1995).
4. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for clarifying this point.
5. For the acronyms of individual organizations, see the Appendix to this article.
6. The World Commission on Dams had to learn this lesson when members of its stakeholder forum challenged the commission's final report on the grounds that a draft version had not been discussed with forum members before publication; see Varma et al. (2000).
7. We distinguish between three indicators of interaction with other transnational rule-making organizations: (a) membership in a meta-organization of transnational rule-making organizations; (b) board members are serving or have served on the board of other transnational rule-making organizations; (c) explicit reference to other transnational rule-making organizations in official documents and/or public communication (or is itself a point of reference).
8. Currently, the ISEAL Alliance is the major relevant umbrella organization in the field (the Joint Initiative on Corporate Accountability and Workers' Rights fulfils a similar function for the field of transnational labour rights regulation). Membership in the umbrella organizations would be problematic as an indicator if it obliged member organizations to adopt elements of the standard model. Yet the ISEAL code merely demands that the interests of relevant stakeholder groups be taken into account in the rule-making process, but it does not proscribe the establishment of strong stakeholder bodies, the adoption of a process-oriented

rhetoric or the organization of regional stakeholder consultations, expert deliberations on specific policy issues or annual conferences open to stakeholders. The only element of our 'standard model' that is proscribed by the ISEAL Code of Good Practice is the requirement to hold public comments periods for draft standards (Article 5.4 of the Code of Good Practice); theoretically, it would thus be possible for an ISEAL member to score 'weak' on our first and second criteria and 'moderate' on our third criterion. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for asking us to clarify this point.

9. On the fruitful relation between International Relations and organizational theory in general, see Dingwerth et al. (2009).
10. Note that this does not imply that organizations perceive themselves to be similarly structured, but rather to share identity statements such as 'we are a supermarket chain', 'we are an environmental NGO' or 'we are a state'.
11. Authors' interviews with individuals involved in the early history of the FSC process.
12. The Tellus Institute and CERES not only shared the professional vision of corporate sustainability, but also office space in Boston between 1997 and 2003. Tellus also assisted the GRI in its early phase in staffing the GRI secretariat.
13. Organizations examined include the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Global Water Partnership (GWP), the International Accounting Standards Committee (IASC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the Mining, Minerals & Sustainable Development Initiative (MMSD), the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the World Commission on Dams (WCD).
14. ISEAL Alliance members include Fairtrade Labelling Organizations (FLO), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC), the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the Rainforest Alliance (RA) and Social Accountability International (SAI).
15. At the same time, ISEAL also indicates the professionalization of transnational rule-making organizations, thereby tipping DiMaggio and Powell's third mechanism of *normative pressures*.
16. Note that for this mechanism to work, it is not even necessary that funding agencies *actually* favour a particular model. The precedent they set by funding a particular project simply makes it more likely that the design of that project is copied by future applicants who can be confident that projects of this particular type are considered as worthy of funding. For all other project types, applicants lack similar information.
17. The other initiatives identified in the report are the Aarhus Convention, the Basel Convention on trade in hazardous wastes, the Ethical Trading Initiative, the Global Environmental Facility, the International Labour Organization and the Kimberley Process (EITI Secretariat, 2005). The heterogeneity of the list illustrates the difficulties for EITI of knowing with what kind of organizations it should identify itself, a difficulty that is characteristic for organizations outside a particular organizational field.

18. Similar developments in transnational financial governance are more difficult to relate to the success of the standard model developed in transnational sustainability politics. Thus, while the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) and the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) have both made considerable efforts to become more inclusive, transparent, accountable and deliberative (Kerwer, 2005; Loft and Humphreys, 2005; McGrew and Robotti, 2006), their reforms appear to respond more to broader social pressures for democratization than to the success of transnational governance organizations in other fields. Direct references to the latter are thus neither found in the *Due Process Handbook* of the IASB (IASCF, 2006), nor in the IFAC reform proposals (IFAC, 2003).

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