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## Book Review: Transnational Communities: Shaping Global Economic Governance

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## Book Review

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Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack (eds.)  
Transnational Communities: Shaping Global Economic Governance  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 448pp. ISBN: 978 0 5215 1878 9. £65.00

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What do bank employees in private equity have in common with the non-profit organization Creative Commons or the transnational Chinese community? And what does this have to do with the growth and decline of the temperance movement or skill-building in developing countries? These are all examples of how transnational communities become relevant in transnational governance. In a thought-provoking and cohesive edited volume, Djelic and Quack have assembled scholars from different disciplines and theoretic fields around a common enterprise: to understand the evolution of transnational communities and how they shape global governance.

Issues of governing have traditionally been approached from a state-centred perspective, which has received criticism since the mid-1990s. As a result, scholars have pointed to the importance of professional networks, regulatory networks, soft regulation, transnational standard-setting, epistemic communities and communities of practice. The editors as well as several of the authors are among those who have participated in these earlier attempts to understand processes of global governance. This volume can be seen as an attempt to investigate whether it is possible to talk about transnational communities; what characteristics such communities have, how they relate to earlier concepts and what effects they can have on transnational governance.

The volume begins with two chapters that introduce the concept of community, followed by a number of chapters that revolve around the notion of transnational community. These are divided into four groups: classical communities with a transnational extension (Dahles; Eder & Öz); professional communities with a transnational extension (Harvey & Maclean; Morgan & Kubo; Hussain & Ventresca; Ramirez); virtual communities (Metiu; Dobusch & Quack); and transnational interest- or issue-based communities (Schrad; Fetzer; Plehwe; Mariussen; Bartley & Smith). In the cases cited, different methodologies are used: mainly interviews and observations, but also historical documents, macro data and network analysis. The volume closes with a final chapter in which the editors discuss the cases and draw conclusions both with regard to their discussion of the community concept and in relation to the discussions on governance.

The concept of transnational community builds on and develops Tönnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft*. Both in a chapter by the editors and in a separate chapter by Mayntz, the concept is firmly rooted in classic sociological literature and developed to suit modern times and a transnational setting. Literatures on transnational elites, activism and transnational governance are linked and discussed, as well as concepts such as epistemic communities and earlier uses of the notion of

transnational communities in texts on migration and business systems. It seems that the authors do not criticize these concepts per se, but rather suggest an overlapping concept that draws attention to a broader community without losing sight of the individuals and without equating organizations with actors.

Transnational community is defined as a mutual orientation of members, articulated around a common identity and/or a common project, a sense of reciprocal dependence, and a form of active engagement from members, all of which translate into and sustain a sense of belonging (p. 13). One main difference from a traditional, locally rooted *Gemeinschaft* is that transnational communities are 'imagined communities' of a fluid or dynamic nature. They are in themselves diverse, 'time-bound, non-essential and non-permanent' (p. 377). In contrast with an organization analysis that often uses the type of organization as a starting point, the notion of a community stems instead from the individuals and their sense of belonging. How this is manifested in structural terms may vary over time. A community can lead to the creation of formal organizations and might include epistemic communities and/or other groups. A transnational community is a transnational network, but it is only networks with a common 'culture' that can be defined as communities (p. 384). On an analytical level, the transnational movement goes beyond specific communities (epistemic, for instance) and business–activist divides and tries to capture a fragile and time-bound, yet potentially strong and, as a whole, fairly enduring community based on individuals with a mutual orientation, dependence and sense of belonging.

As mentioned, the primary focus of most of the chapters is to investigate whether a community is present and, if so, what it looks like. The reader is left slightly confused as to why it should be better to collapse all of the various community-related concepts into one, and this is not for lack of arguments, but rather due to the many different and at times contradictory arguments presented in different parts of the volume. Sweeping comments about other concepts are sometimes made – such as that social movement theory depicts movements in an overly coherent way. I am not entirely convinced that scholars who represent such traditions will agree or be convinced that community constitutes a better concept. For instance, why is it better to talk about communities than about common, collective identities, in line with Melucci (1996)? It is also surprising that there is no discussion of the vigorous literature regarding transnational actors in relation to transnational communities (e.g. see Steffek, 2008; Jönsson & Tallberg, 2010). Research interests concur, even though these scholars tend to be more interested in the consequences that flow from the impact of transnational actors, for instance, on the quality of democracy, efficiency in policy implementation, and so on.

However, since the book's main emphasis and contribution lies in its suggested addition of a common level where scholars can combine and compare the earlier studies in order to gain a better understanding of processes that shape transnational interactions and especially the cultural side of the communities, the volume can definitely be appreciated even by readers who are not convinced. In social movement theory, for instance, the point of departure is usually that the movement exists as a result of a conflict. In this volume, 'normal' social movements are placed side by side with cases where the transnational community is a result of business pursuits – for instance, the private equity community (Morgan & Kubo) or French accountants confronted with Anglo-Saxon multinational companies (Ramirez). In the final chapters, both 'sides' – business and activists – are analysed together. There are apparent similarities between the various transnational communities. The question that remains is: what are the differences?

A definite strength of the volume as a whole, which is also evidence of the usefulness of the concept introduced, is that it shows the dynamics of communities. Several of the studies cited are longitudinal, which allows for observations of how they start off small, grow and expand, and may

later diminish (Schrad; Plehwe; Dobusch & Quack). At these different stages, different communities (elite, practice-based, epistemic, etc.) and various degrees and types of formal organization are used, and the transnational community emerges from the combined actions as a pulsating collective motion. The authors repeatedly stress that transnational communities have a transient and hybrid nature and can be described as ‘communities of limited liability’ (Janowitz, 1952), since members may be differentially involved and invested at any point in time – and may belong to several different communities.

The aspirations of the authors aside, I believe that this observation opens the way for a renewed study of what ‘actors’ are in policy processes and how they are created (here again indicating the relevance of positioning in relation to the ‘transnational actor’ literature). A related actor effect is discussed in another recent book. In a study of rule-setting in multi-stakeholder processes, Tamm Hallström and Boström (2010) show how participants are sorted into different categories, which have important implications for their influence in the rule-setting process. The collective within the category together form one ‘actor’, restricted by the ascribed category. In the cases presented in Djelic and Quack’s volume, the association to a community often seems more intentional – individuals or groups come together of their own free will (although there are exceptions). Even so, there are big differences within the community and it is shown how individuals or groups in the community can have fairly diverse motives. In traditional sociological texts, interests are often taken for granted and also more or less equated to actors. What is interesting here is that the actor and the interest are not always the same. The community may come to play the role of an actor, but its constituent individuals may have different interests and at the same time be part of other actor effects. Notions such as ‘limited liability community’ provide an idiom for talking about this, and point to the fluidity of agency not only in transnational settings but in society as a whole.

Returning to the governance theme in the book, interesting conclusions are drawn. The authors could have been more explicit at the beginning of the book as to why they embarked on this journey in the first place and what they consider as problems with studies of global or transnational governance today. The discussion of governance surfaces regularly throughout the book, but always in the shadow of the investigation of the idea of a transnational community. However, in the concluding chapter, Djelic and Quack analyse the cases included and make some interesting observations. They argue that what is surprising in relation to earlier research is that transnational communities have an impact on policy or interaction, not only in the early stages of the policy cycle, but also in the later stages. The integration of individuals into a new community can change the preferences of the individuals integrated. Djelic and Quack argue that, in later stages, communities become ‘stabilizers’ or ‘protectors’ of specific governance rules or monitoring systems. Several studies also indicate the importance of informal sanctions such as naming and shaming, the risk of exclusion (chapters by Metiu; Dobusch & Quack) or the effects of public benchmarking (Bartley & Smith), all of which, according to Djelic and Quack, represent sizeable pressures and important factors when it comes to implementation of a policy or to compliance with one.

In all, the volume captures and theorizes on the dynamics that might be involved in the growth and decline of transnational communities in a fascinating manner. A more systematic study of the effects on governance remains to be done, and, as the authors suggest, it will be interesting to see more longitudinal studies with transnational communities as an analytical starting point. The volume as a whole thus delivers interesting conclusions and an apparently useful concept, opens the door for new discussions, and leaves the reader with an overall positive, nudging feeling that there is interesting work to be done.

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