

Organic Expertise from Diverse Experiences Consensus, Experientiality and Network Centrality in Transnational Governance

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**Organic Expertise from Diverse Experiences:
Consensus, Experientiality and Network Centrality in Transnational Governance**

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1. Introduction

When experts with diverse training and experiential backgrounds come together to make binding decisions they face the challenge of finding common ground in the absence of any particular shared abstract body of knowledge or organization specific set of evaluative principles. How does consensus emerge in situations marked by contentious friction? Network theory suggests that connectivity enables orchestration of alignment and coordination across difference. Occupants of strategically central positions in networks can thus be formally identified from the structural characteristics of those positions (White et al. 1976; Burt 1992, 2010; Vedres and Stark 2010). But the formal characteristics of positions only tell us about the potential advantage of occupants. Actual advantage is about mobilizing action from network positions to influence what goes on in the network (Burt 2010, 223ff). What does it take for occupants of advantageous position to take action on specific collective problems in the face of contentious situations?

Action is not only about the ‘flat’ positions that actors occupy but also about the ‘thick’ experiential backgrounds that goes into bringing them to life. Lawyers draw on their professional experience as they convince other lawyers to follow their lead. Business managers draw on their corporate experience when they convince other managers to enter alliances. Homophily is a well-known feature of most networks that has to do with preferential attachment, among other things (McPherson et al. 2001), leading tie formation based on similarity of social attributes into dynamics of triadic closure and attributional clustering. While those dynamics tend to constraint actors exposure to diversely experienced others, they also open up structural ‘hubs’, ‘holes’ or ‘folds’ which are rife with action potential in being particularly privileged access points to access, engage with and even bridge experiential divides (Burt 1992, 2010; Vedres and Stark 2010, de Vaan et al. 2013). Since networks tend to cluster around attributional similarity, being central in a diverse network on average means being exposed to, and challenged, by more difference.

The key proposition in this paper is that the capacity of a network’s central actors to evoke *experientiality* (Caracciola 2012, Fludernik 1996) is crucial to drawing contentious parties together around common framework solutions. The basic idea of experientiality, a concept imported from literary theory, is that actors’ engagement with the present is inseparable from their experiential backgrounds. The concept was invented by Monika Fludernik in her reference to narratives’ ‘quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experiences’ (1996, 2). Marco Caracciola (2012) has pushed the

concept in a slightly different direction, pointing to the use of experientiality not only to describe how stories evoke past real-life experiences but also to include how they can provide ‘new imaginative experiences’, referring to the ‘experiential feel of writing and reading stories’ (Caracciola 2012, 3). What characterizes an exceptional piece of art is its broad appeal in being able to restructure the perceptions of viewers with very different experiential backgrounds. The capacity to evoke experientiality in narratives is therefore more likely to come from actors that themselves have diverse experiential backgrounds. Returning to the initial question: Since all present decisions are projected onto a background of experience, actors that underwrite decisions have to be able to tap into those decisions with their unique experiential background in mind, reimagining those decisions as meaningful even if they compromise principled values. This reimagining however requires experientiality from narratives that can be tapped into by diversely experienced actors: Central actors can use their exposure to diversity from their advantageous positions to shape such narratives, requiring familiarity with experiential diversity and friction.

This proposition is tested in multistakeholder governance settings marked by high organizational, professional and experiential diversity. In recent years multi-stakeholder standard-setting has emerged as a collaborative way of aligning the interests of lead firms in the global economy with the activist watchdogs who wants to raise the standards of what is considered appropriate corporate behaviour. Multistakeholder governance has been seen as particularly effective for inducing consensus-building, knowledge-sharing and interest representation (Fransen and Kolk 2007, Brassett et al. 2010, Abbott and Snidal 2009, Vogel 2008, Ponte 2013), in part due to the complementarity of public legitimacy brought to the table by NGO’s and the market outreach of lead firms, enabling effective implementation of standards. Current macro approaches explain the effectiveness of multistakeholder standard-setting from the functional complementarity of organizational competences brought together (Fransen and Kolk 2007, Brassett et al. 2010, Abbott and Snidal 2009, Vogel 2008), but in doing so they overlook an important micro-level aspect of consensus-building which has to do with the experiences of the experts that are pointed out to represent those organizations in the standard-setting process and with their positions in the interpersonal networks of multistakeholder governance. While those experts carry certain mandates from their respective organizations to the multi-stakeholder situation, they also occupy differential network positions and bring with them experiential backgrounds that cannot be reduced to those

organizational mandates. This paper investigates how the experiential backgrounds of experts shape their ability to take action on network positional opportunities (Burt 2010, 222).

The empirical analysis finds that actors with complex career trajectories in terms of sectorial affiliations are on average more central in the network connecting those multistakeholder institutions, enabling them to act as evokers of experientiality in the system. In addition to their comparatively greater capacity to evoke experientiality, thus building support for common framework solutions, diversely experienced actors may also increase organizational legitimacy because they are seen as 'knowing well' (Lazega 1992:30, Seabrooke 2014: 3-4) and having 'good ideas' (Burt 2004) rather than representing particularistic experiences. The notion of experientiality contributes to the current literature on the relationship between network characteristics and innovation, creativity and robustness (Uzzi and Spiro 2005; Bothner et al. 2010; Vedres and Stark 2010; Vaan et al. 2014) by adding the complexity of actors career experiences as an endogenous source of agency in networks. By bringing in entropic measures of career complexity, the paper contributes by adding experiential and temporal 'depth' (De Vaan et al. 2013) to the otherwise 'flat' treatment of nodes in networks. The paper also intervenes in contemporary debates about the changing character of expert authority by following the sociology of expertise anchored in phenomenological notions of experience (Eyal 2013). Through this notion, the paper pushes current approaches to transnational governance that understand the emergence of institutions from 'thick' shared understandings of a common abstract knowledge-base (Djelic and Quack 2010; Bartley 2012; Haas 1992; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Chwioroth 2010) or from organizational complementarities (see above) in the direction of a more 'organic' understanding of expertise as coming from diverse experiences.

The paper thus builds a network reading of the long-standing search for difference-based integration mechanisms within modern societies (Durkheim 1893). What enables voluntary agreement among contentious stakeholders in the global economy are those contemporary forms of transnational governance that are successful in embedding standards within the global economy in ways that resist the temptation of formulating the principles of a convergent belief systems. Instead those forms that can successfully articulate common framework solutions while allowing for the continued presence of stakeholdership are more viable, both functionally and experientially. This study thus provide an analytical approach that picks up on Durkheim's (1893) classical search for 'organic solidarity' that

may provide alternative integrative social anchors based on difference rather than similarity in social attributes. Yet experiences with multistakeholder governance still vary from sector to sector, and region to region, and thus innovation should continue based on those experiences with a view to heightening standards in the global economy.

The paper falls in five subsequent sections: The first section situates this approach in current scholarship on transnational governance. The second section gives an overview of multistakeholder governance and the emergence of a transnational network of multistakeholder institutions, outlining its history and main principles of operation. The third section goes through the data and methods and the fourth section analyses the role of experience for network members' centrality. In the fifth section, I conclude and discuss the implications of the findings.

2. Explaining transnational governance

In recent decades, numerous non-state-driven economic and environmental governance institutions have emerged transnationally, bringing industry- and product-specific stakeholders together to form consensus about common standards of appropriate behavior in what are often globalized markets. In some cases, these governance institutions are made up mainly of industry actors (sometimes also including a minority of 'general interest' roles) with divergent industry roles (e.g. fuel producers vs. engine manufacturers), thus creating coordination issues arising from role conflicts. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM International) and the International Organization of Standardization (ISO) are prominent examples of governance institutions in which primarily engineers from industry-specific producer and user organizations negotiate measurement and standards issues related to mainly quality specifications, but increasingly also broader environmental and social issues, and industrial policy (Murphy and Yates 2009; Büthe and Mattli 2011, Fransen and Kolk 2007, Fransen 2010, Abbott and Snidal 2009, Vogel 2008, Timmermans and Epstein 2010, Ponte et al. 2011, Higgins and Larner 2010). In a national context, these types of institutions date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whereas transnationally they mainly emerged in the immediate postwar era and later.

More recently, however, more diverse, inclusive and participatory standard-setting institutions have been established that address not only technical issues of so-called quality standards (regarding measurement and criteria of the physical and chemical substances contained in products) but also

consider broader, more normatively loaded principles of ‘sustainable’ market and production behavior. Although these institutions are industry- and/or product-specific, their issue scopes are broader, reflecting the inclusion and centrality of a more diverse host of organizations, including environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)(e.g. the WWF), Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) (e.g. Carrefour and Ikea) and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs)(e.g. the Inter-American Development Bank). The form of multistakeholder standard-setting connected to these institutions has been coined ‘Roundtabling’ (Ponte 2013) in reference to the participatory norms of standard-setting and the extraordinary diversity in their stakeholder compositions, including the resulting democratic legitimacy (Fransen 2012,, Abbott and Gartner 2012). Given this stakeholder diversity, the executive boards of these institutions also comprise experts with different experiential backgrounds, including their organizational and professional status. Other consensus-based governance institutions with similarly divergent organizational roles are usually characterized by common professional affiliations, allowing for professional status hierarchies to predominate when disagreement seems insurmountable. As noted above, the ASTM International and the ISO are dominated by engineers (Murphy and Yates 2009; Büthe and Mattli 2011); the International Swaps and Derivatives Association (ISDA) has its legal specialists (Morgan 2012) and the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) with its chartered accountants are additional examples (Perry and Noëlke 2005).

2.1. Existing approaches

In the past decade, a sizable amount of literature has emerged that attempts to explain the emergence of transnational governance institutions and their regulatory impact. Various aspects of these institutions’ regulatory impact have been assessed, including the agenda-setting capability, democratic legitimacy and implementation efficiency (Abbott and Snidal 2009). Agreement in the literature, however, converges on these institutions being effective consensus-builders, acting as so-called ‘orchestrators’ in the global economy (Abbott et al. 2014). Some scholars have suggested that the failure of state systems to manage increasing interdependency explains the emergence of this system. Some have put explicit emphasis on the agency of firms in responding to coordination problems that states cannot solve whereas others stress regulatory capture (Woods and Mattli 2009). Today, however, the literature has moved toward a greater recognition of the centrality of a broader cast of actors and set of experiences, including specifically NGOs and civic activist groups but also including states, although the role of states is often more protracted (Bartley 2007; Cashore 2002;

Bernstein and Cashore 2007, Büthe and Mattli 2011, Braithwaite and Drahos 2000; Abbott and Snidal 2009; Abbott 2011; Gale and Haward 2011; Foley 2012; Guldbrandsen, 2012; Auld 2012; Avant et al. 2010, Andanova et al. 2009, Vogel 2008).

The existing literature has emphasized increasing the analytical sensitivity to the macro-level composition of organizational mandates, linking the functional complementarity of organizational mandates and capabilities to regulatory outcomes and performance (Fransen and Kolk 2007; Fransen 2010, 2012; Abbott and Snidal 2009, 2009b, 2010). Another approach taken to explain consensus-building around transnational standards more generally has stressed micro-level dynamics of how shared understandings and community-like structures emerge through social closure, and as a result enable institutions and standards (Djelic and Quack, 2010; Bartley and Smith 2010; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Adler-Nissen 2012; Meyer et al 1997). This work also links back to earlier work from Peter Haas (1992) on the power of epistemic communities to resolve organizational interest conflicts in international arenas when building consensus-based policies. These lines of inquiry focus mainly on how abstract knowledge as providing shared understanding have also drawn on the sociology of professions in pointing to professional affiliations and status as facilitators of coordination in standard-setting processes (Searbrooke and Tsingou 2009; Dezalay and Garth 2002, Quack 2007; Suddaby et al. 2007). Transnational financial and environmental governance, in particular, increasingly rely on support from highly specialized professionals who have mastered the scientific methods that increasingly inform the content and tools of standards (Edwards 2010; Fourcade 2006; Chwiero 2010; Henriksen 2013; Seabrooke and Tsingou 2009; Suddaby and Viale 2011; Suddaby et al. 2007; Stone 2013; Haas 1992; Djelic and Quack 2012; Quack 2007, 2010; Reed 1996; Stone 2013). Yet for cases of multistakeholder standard-setting institutions in which the cognitive diversity of actors from different organizational, professional and backgrounds is high, this line of inquiry is inadequate. Yet, sensitivity towards the micro-level conditions of how actors can form agreement remains important.

2.2. Organic expertise: Towards an experience-based notion of expertise

Another direction of inquiry suggesting an experts-as-consensus-builders view is provided by Eyal in his recent suggestion to replace the sociology of professions with a sociology of expertise, drawing on STS insights to examine expertise in broader terms 'as a network linking together

agents, devices, concepts, and institutional and spatial arrangements’ and the diverse assemblages through which expertise operates (2013, 863). The relevance of STS scholarship also comes from considering expertise as *embodied* skills and knowledge (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Law 1992), delinking the necessary relationship between authority and abstract certified knowledge that has so far been the legacy of the sociology of professions (Abbott 1988). In this vein, experience-based expertise matters in multistakeholder governance, and executive decision-makers are certainly all seen as experts in their own right¹. But their enrollment is motivated by the specificity of their experiences rather than their subscription to a shared knowledge base. Some forms of expertise combine technical skills with a knowledge of fragile concerned groups (Callon et al. 2009; Kimura 2012; Eyal 2013), thus breaking down conventional categories of professionals and laymen. If differential forms of experience-based expertise are considered authoritative in multistakeholder governance, then the question becomes: what brings together different experiential backgrounds around common framework solutions? And secondarily, what differentiates some experts as more ‘organically’ providing a source of integration when organizational or professional status erodes as a singular hierarchical principle?

When transnational governance takes place in diverse networks, we are likely to observe the well-known behavior of network brokerage, which is a strategy of gaining positional leverage by inhabiting ‘thin’ network spaces (or ‘structural holes’) and thus connecting otherwise disconnected experiential domains (Burt 1992, 2005), or network entrepreneurship which involves occupying overlapping ‘thick’ network spaces, thus allowing for the integration of experiential knowledge across otherwise distant domains (Vedres and Stark 2010). Those actors who occupy positions from which they are able to mediate between, and sometimes reconcile, different experiential domains are crucial for transnational network governance to succeed (Goddard 2009; Stark 2009). Especially in a ‘thin’ transnational context, regulatory emergence relies heavily on those experts who find strategic advantage in seeking influence from arbitrage across organizational and professional boundaries (Henriksen and Seabrooke 2013; Seabrooke 2013). A network understanding of expertise is more apt for understanding how authority and influence works in the rulemaking context that is explored here. But as argued by Burt in his most recent book (2010), network positions are only opportunities for action. What makes some actors take action on those

¹ Interviews were conducted with board members of different multistakeholder institutions and they confirmed that even if organizational mandates are important, the ability to make expert arguments based on combinations of work, market and technical experience are crucial in standard-setting situations.

opportunities is a question that begs a more detailed look at the network nodes to learn about endogenous features of their agentic capabilities.

2.3. Experiential backgrounds from career sequences

Careers are evolving sequences of individual work experiences (Arthur et al. 1989, 8) but they are also personal network histories. Classical status-attainment approaches to career dynamics (Featherman 1971; Kelley 1973) and models of occupational socialization through organizational careers (Barley 1989) are well-suited for explaining the causal sequence of certain careers taking place in cohesive networks marked by closure: with one kind of experience linked to a highly cohesive network leading to similar experiences in the future, and so on. Within this approach, socialization into organizational belief systems is the mechanism by which people attain status (van Maanen 1977). The view from the organization is one of ‘matching’ the skills and behavior of its staff to its overall needs and mandates of the organization (Schein 1978). One major problem with this approach, however, is that experiential shifting is seen as probabilistic anomalies, or outliers. Contemporary network theory would suggest that closure and connectivity are functional complementarities (Burt 1992, 2010; Vedres and Stark 2010); mechanisms of inward closure create a need for branching outward.

Wilensky (1961) and Evans and Laumann (1983) have shown that the straightforward career is a ‘mirage’: careers are typically marked by much more turbulence and disruption than is generally recognized (see, also, Abbott and Hrycak 1990). Nicholson and West (1989, 182) have even suggested that transitions in work histories should be the unit of analysis of career studies and Abbott has suggested career ‘turning points’ as valuable sources of power and experience (Abbott 2001). The study of transitions is a way of exploring the critical incidents of experience and self-formation associated with individuals’ ‘evolution of social boundaries’. Hegel’s dialectical conception of experience as that which ‘runs counter to expectation’ is also implicit here (Van Maanen 1977).

To understand the backgrounds of board members involved in multistakeholder standard-setting, complexity in the sequencing of their careers is crucial. When complexity of a career system is too high to model, the methodological approach suggested by Abbott (2001, 161) to bracket the question of causality and instead characterize ‘narrative typicality’ seems a plausible solution.

Interestingly, Abbott has also argued that in ‘open elite’ contexts the status of individuals may rely more on the ‘robustness’ of their current opportunities than on the aggregation of their status in previous career steps. Because the trajectories for such open elites are likely to be marked by higher frequencies of ‘turning points’ from open opportunities, individuals who have broader work experience and network exposure are more likely to fare well. As Abbott argues, ‘...the most powerful actor is the one whose actions are the least predictable and least specifiable.’ (Abbott 2001, 247). Essentially, this argument suggests that ‘portfolio diversification strategies’ are more successful than are ‘socialization into organizations’ career trajectories. I start from this argument, but expand on it in two ways. Having diverse careers does not only entail building multiple future action spaces, it is also a predictor of experts’ capacities to evoke experientiality. First, diverse experiences enhance an expert’s ability to navigate diverse networks, and this ability mainly develops through complex personal network histories, that is, changeable careers. Actors with complex careers, as a result, are better at navigating diverse networks.

2.4 Consensus from experientiality

One central mechanism in this enhanced navigation is the focal point of this paper: experientiality. The concept of experientiality comes from literary theory and refers to an essential aspect of narratives. The concept was invented by Monika Fludernik in her reference to narratives’ ‘quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experiences’ (1996, 2). Narratives such as autobiographical life stories may furthermore be analytically decomposed as networks of experiential sequences, yielding insights into dynamics of emergence (Bearman and Stovel, 2000). Marco Caracciola (2012) has pushed the concept of experientiality in a slightly different direction than Fludernik, pointing to the use of experientiality not only to describe how stories evoke past real-life experiences but also to include how they can provide ‘new imaginative experiences’, referring to the ‘experiential feel of writing and reading stories’ (Caracciola 2012, 3). What characterizes an exceptional piece of art is its broad appeal, in being able to restructure the perception of viewers with very different experiential backgrounds. Exceptional work has high experientiality. In network terms, experientiality in narrative then point to the opportunity for events opening up network level ruptures. Narratives may then work to transgress experiential differences at time point 1 by inducing experientiality that regroup the perception of those difference in ways that make them more compatible. The art of great consensus-driven decision-making has similar qualities: it needs

to draw in diverse participants around common solutions to differently experienced, and perceived, problems.

In diverse networks, however, consensus formation is not necessarily a sign of participants ‘deeply’ held beliefs converging (cf. Martin 2002) (just as no deep overlap between beliefs or experiences is needed between the author and his audience). Instead, consensus is the art of finding imaginative middle-ground solutions that tap into the potentialities of diverse experiential backgrounds.

However, because participants begin with different experiential backgrounds, some convincing is necessary before a decision can be made, and a potential mechanism of this convincing is the evocation of experientiality. Overcoming the ‘undecidability of decision-making’ (Luhmann 1993) requires perhaps not necessarily an extraordinary event, but then at least the opening up of a situation to a solution that can be told as particularly imaginative. Let us refer to individuals who enable such contingent situations convincers.

3. Multistakeholder governance: The Emergence of a Transnational Network

I explore the relationship between career complexity and network centrality in an analysis of a network of board members at multistakeholder institutions that make product-related sustainability certification systems. The nine institutions (see below) are all membership-based organizations that have corporations and NGO’s as their primary members as well as public agencies, universities, research institutions and consultancies. The main activity of the institutions is issuing of standards for ‘good management and production practices’, as well as in some cases physical specifications and criteria related to the actual product. The literature on this type of transnational governance commonly characterizes such standard-setting institutions by the organizational mandates that dominate their decision-making infrastructures (for this argument and an extended review see (Henriksen 2013)). Following the above discussion of norm socialization, this literature is based on a strong assumption about the (organizational) identities of individual decision-makers and the strength of their socialization. There is a general neglect in the literature of the complex set of skills and experience of those who undertake actual decisions and only an anecdotal exploration of the attributes and histories of central individual entrepreneurs and brokers. In this paper, I see multistakeholder governance as an instantiation of transnational governance that has a particularly diverse institutional foundation. Each multistakeholder institution in itself makes up a network of product-specific stakeholders and members, but the nine institutions are also connected through

shared affiliations and memberships in a ‘network of networks’ that involves actual cross-board coordination rather than not only institutional imitation through shared understandings.

This assumption of ‘networkedness’ is thus empirically sound not only because of the convergent practices of standard-setting that mark multistakeholder governance as an institutional phenomenon but also because of the considerable connectedness across the nine boards: NGOs such as the WWF and Solidaridad and MNC’s such as Unilever, Nutreco and Carrefour are represented on various boards and thus connect the boards together into a ‘small world’-like structure (Watts 2003). The institutions all emerged in response to some form of public ‘protest’ over the perceived adverse ecological effects of specific product-classes, such as forestry, aquaculture or bioenergy. Although they have different histories, the institutions are similar in that they include a highly diverse set of stakeholders participating in standard-setting processes. In Figure 1 (see appendix), the interlocking board network is represented as an affiliation network with person-to-organization ties based on affiliations (commonly also referred to as a two-mode network). According to this structure, individuals are indirectly tied to each other through common affiliations with the boards as well as their stakeholder organizations (a more detailed empirical analysis of the network is provided below).

Part of the puzzle that led me to pursue the research for this article was an observation about a common trait in the career patterns of board members based on qualitative and historical research. First, after interviewing individuals who had been central in founding the first of the nine institutions, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), it was clear that although those ‘founding fathers’ clearly had strong ties (including long-standing employment) with environmental activism, their sense of belonging was not tied exclusively to the world of activism but, rather, to a much more pragmatic sense of ‘getting things done,’ asking the question ‘what does it take to accomplish a task?’ (Eyal 2013). Professionally, they saw themselves as ‘environmentalist entrepreneurs,’ less connected to any specific organizational form and more tied to a project of heightening sustainability standards in their respective areas of expertise. Francis Sullivan, for instance, who is known to be one of the most important actors in pitching the original certification idea to the key activist networks working on global issues of biodiversity and deforestation immediately before the FSC was established, had a remarkable career that underlines this pragmatism. Sullivan was first a dedicated activist, but he never restricted his work to traditional forms of activism. He studied

agriculture and forestry at Oxford University and then joined the WWF in 1987 and went on to play a central role in establishing the FSC as well as what is currently known as the UK Forest and Trade Network. Sullivan later ran WWF's internal change team, 'Action Network,' to develop strategies for scaling up conservation activities. As the Director of Conservation at WWF-UK from 1999 to 2004, he was also heavily involved in establishing WWF's key role in the HSBC 'Investing in Nature' programme. Subsequently, he moved on to work with the HSBC (from 2004) as their Adviser on the Environment. Interestingly, Sullivan has maintained some of his personal contacts from the early FSC days intact: in 2010 he co-launched the Global Association for Corporate Sustainability Officers (GACSO) with Alan Knight from B&Q (who was also part of the initial network of the Certification Working Group that led to the establishment of the FSC (more on this below)), an initiative aiming at codifying standards, codes and training for 'sustainability professionals.'²

Chris Elliott, who was equally important—being the first chair of the FSC board of directors—has had a similar career. Elliott is currently the Executive Director of the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA). CLUA is a collaborative initiative of the ClimateWorks Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Before joining CLUA, Elliott worked for the WWF in a variety of capacities for over 20 years, initially as the China Program Coordinator, and most recently as executive director of conservation at WWF International. Before joining WWF, he worked for the World Bank, the Bank of Boston and a Swiss foundation focusing on organic agriculture and natural medicine. Elliott has been closely involved in major forest conservation initiatives in the Congo Basin and the Amazon, and he led the development of a global partnership between the WWF and IKEA. He also wrote a doctoral dissertation on forest certification late in his career and he is currently an adjunct professor in the Department of Forest Sciences, University of British Columbia.³ An additional example of a key entrepreneur from the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), established in 2010, is Jose Villalon who originally joined the board as a WWF employee but who recently went to work for Nutreco as sustainability manager also sits on the ASC board.

² This information was compiled from biographies, CVs and presentations that are publicly available from various websites.

³ Skype interview conducted on September 20, 2013. Information is from Elliot's personal CV.

This anecdotal evidence illustrates how networks associated with the multistakeholder institutions relate to the unfolding of individual career experiences. Clearly, in the above-described cases, it has been the ‘network and experience’ from multistakeholder work that lead to the career ‘turning points’ of Sullivan, Elliott and Villalon. Building careers as activist brought them into contact with the business side of regulation and eventually led to work in that arena. Ample research has revolved around the role of networks in facilitating job search and career opportunities through improved access to information, social capital and trust-building (Granovetter 1973, Montgomery 1992, Bian 1997). What I will focus on below however is the reverse mechanism: To what extent are experiential backgrounds from careers antecedents of network positions; is the nature of trajectories in themselves important in shaping network processes? Before beginning the in-depth analysis of experientiality and networks, some background on the history of multistakeholder governance is warranted to understand the relevant decision-making context in point.

3.1. The history of multistakeholder governance

Certification and labeling emerged as forms of governance in the mid- to late 1980s in response to growing public concern over adverse environmental and social consequences, including health issues, related to the ‘life cycles’ of certain commodities (Gale and Haward 2011, 48; Counsell and Loraas 2002, 11-2). The first labels to certify products’ ‘fairness’ or ‘goodness’ were established in the Netherlands (Max Havelaar) and the UK (‘Good Wood Guide’), respectively by the Dutch environmental-cum-development NGO Solidaridad and the UK-based Friends of the Earth group respectively (Cadman 1999, 120). At the same time, the US-based Rainforest Alliance had developed the Smart Wood Program, which was launched in 1989 (Gulbrandsen 2010, 52). These early systems were based on ‘sustainability’ criteria but were mere forerunners of the later programs that would abandon the vocabulary of sustainability (Synnott 2005, 17; Cadman 2011, 45).

Since then, many more labels have been tailored to certify different products. The first comprehensive sustainability certification system was focused on forestry products and developed by the FSC. With more than 1200 FSC certified forest areas in 80 countries covering more than 40% of the total certified forest area in Europe and the US (FSC 2013), the FSC has been an important global player in recent decades whose features have had a substantial institutional imprint on subsequent schemes.

From early on, the organizational and personal networks of environmentalists affiliated with Solidaridad, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Rainforest Alliance and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) collaborated in raising sustainability issues relating to forestry products in a wide array of decision-making arenas. Although FSC's scale and scope has increased massively in the past two decades following the initial pioneering initiatives, the original network of environmentalists has not remained stable. Questions of issue focus, governance arrangement and institutional-setup became a growing sources of contestation as actual certification systems were designed to take into account divergent organizational and personal mandates and perspectives (Synnott 2005; Gale and Haward 2011, 48). What at first seemed to be a relatively cohesive network coalition of organizations evolved into a more fragmented network, with some organizations increasing their control over processes related to the designing and managing sustainability certificates while displacing others to more peripheral positions.

One crucial change to the network was the entrance of business experience.⁴ After having failed to push the issue of forest certification at the inter-state level with the *International Tropical Timber Organization* (ITTO), the WWF in particular started to mobilize business interests directly into negotiations circumventing state or inter-state decision-making locations (Humphreys 1996, 72-5)⁵. The WWF also established so-called "trade networks" that aimed aimed at convincing large-scale timber consuming businesses to source sustainable product in addition to an important partnership with the World Bank to promote global demand.⁶ Because the sustainability of forestry products was already a major concern of mass consumer movements, some producers and retailers also saw an opportunity to protect their brands against public shaming and potentially capture niche markets for particularly environmentally conscious consumer segments (Counsell and Loraas 2002, 12). Thus, the WWF's close connections to forest businesses in tandem with the more hostile shaming and boycotting strategies of Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were central in giving the pre-FSC process its impetus. The combination of failed state coordination and the relative alignment of the

⁴ A growing number of business initiatives also evolved in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with companies developing their own codes of conduct, labels and reporting procedures to signal an ethical stance on sustainability concerns (Kolk 2004).

⁵ Friends of the Earth and the WWF were particularly active in lobbying for a state-backed global certification system on forestry (Gulbrandsen 2010, 52). As Gulbrandsen notes forest certification systems developed alongside intergovernmental processes, but enjoyed increasing success as it became clear that no international convention could be agreed upon.

⁶ Establishing the WWF-World Bank Forest Alliance.

early NGO networks with ‘progressive’ business interests in consequence lead to a series of meetings in which the FSC institutional design was developed.

The idea of the FSC was conceived by Hubert Kwisthout, the head of a UK timber import company called the Ecological Trading Company (ETC) that had specialized in sourcing sustainable timber (Cashore et. al. 2004, 3-5). In exchanges with Francis Sullivan from the WWF-UK Kwisthout had come up with the idea of an *International Forest Monitoring Agency* (Synnott 2005, 10). In 1990, Kwisthout presented the idea at a meeting of the Woodworkers Alliance for Rainforest Protection (WARP) and a Certification Working Group (CWG) was established. As Timothy Synnott (2005, 13) notes, ‘Over the next year, most of the activities that led to the founding of FSC were associated with this group or its members. However, it remained quite informal, as a gradually expanding circulation list or forum, rather than a fixed membership.’

The first draft of the FSC charter was conceived at a CWG meeting that took place in San Francisco in April 1991 with the WWF, the Rainforest Alliance, Greenpeace, the British timber retailer B&Q, ETC, and the original WARP members as participants (Cadman 2011, 219). Those initial participants mainly had experience in their respective sectors, but as noted above, they shared a sense of wanting to get things done. The charter thus brought together rudimentary standards developed by ETC, WARP and Rainforrest Alliance. Prior to the San Francisco meeting, ETC had already proposed a set of ‘criteria and standards for sustainable forest management’ that had been accepted at the WARP founding conference. Note that at this point, the object of regulation had become forest management rather than actual product qualities. Moreover, the Rainforrest Alliance had published its SmartWood Guidelines, which carried the same style of principles and criteria as the Charter would carry.⁷ After the San Francisco meeting, the charter was re-drafted several times. first with Francis Sullivan of the WWF-UK in 1991 and later in 1992 with Ivan Ussach and Richard Donovan, both of whom been affiliated with and held important roles within the Rainforrest Alliance playing a significant role (Synnott 2005, 18). In parallel, a consultation process was conducted in ten countries to take stock of institutional support.

The founding assembly of the FSC was held in Toronto in September 1993 with 134 participants, 56 of whom were from the Global South (Synnott 2005, 21). A highly contested issue was whether

⁷ For a detailed account of this drafting process see Synnott (2005, 17-20).

business interests should have voting power and, if so, in what proportion. As an NGO participant recalls: ‘For two nights and days there was a running battle between the economic group and social environmental stakeholders, who at that time were still joined together... There wasn’t any preliminary agreement until just before the party the last evening’ (quoted from Cadman 2011, 46-7). The argument here was that if the FSC were to ‘make a real difference across the entire forest sector rather than develop a “boutique” standard, it needed to include a strong voice from the industry...’ (Gale and Haward 2011, 51).

Simon Counsell from Friends of the Earth coordinated the position of the group that was sceptical towards business, but after a number of discussions the number of skeptics dwindled, and Chris Elliott of the WWF, who chaired the meeting, ‘denied one of Counsell’s demand for the right of reply {and} the rump of the group withdrew from the discussion and abstained from voting’ (Synnott 2005, 23). After this controversy, agreement was reached on a formalized chamber System with social and environmental interests holding 75% of votes on the board and with business holding 25%. Another important outcome of the meeting was that FSC was set up as a member association with a board and not as a foundation as was originally intended, which was arguably acceptable as a pragmatic solution to bridging those skeptical of business interest participation with those in favor of it (Cadman 2009, 121).⁸ In essence, this was when the ‘multistakeholder’ certification system as a form of governance took shape, and given its subsequent mushrooming across a variety of industries and commodity domains, it is difficult to underestimate the institutional imprint of this system. Elliott was the central broker of the deal at the assembly, mediating deliberations between environmentalist and business experiences: At this point he had worked with the WWF for seven years and had been responsible for an initially regional and subsequently global conservation program, but his experiential background was more diverse than that. He had also worked in research at the World Bank and had work experience from the Bank of Boston and a Swiss foundation focusing on organic agriculture and natural medicine. In a telephone interview, Elliott confirmed that career experience is crucial to what is considered expert opinion in this context but that organizational affiliation is another important trait of expertise.⁹ This evidence

⁸ The initial expectation within the working group was that FSC would be a foundation with only a board of trustees, but this proposal was resisted by a coalition of business skeptics who ‘persuaded the working group to adopt a participatory structure including open membership and accountability mechanisms and procedures for settling disputes’ (Cadman 2009, 121).

⁹ Interview conducted September 20 2013.

suggests that his diverse experience is part of what allowed him take a central position as mediator between experienced business and environmentalist experts.

Multistakeholder governance is now a form of standard-setting that is arguably more heterogeneous and inclusive than other forms of private governance incorporating a wider array of concerned groups (Ponte 2013; see also Brassett et al. 2010 and Vogel 2008). Already in 1998, the Marine Stewardship Council followed with a slightly different institutional setup, and in 2003, the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil followed, with the WWF playing a key foundational role in designing both certification systems. Since then, more organizations have followed, in particular to certify agrofood and bioenergy products (such as sugar, beef, soy, biofuel and biodiesel), and yet more are in the making (Brassett et al. 2010). Currently nine multistakeholder institutions exist, eight of which have operational voluntary standards in place, including principles and criteria documents specifying ‘sustainable’ production practices that are for the most part enforced through third-party certification systems. In Table 1, a cursory overview of the standards and standards’ bodies is provided. Before a more systematic empirical assessment of the role of experiential backgrounds in the network centrality of board members, the data and methods used in this assessment will be introduced.

Table 1. Overview of multistakeholder governance institutions

| Name – date established | Current status | Main standard in place | Current membership |
|--|--|--|--------------------|
| Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) -1993 | 1229 certified forest areas in 80 countries, 180,538,563 hectares | ‘FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship’, including National Standards (third party certification system in place) | 820 members |
| Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) - 1997 | 147 fisheries, 2,000 seafood businesses certified, 15,000 products available across 84 countries | ‘The MSC Environmental Standard for Sustainable Fishing’ (third party certification system in place) | 50 members |
| Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) - 2003 | 14% of world’s crude palm oil | ‘RSPO Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production’ (third party certification system in place) | +1000 members |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|-------------|
| Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) – 2005 | 165,000 farmers (aim of one million by 2015), 685,000 hectares | ‘Better Cotton System’ (farm ‘self-reporting’ system in place) | 248 members |
| Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS) - 2006 | 345,638 hectares and 714,163 tons certified | ‘RTRS Standard’ (third-party certification system) | 157 members |
| Better Sugarcane Initiative (BSI) - 2006 | 695,000 hectares and 43,302,526 tons certified (3% of global sugarcane production area) | ‘Bonsucro Standard’, including an EU regional standards (third-party certification system) | 106 members |
| Roundtable on Sustainable Bioenergy (RSB) - 2007 | TEn feedstock and fuel producers certified, nine different countries | ‘RSB Principles and Criteria’, including a range of product-specific standards and methods (third-party certification system) | 101 members |
| Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) - 2009 | 54 certified farms, ASC certified products in 24 countries (mainly Europe and North America) | Eight species-specific standards. | 2 members |
| Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) - 2012 | No certified product yet. | Standards under development, definitions currently being developed. | 34 members |

Source: Various websites of the institutions. A somewhat similar but slightly outdated overview can be found in Brassett et al. (2010).

4. Data and methods

4.1. Data

The data set used in the following sections consists of two parts: 1) a network matrix and 2) a career sequence matrix. I constructed a two-mode network matrix with the rows being board members and the columns being multistakeholder institutions and stakeholder organizations. The population of board members was 109. The data set contained all board member network ties through common affiliations in 2013. A tie was thus present between two actors if 1) they were on the same board or 2) if they worked within the same organization. One individual served on multiple boards (Jan Kees Viis, RTRS and RSPO) and one individual represented two different organizations for the year 2013 (Jose Villalon, the WWF and subsequently Nutreco). Twenty-four of 109 were across bridges boards, and thus served as ‘interlockers’ or brokers.

I also constructed a career sequence matrix of board members careers from 1980 to 2013. The matrix is a time series of the career states of 106 board members (including all interlockers)¹⁰. Career states were coded by organizational domain or combinations of several domains because I was interested in recording the organizational complexity of their professional experience. I used a bottom-up coding approach in which I developed categories from the prevalence of states in the population. The following categories of organizational domains were arrived at through this bottom-up approach: (A) non-business development or environmental non-governmental organization (NGO), (B) government or public agency, (C) business or business interest organization (firm), (D) universities or independent research institutions (academia) and (E) independent consultants or professional service firms (consultancies).¹¹

My coding system involved three digit codes because a considerable number of board members simultaneously held two or more jobs in different organizational domains. University tenure combined with a formal employment in an environmental NGO was thus coded A-D-X. I also coded standard demographics such as gender, academic degrees and country of origin as well as their current organizational affiliations. With this coding system, only job transitions involving

¹⁰ CVs were obtained from public records such as personal websites, public registers, LinkedIn and personal interviews. CVs could not be obtained for three board members and hence the analysis was only run for 106 individuals. None of the missing individuals however were interlockers.

¹¹ The short terms were applied for convenience.

domain shifts were recorded, the underlying assumption being that those were the career transitions other stakeholders considered. Analytically, this coding allowed me to not only focus on the frequency of career transitions per se but, instead, to measure the complexity of the overall career sequences. This approach was convenient because I was not interested in specific transitions but, rather, in assessing what the overall careers signaled to peers within the stakeholder network.

4.2. Methods and measures

To test my proposition that network centrality is likely to be higher for board members with more experiential complexity, I investigated the statistical association between experience and network centrality using simple Pearson correlation and logistic regression methods. I calculated four commonly used centrality measures in social network analysis that served as the dependent variables. I measured experiential complexity using the sequence complexity measure of entropy applied to the board members' career sequences. Entropy was the main dependent variable.

Centrality, an important structural attribute of networks (Freeman 1979, 217), is one of the most thoroughly debated measures in social network analysis and various measures have been developed and refined to account for different aspects of actors' importance, agentic capacities, influence and status (Bonacich 1987, Borgatti 1995). However, as Steve Borgatti notes, different notions of centrality are associated with implicit assumptions about the nature of the mechanisms of flow at play in a given network (Borgatti 2005). Borgatti distinguishes between *copy mechanisms* (serial as well as parallel) that work through replication and *move mechanisms* that work through translocation (Ibid., 58). Whereas the copy mechanism assumes that what flows in the network stays with the sender and remains unaltered, the move mechanism assumes the potential for transforming the content of what is being passed in the network.¹² I concur with Borgatti's refined treatment of this dichotomy whereby he conceptually considers both types of processes and discusses how they can be meaningfully applied to different empirical flow processes, rather than disqualifying either of them on ontological grounds. I assume that both mechanisms are at play in the network and that they both matter for the status ascription of network peers, but I do not have data to evaluate their relative importance.

¹² This conception bears considerable resemblance to Michel Callon's (1986) typology of diffusion vs. translation models of how social power and belief are enacted, highlighting how fundamentally different conceptions of agency arise from the two models.

I calculated the four commonly accepted centrality measures (Borgatti 1995): degree-, closeness, eigenvectors, and betweenness. Although these variables measure different aspects of actors' structural capacities to influence network processes through copy and move mechanisms, they can invariably be seen as indicators of status and power (Bonacich 1987, Borgatti 1995). *Degree centrality*, defined as the number of ties connecting to a node (or the number of paths of length one of a node), measures an actors' ability to influence his/her immediate environment (Freeman 1979). WWF board members, for instance, are on average more central because they are tied not only to other board members (whom, in turn, they are able to influence through board interactions) but also to WWF affiliates who operate on other boards. As argued by Borgatti, degree centrality is a particularly appropriate measure of the capacity to perform parallel copy mechanisms, because 'the probability of receiving—in the next time period—something that is randomly distributed in the network, will be entirely a function of the number of ties that a given node has' (Borgatti 2005, 62).

Closeness centrality is another well-known measure in the toolbox of social network analysts. Closeness has classically been conceived as a measure of an actors' independence, that is, the actor's ability to communicate or disseminate information and knowledge without relying on other actors and thus being forced to relax control over what he or she relays (Bavelas 1950; Leavitt 1951; Freeman 1979). In graph-theoretical terms, an actor's closeness is defined as the sum of the shortest distances from all other nodes in the network (Freeman 1979, 225). *Eigenvector centrality* is an important variation of degree centrality designed to capture the importance of a nodes' alters, and not just their immediate environs. Eigenvector assigns relative scores to all nodes in the network based on the idea that connections to high-scoring nodes contribute more to the score of the node in question than do equal connections to low-scoring nodes. *Betweenness centrality* is yet a different measure of centrality that takes non-local network dynamics into account. Betweenness centrality counts the number of the shortest paths that pass through a node and therefore is an indicator of a node's ability to block or facilitate flow processes in the overall network, even across distant regions (Freeman 1979, 222-24).

I define *sequence complexity* using the well-known measure of information, entropy. Entropy is often interpreted as the uncertainty of predicting a sequence of states given a specific range of observed states. Simple sequences (e.g., AAAA), as it were, contain little information because they are easily reducible (e.g., 4A). Complex sequences (ADCB) are difficult to reduce and therefore

contain more information. Entropy is a measure of the amount of information in a sequence. Entropy takes into account the uncertainty of, or difficulty in predicting, a sequence (Gabadinho et al. 2011, 77-8). Entropy is sometimes viewed as the expected number of optimal yes-no questions to determine a sequence's composition. Another measure of complexity, developed by Elzinga et al. (2010) is that of sequence turbulence. Sequence turbulence also takes into account the number of distinct subsequences in combination with the variation in their duration. If durations are short, turbulence increases. In this study, I was not interested in durations as such but in how career sequence complexity is evaluated. Moreover, in terms of measuring experience, turbulence allows for short durations. Short durations, however, may come at the cost of familiarity with the novelty that one is exposed to. Entropy is therefore the best fit for measuring the complexity of the state composition because as argued by Elzinga (2010, 467) it is 'fully insensitive to transition frequency or the order of the events'.

5. Experience, experientiality and network centrality

5. 1. Career descriptions

In this section, I briefly present the network statistics and inspect the careers of board members. As suggested above, expertise develops from the composition of career experiences, including training experiences as one particular element of those experiences. Table 2 provides a list of the number of board members with specific domain experience, including the accumulated times as well as the mean times spent in a specific domain for the overall population of board members. The table also lists the occurrence of career transitions across domains. Most board members had firm experience (68%), and almost half had experience with NGOs (45%). The time spent in specific domains was even more centralized around firms (47%) but much less so for NGO's (20%), public agencies (15%), academia (25%) and consultancies (24%). This pattern is explained by the much shorter mean consecutive employment durations for those domains. Job mobility between firms and NGOs accounted for 19% of all cross-domain transitions among board members. Transitions between firms and NGOs on the one hand and academia and consultancies on the other were also disproportionately high, which again can be explained by the short time spent in academia or consultancies before board members moved on to other jobs.

Table 2. Years of experience, frequency, mean time spent and transitions across domains

| | Board members' experience (persons) | Domain frequency (years) | Mean domain time spent (years) | Cross-domain career transitions (symmetric count) | | | |
|------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---|----------|----------|------------|
| | | | | Public | Firm | Academic | Consultant |
| NGO | 48 (45%) | 504 (20%) | 3.94 | 10 (7%) | 26 (19%) | 14 (10%) | 16 (12%) |
| Public | 32 (30%) | 376 (15%) | 2.77 | - | 15 (11%) | 10 (7%) | 5 (4%) |
| Firm | 72 (68%) | 1175 (47%) | 10.07 | - | - | 21 (15%) | 13 (10%) |
| Academic | 26 (25%) | 272 (11%) | 1.52 | - | - | - | 6 (4%) |
| Consultant | 25 (24%) | 168 (7%) | 1.27 | - | - | - | - |
| Hybrid | (22 (21%)) | (196) | - | - | - | - | - |

Considering the patterns of board members' full career sequences allows us to divide them into two overall groups: The pure and the hybrid careers. Whereas the pure careers involve no transitions, the hybrid careers involve at least one. Pure careers can again be divided into four subgroups, with the largest being from firms (30) and with an equal distribution from NGOs (9) and public bodies (9). Only one board member had a purely academic career. More board members had hybrid careers (57) than pure ones (49). The number of transitions ranged from one to six for those with a hybrid career. Again, hybrid careers can be divided into five subgroups: the two largest groups were those whose members had mostly been employed with either firms or NGOs, but there was considerable movement across those as well as other domains. Two additional groups were characterized by hybridity across the NGO domain on the one hand and public agencies and academia on the other. Lastly, the true hybrids were careers that involved frequent transitions with no domain-dominant employment. To sum up, even if we found hybrid careers to be more frequent than pure ones with considerable transition across all five domains, and most careers were anchored in firms, or subsequent NGOs or public agencies. I now describe some key characteristics and statistics of the network.

Table 3. Typology of career sequences

| Organizational domain | Duration | Number of occurrences |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Pure | | (49) |
| Firm | | (30) |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------------|
| | Long | 8 |
| | Medium | 13 |
| | Short | 9 |
| NGO | | (9) |
| | Medium | 4 |
| | Short | 5 |
| Public | | (9) |
| | Long | 4 |
| | Medium | 5 |
| Academia | Long | 1 |
| Hybrid | | (57) |
| Firm (<i>dominant state</i>) | | (30) |
| | Long | 16 |
| | Short | 14 |
| NGO (<i>dominant state</i>) | Medium | 13 |
| 'True' Hybrids | Long | 5 |
| Academia-NGO | Long | 4 |
| Public-NGO | Long | 5 |
| | | (Total 106) |

5.2 Network descriptions

Figure 1 (see appendix) presents a simplified visualization of the two-mode network that includes only interlockers. Clearly, the WWF was organizationally the central coordinator of the network, with board members on all mutistakeholder institutions. Solidaridad, a Dutch environmental NGO known for its role in the corporate Social responsibility debate, held thee board seats, followed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), Nutreco, Unilever, Carrefour, Rabobank and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), all with two board members. This centralization of the network around the WWF makes affiliation with the WWF a systematic confounder of centrality. Measured by their mean individual centrality scores, all WWF board members were naturally among the most central because their ties with WWF colleagues placed them in a central position in the network (see Table 2). As the only individuals ranking above WWF affiliates, Gloria Visconti from the IADB and Barbara Bramble from the NWF were both in structurally central positions because they served on the Roundtable for Sustainable Bioenergy, which increased their overall

closeness in the network and gave them access to well-connected peers (high eigenvector centrality).

Table 4. Normalized centrality measures of interlockers (ranked by mean)

| Name | Stakeholder Organization | Multi-stakeholder institutions | Degree | Close | Eigen | Between | Mean |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Laszlo Mathe | WWF | RSB | .267 | .629 | .356 | .238 | .373 |
| Alfred Schumm | WWF | MSC | .248 | .619 | .168 | .096 | .283 |
| Will Martin | WWF | MSC | .248 | .619 | .168 | .096 | .283 |
| Adam Harrison | WWF | RSPO | .238 | .614 | .100 | .174 | .282 |
| Gloria Visconti | IADB | RSB | .181 | .487 | .308 | .017 | .248 |
| Kevin Ogorzalek | WWF | BSI | .190 | .590 | .080 | .130 | .248 |
| Barbara Bramble | NWF | RSB | .181 | .478 | .302 | .015 | .244 |
| Bryan Weech | WWF | GRSB | .190 | .590 | .082 | .114 | .244 |
| Cassio Franco | WWF | RTRS | .200 | .595 | .086 | .093 | .244 |
| Margareta Renstroem | WWF | FSC | .171 | .581 | .078 | .126 | .239 |
| Hammad Kahn | WWF | BCI | .200 | .595 | .087 | .074 | .239 |
| Jose Villalon | WWF, Nutreco | ASC | .162 | .576 | .078 | .097 | .228 |
| Jan Kees Vis | Unilever | RSPO, RTRS | .248 | .533 | .049 | .043 | .218 |
| Werner Kiene | IADB | MSC | .171 | .484 | .128 | .017 | .200 |
| David Mureithi | Unilever | MSC | .171 | .492 | .114 | .017 | .199 |
| Herve Gomichon | Carrefour | MSC | .171 | .478 | .113 | .010 | .193 |
| Joko Arif | Carrefour | RSPO | .152 | .481 | .036 | .010 | .170 |
| Gert van der Bijl | Solidaridad | RTRS | .133 | .494 | .018 | .025 | .170 |
| Janet Mensink | Solidaridad | BCI | .143 | .476 | .024 | .019 | .166 |
| Geraldine Lim | Rabobank | RSPO | .152 | .460 | .031 | .001 | .161 |
| Sven Sielhorst | Solidaridad | BSI | .124 | .467 | .012 | .021 | .156 |
| Jaap Oskam | Nutreco | RTRS | .114 | .452 | .020 | .005 | .148 |
| Nathalie Walker | NWF | GRSB | .105 | .443 | .028 | .014 | .148 |
| Daniela Mariuzzo | Rabobank | RTRS | .114 | .444 | .017 | .001 | .144 |
| Mean interlockers | | | .178 (.05) | .528 (.07) | .103 (.10) | .061 (.06) | .218 (.06) |
| Mean entire network | | | .138 (.05) | .457 (.06) | .088 (.11) | .015 (.04) | .174 (.05) |

5.3. Experientiality, mandates and network centrality

To test the statistical association between entropy and the four centrality measures, the Pearson correlation coefficients for those variables as well as for select control variables were calculated. A positive association between entropy and the four centrality measures was found across the board, with the strongest effects on closeness and degree centrality (see Table 5). WWF and/or NGO affiliates were also on average more central than were other board members, whereas firm board members lowered entropy as well as centrality scores. Interestingly, board members with higher education in social science were more likely to have high entropies as well as high eigenvector centrality. The higher eigenvector centrality of those with a social science higher education likely stemmed from their overrepresentation on the Roundtable for Sustainable Bioenergy, which as a result of the board's overall structural position in the network, had a higher eigenvector centrality. Training in science was negatively associated with degree and eigenvector centrality, which can be explained by scientists' often specialist roles on specific boards without a high degree of coordination across the boards. Board members with law degrees also had higher centrality scores, but because many of those trained in law were also WWF and/or NGO affiliates, this result was not robust. Gender played no major role, except that board members from the Global North were more likely to be female than those from the Global South. The strongest confounder of the relationship between entropy and centrality was clearly organizational affiliation. Because the WWF affiliation was also what drove the positive association between centrality and NGO affiliation, I use a regression model to control for WWF affiliation and gender.

Table 5. Correlation table

| N=104 | Entropy | Degree | Close | Eigen | Between | WWF | Firm | NGO | Gender | North |
|---------|----------|----------|----------|--------|----------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|-------|
| Degree | .30*** | | | | | | | | | |
| Close | .35***** | .84***** | | | | | | | | |
| Eigen | .20** | .65***** | .32***** | | | | | | | |
| Between | .27*** | .51**** | .86***** | .04 | | | | | | |
| WWF | .21** | .45***** | .75***** | .06 | .87***** | | | | | |
| Firm | -.18* | -.24** | -.30*** | -.21** | -.29*** | -.31*** | | | | |
| NGO | .36***** | .36***** | .47***** | .26*** | .41***** | .41***** | -.76***** | | | |
| Gender | -.13 | -.14 | -.04 | -.23** | .02 | .02 | -.03 | .02 | | |
| North | .11 | .01 | 0 | -.01 | .08 | .04 | 0 | -.07 | -.23** | |
| MBA | -.2* | -.16 | -.17 | -.17 | -.14 | -.08 | .38***** | -.27** | .06 | -.21* |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-------|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|------|------|
| M.Sc | -.03 | -.19* | -.12 | -.27** | .01 | .12 | .05 | -.11 | .07 | .03 |
| MA Soc | .24** | .14 | .07 | .31*** | -.01 | -.1 | -.1 | .14 | -.11 | -.03 |
| Law degree | .11 | .32*** | .37**** | .18* | .30*** | .41**** | -.23** | .29*** | -.08 | .01 |

Significance codes: p < '****' 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*' 0.1

For all four linear models, entropy remained positively associated with centrality across the board, although the magnitude of the association decreased after I controlled for WWF affiliation and gender. The association was particularly strong for eigenvectors (where WWF affiliation effect was also weak and insignificant), suggesting that diverse experience is particularly important in interactions with well-connected experts. However, the association between entropy and betweenness was relatively weak, suggesting that the function of inducing shorter paths in the network was more driven by organizational affiliation, in this case WWF affiliation. Affiliation was also more important for closeness centrality than was entropy, although the association was still considerable. In contrast, entropy and affiliations were more or less equally associated with network centrality. The only significant effect of gender was on eigenvector centrality, for which a slight negative association could be traced. These results reinforce that although the positive gains in terms of network centrality were higher for WWF affiliates, entropy was consistently associated with higher centrality regardless of the mandates carried.

Table 6. Linear logistic regression

| Independent variable | Degree | Close | Eigen | Between |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Entropy | .05** | .06*** | .10* | .02* |
| WWF | .07*** | .15**** | .01 | .10**** |
| Gender | -.01 | 0.00 | -.06** | .00 |
| Constant | .13**** | .44**** | .12**** | .00 |
| N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| Residual standard error | .04 | .003 | .10 | .01 |
| Adj. R-squared | .24 | .58 | .06 | .76 |
| P-value | <.001 | <.001 | <.030 | <.001 |

Significance codes: p < '****' 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*' 0.1

6. Conclusion: understanding experiential complexity in transnational network governance

In this paper it has been argued that in order to understand the role of agency for consensus formation in diverse network we must complement inference from the formal structural properties of agentic opportunity with inference about where experience to actualize this opportunity comes from. Connectivity is a necessary condition for consensus formation in diverse networks, since the presence of network central topologies allows for difference to encounter and align. But what inhabits those otherwise ‘flat’ topologies matter: Actors with diverse experience are more likely to induce experientiality from their central topologies, including diverse experiential backgrounds in emergent narratives rather than imposing static beliefs as in network stories about ‘hubs and authorities’. The presence of what I called organic expertise is therefore crucial to enable consensus in diverse networks.

I have explored the relationship between experience and network centrality in a transnational multistakeholder governance network. I have argued that in governance settings characterized by diverse stakeholder status ascriptions are likely to hinge on experiential complexity and not simply on formal training and organizational affiliation. I have also argued that studies on careers in international organizations have focused on careers as a socialization process by which actors internalize organizational and/or professional norms. In this paper, I use career sequence data to calculate indicators of experiential complexity. Building on the case study of multistakeholder governance, I have explored the interlocking boards network of nine multistakeholder institutions and the relationship between the centrality of board members within this network on the one hand and their career histories on the other. This analysis shows that both experiential complexity and organization- and organizationalform-specific affiliations are associated with network centrality, with WWF and NGO members benefitting from their affiliations as opposed to firm members, who are on average less central. The analysis also shows that training matters to some extent, but that training, in for example business or law is highly confounded with organizational affiliations and therefore is not independently important. Social science-trained board members, however, have more experiential complexity and also higher eigenvectors. The centrality of WWF affiliates can be historically explained by their central role in establishing all of the institutions and in their overall role as cross-institution coordinators. Their central strategy, ‘Transforming Markets,’ is at the heart of this process. Why, though, are board members with high experiential complexity more central in the network?

One key explanation places agency with organizations: organizations that participate in sustainability standard-setting are interested in signaling that they ‘know well’ (Lazega 1992) and are genuinely interested in improving standards based on knowing well, and not based on particularistic interests. The board members being selected by central firms are more experienced because those firms want to increase their legitimacy in a decision-making context marked by business skepticism. Central firms are not interested in being seen as acting from particularistic interests, and therefore, they want to legitimately claim a central decision-making position based on knowing well. In some cases, central firms are also strong players in niche markets for sustainable products, and they are also not interested in jeopardizing their brand value.

A competing explanation places agency with the individual board members: as ‘experienced’ persons who have encountered novel sectorial environments in changeable careers, they are better able to juggle the multiple evaluative principles at play in sustainability standard-setting. Their complex network experiences enable them to cognitively make sense of the complex interest and status ascriptions at play in transnational governance. This cognitive capacity also allow them to enter their employer organizations in the first place, bringing them into central positions within those organizations in terms of sustainability decision-making from which they eventually enter boards as part of their organizational responsibilities.

Based on the case study, I cannot rule out either of these two explanations. Instead, there is reason to suggest that both explanations are plausible, and indeed make up mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Central organizations select experienced individuals to remain legitimate, and thus central. Experienced individuals make their way into central organizations, because they seek experience and opportunity to influence important decisions. ‘Careers into networks’ are the product of both organizational and individual strategies. For scholars of transnational network governance, these two-level strategic maneuvers are particularly important to understand because they add to functional complementarities between organization an additional set of functional complementarities, name those between diversified individual experiences. Embedded standards building ownership among a diverse set of concerned parties, needs to transgress functional complementarities of organizational diversity and find groundig also in new forms of organic solidarity that builds on diversified experiences as the wellsprings of experientiality.

7. Literature

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