12 International relations and transnational politics

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1 FOREWORD

For a long time the sub-field of international relations has been studied by approaches where nation states were the focus (for example, neo-realism and neo-liberal institutionalism). However, increasingly not only inter-state (more specifically, intergovernmental) relations but also transnational relations have come to the fore. In particular the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International), autonomously acting international agencies (such as the World Bank) and various transnational interest associations (such as the European Roundtable of Industrialists) have become the subject of analysis in international relations. Theories such as neo-realism and neo-liberal institutionalism, however, are unable to analyze transnational politics, given their government-centric categories. These developments require fresh approaches to analyze the different patterns of transnational versus intergovernmental policies and to identify the conditions for their relative salience.

The chapter uses policy network analysis as an approach for distinguishing between intergovernmental and transnational relations, and illustrates its application in various settings. It starts with highlighting the basic distinction between transnational and inter-state politics, as well as its importance (section 2). Next, it operationalizes this distinction by juxtaposing intergovernmental co-operation and transnational policy networks. Policy network analysis as a method in order to distinguish these two types is described in section 3 and the pros and cons of alternative approaches are discussed in the same section. Section 4 develops framework conditions for the relative salience of both types of policy-making and illustrates the transnational–inter-state distinction, as well as the role of selected framework conditions based on applications involving international agencies, NGOs and subnational administrative actors. The final section concludes with the main findings, normative implications and further research requirements.
2 INTRODUCTION: TRANSNATIONAL VERSUS INTER-STATE POLITICS

Since the 1970s, the question of whether global politics should be characterized as inter-state politics or as transnational politics has become a central puzzle in international relations scholarship (Risse 2013). How shall we characterize global politics – as the plain interaction between the ‘billiard balls’ of inter-state politics, or as the more complex ‘cobwebs’ of transnational politics (Rochester 2002)? Traditionally, international relations have been studied as inter-state politics. Since the early 1970s, however, this traditional picture has increasingly been cast into doubt by the increasing importance of a number of transnational actors (see Box 12.1). Since 11 September 2001 (9/11) at the latest, the importance of transnational actors such as terrorist networks has become familiar to the wider public (Schneckener 2006). Before this recent burst of attention for transnational actors, multinational companies were the most widely known cases of the latter (Keohane and Nye 1974, 1981). Other well-known cases of transnational politics include the European Union (EU) multi-level governance system (Marks et al. 1996), but also the activities of transnational organized crime (Galeotti 2001) or of transnational private security providers (Coker 2001).

For the analysis of whether we should classify global politics as

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**BOX 12.1 ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS**

As with other popular concepts in political science, there are competing understandings of the term ‘transnational’. The dominant and most widely quoted utilization of the term ‘transnational politics’ or ‘transnational politics’ in international relations follows the understanding outlined above (Keohane and Nye 1981; Risse-Kapp 1995a). Still, in order to clarify the options available, two alternative understandings need to be mentioned. On the one side, an important alternative utilization is the concept of transnational (private) governance (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Graz and Nölke 2008; Hale and Held 2011). Here, the focus is not on developing research methods in order to distinguish inter-state and transnational politics, but to analyze an alternative form of governing, where non-state actors play a strong or even exclusive role, in contrast to traditional inter-governmental organizations. On the other side, an important alternative utilization is the concept of transnational historical materialism (Cox 1987; Gill 1991; Van der Pijl 1998; Overbeek 2000; Van Apeldoorn 2002). Here, again, the focus is not on developing research methods in order to distinguish inter-state and transnational politics, but on developing an alternative substantial theory of international relations, based on class-theoretical works of authors such as Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci.
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inter-state or as transnational politics, the concept of policy networks has become increasingly dominant (Nölke 2000, 2004). Since the 1990s, policy networks have gained quite some currency within international relations. While the concept has inspired research in diverse types of transnational networks, such as epistemic communities (Haas 1992), transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), transnational knowledge networks (Stone 2004) and transgovernmental networks (Slaughter 2004), its most congruent equivalent is the concept of global public policy networks as developed by Wolfgang Reinicke and associates (Reinicke 1998, 1999; Reinicke et al. 2000; Witte et al. 2000). Here, transnational (or global) policy networks are recently proposed to be a key instrument of global governance. According to this perspective, networks do not only lead to more flexible and efficient policies (Reinicke 1998, p. 89ff.), but also to a democratization of international politics, owing to their ability to involve major stakeholders in a more transparent and broad-based dialogue (Witte et al. 2000, p. 178, 180ff.; see also Dingwerth 2003, pp. 73–6).

If we combine the resource dependency framework, the most widely established policy network theory (see Börzel 1997), with the concept of transnational politics (as conceptualized by Risse-Kappen 1995b, p. 3), we can define transnational policy networks as a group of public and/or private organizations where at least one organization does not operate on behalf of a national government or an intergovernmental entity. These organizations are connected by a significant level of interactions (at least partially) across national boundaries and participate in policy-making and implementation through an exchange of resources. Typical resources to be exchanged in transnational policy networks include finance, information, legitimacy and the offer of participation in policy design. Actors within transnational policy networks include all types of public and private organizations, including interest groups, subnational governments, state agencies and international secretariats. Networks generally are grouped for a certain issue area, but may vary in their saliency during different phases of the policy process. Actors within these networks are to a varying degree dependent on resources which other actors control. Thus, the European Commission, for example, allows an interest group a role in policy design or in the allocation of funds during implementation, while at the same time the interest group provides the Commission with information and legitimacy. Whereas the interest group may largely rely on the Commission for political influence, the Commission may choose among a number of competing interests.

Based on this definition, we can now clearly distinguish transnational policy networks from intergovernmental cooperation. First, both forms of international politics differ very much regarding their core actors. Whereas
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Table 12.1  **Transnational policy networks versus intergovernmental cooperation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transnational network</th>
<th>Intergovernmental cooperation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
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<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Inter-organizational</td>
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<td>resource dependencies</td>
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<td>Focus</td>
<td>Sectoral policies</td>
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Intergovernmental cooperation (see Table 12.1) is based on governments acting as unitary and only important actors, transnational policy networks are based on a multitude of organizational actors. The latter include different types of non-state actors, but also different government agencies acting on their own, in the absence of clear guidance by governments as a whole. Second, the basic dynamic underlying both types of international politics is very different. Whereas transnational policy networks are kept together by inter-organizational resource dependencies, international organizations and regimes are based on the preferences of the participating governments (theories of international relations differ, however, very much regarding their interpretation of these preferences as being based on interest, power or norms; see Hasenclever et al. 1997). Finally, the scope of both forms of institutions can be different: Whereas (transnational) policy networks are always focused on sectoral (or subsectoral) issues, intergovernmental cooperation can take on a much broader scope, as in case of international organizations such as the EU or the United Nations (international regimes usually are also limited to one sector).

Both transnational policy networks and intergovernmental cooperation as described above are stylized; in reality there is frequently a combination of both. Even more so, transnational policy networks very much benefit from the existence of intergovernmental cooperation, as international institutions contribute a great deal to the viability of these networks (see below). Transnational policy networks can also contribute to the evolution of intergovernmental cooperation, insofar as the preparatory work for new international regimes or organizations may be done within transnational policy networks.

To summarize, the concept of policy networks is able to aid our understanding of the distinction between transnational politics and intergovernmental cooperation. Transnational politics differ from intergovernmental cooperation as regards the actors involved, the basic dynamics and the scope of the issues involved.
3 POLICY NETWORK ANALYSIS AS A METHOD FOR DISTINGUISHING TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

How can we find out whether cross-border politics can best be studied as transnational politics or international or, more precisely, intergovernmental relations? Based on the traction the network concept has gained in the study of transnational politics, the most widely used method is to apply policy network analysis. Policy networks assume that policies are not being created and implemented by a central authority (government or parliament), but by resource exchanges between a number of public and private organizations, predominantly at the sector level (Mayntz 1993, p. 40). The affinity between the concepts of policy networks and transnational actors becomes obvious at once – both cast the traditional picture of politics into doubt, especially the central role of governments as unitary actors therein. Both concepts highlight the important role of organized societal actors as well as the independent role of fractions of the state apparatus. Both concepts deal with empirical issues which neither follow the typical logic of domestic politics in Western societies (party competition and the hierarchy of the state), nor the typical logic of international relations (anarchy). Thus, transnational policy networks stand at the focus of a double dynamic with both national and international roots: ‘Just as much policy making is now transnational . . . , involving both international and domestic players, . . . policy making is also both public and private at one and the same time’ (Forsythe 2000, p. 176).

Given the popularity of the policy network concept within public policy, it is no surprise that there are different, competing ‘network schools’. The most sophisticated treatment of policy networks within domestic settings is based on categories of (inter-)organizational sociology, which assume that political decision-making and implementation is mainly based on the exchange of material and immaterial resources between mutually – but frequently asymmetrically – dependent organizations. Sociological inter-organization theories are based on an organization-environment perspective, where the most important feature of this environment are other organizations (see Jansen and Schubert 1995a). The focus is on the relationships between the organizations involved and on the consequences of these interactions for the policy outcome (Jansen and Schubert 1995b, p. 7). The most important competing policy network school is the ‘governance model’. The latter is more interested in a normative comparison between networks, markets and hierarchies as alternative types of social coordination (Börzel 1997). However, it has a strong normative
focus and thus is less well suited for the analytical study of global politics as either transnational or inter-governmental.

The state of the art of the study of inter-organizational policy network analysis can be summarized as follows. The actors within transnational policy networks are organizations. The spectrum of organizations may be rather wide; it can include business (associations), labor unions, NGOs, research institutes and think tanks. Typical members of transnational policy networks also involve ministries, sub-state governments and other state agencies that are acting on their own (not on behalf of a national government). Of particular importance are international organizations, that is, the staff of international organizations who have the ability to act autonomously. Here we have to distinguish between (parts of) international organizations that serve as an arena for inter-governmental cooperation (such as the UN Security Council, or the Council of Ministers in the EU) and the staff units of international organizations with autonomous capacity (such as the European Commission or the World Bank). Many international organizations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Health Organization (WHO) combine the features of arena and autonomous bureaucracy, thereby making a fine-grained analysis necessary for distinguishing between the two. Interactions within transnational policy networks may take different forms, for example, conferences, telephone calls or letters between representatives of organizations. Interactions within transnational policy networks serve specific purposes, such as to get access to political arenas, gather political information, mobilize political support or execute political influence (Jansen and Schubert 1995c, p. 12).

Policy networks are based on the exchange of resources. Typical resources involve finance, analytical resources, legitimacy and the provision of political influence (political resources). Political resources are mainly based on legal responsibilities and involve the ability to let other organizations participate in the design of political decisions. Financial resources involve the competence to decide about the allocation of money (for example, economic assistance and investment). Analytical resources include not only the provision of information in the narrow sense of the word, but also expertise, strategies or implementation plans, frequently based on the quality and quantity of staff. Legitimacy as a resource involves acceptance by political opinion and the mobilizations of political support (votes, political loyalty and so on).

A typical resource exchange involves an interaction during which one (governmental) organization allows another organization to participate in the design of a political decision while at the same time receiving information, finance or legitimacy from this organization. Transnational policy
networks, however, also involve the pooling of resources from several organizations in order to exchange this resource pool against political resources of a governmental organization. The substantial content of a political decision may thus be explained by the resource allocation within a transnational policy network. Exchange within inter-organizational networks is necessary if single organizations need resources that they cannot produce on their own and other organizations can provide these organizations and themselves need resources that the first organization can provide. Thus, the resource dependency model departs from a relative independence of organizations – formally these are autonomous, but de facto they are dependent on resources controlled by other organizations. Common to all organizations is the desire to maximize their influence over political decisions and to avoid dependencies on other organizations (Rhodes et al. 1996, p. 368). Influence over political decisions is meant both to maximize (or at least stabilize) an organizational resource base and to further the specialist perspective of an organization, for example, as an environmental NGO, ministry of finance or labor union. In order to exchange resources, interactions have to have a certain durability; a single inter-organizational contact mostly is not sufficient for the membership within a transnational policy network.

Not all organizations of a network are connected with all other organizations; networks mostly have some ‘holes’ in their structure. Membership of a network, therefore, is less based on interaction density, but rather on the participation within policy design. Not all network interactions within a transnational policy network are strictly transnational, but one of the transnational interactions has to have a meaningful influence on policy design. Network structures become particularly important, if single organizations are able to derive a particular influence based on their central position in the network, for example, as a ‘linking pin organization’. The focus of a transnational policy network normally is a policy field. Policy fields are based on a specific content, as based on the competence of a specific ministry, international organization or regime. Decisions within policy fields are made by political actors, that is, actors with the ability to make generally binding regulations. Policy networks are not limited to decisions in the narrow sense, but also include the implementation of these decisions. Whether a political decision will become the focus of a transnational policy networks also depends on the decision of a transnational actor, for example, whether a transnational NGO decides to attempt to influence domestic policy-making in a given country.

While some of the behavioral assumptions of the policy network concept may simply be transferred from the national to the transnational level, others have to be developed anew. This is most particularly true for
the different foci of transnational policy networks. At the national level, the focus of the concept is clear, since generally binding decisions are mostly taken by government and/or parliament. Policy networks therefore study the political decision-making process leading to laws and other public decisions. There is far more diversity at the transnational level. Basically, we can distinguish four different constellations in which transnational policy networks do evolve (Nölke 2000, 2004):

- The political transnationalization of a border region is a case of a transnational policy network at the sub-national (or micro-regional) level, for example, in an Euregio. Here, local and regional authorities, but also social groups from both sides of the border coordinate their activities or form coalitions to jointly influence an (inter) governmental authority (for example, Blatter 2000).

- Even more prominent are transnational policy networks at the (macro-)regional level, within regional integration schemes. The most prominent case is the multi-level governance system of the EU, where a multitude of networks have been studied (for example, Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999; Peterson and Bomberg 1999), for instance, between the European Commission and local/regional authorities in the field of regional development policy (Marks et al. 1996).

- Given the independent decision making capacity of some international organizations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, transnational actors form networks in order to influence the decisions made by these organizations (for example, Reinalda and Verbeek 1998; Slaughter 2004).

- Both the negotiation and the implementation of international regimes, for example, in the framework of the United Nations, may also be transnationalized. Here, transnational actors such as businesses, NGOs, labor unions or academic think tanks lobby for an adequate representation of their particular interests (for example, Keck and Sikkink 1998).

In conclusion, policy network analysis assists us in deciding whether a specific case of cross-border politics should be studied as transnational politics or intergovernmental relations. Based on the resource dependency school in organizational sociology, this analysis can be applied in very different settings and looks at the actors involved, the resources exchanged, the network structure and the network focus.
FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS FOR THE SALIENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL POLICY NETWORKS AND EMPIRICAL APPLICATION

Under which conditions are transnational policy networks relevant? The basic idea is that transnational policy networks are not ubiquitous, but only relevant under certain conditions. Dealing with these conditions allows us to focus on the crucial differences between intergovernmental cooperation and transnational policy networks. Owing to the open character of the policy network concept it has to be combined with other theories in order to answer this question. Most important is the combination with theories dealing with the structural and institutional context of a policy sector, given the strong actor focus of the policy network concept (see Lenschow 1995, p. 33). Again, we may depart from studies of policy networks at the domestic level for some more precise hints about the relationship between network context and the relevance of transnational policy networks. Here, the resource dependency approach already contains a basic assumption:

Policy networks are not useful tools for analyzing all political systems. The approach assumes a degree of pluralism, the relative separation of public and private actors, and complex policies needing many resources, which are not concentrated in the state. For example, if resources are concentrated in a strong national gatekeeper, policy networks are less likely to emerge and, where they do exist, will be less important for explaining policy outcomes. (Rhodes et al. 1996, p. 382)

Thus, we may assume that the relevance of transnational policy networks depends on the institutional configuration of the state(s) involved. If state structures are centralized, there is little need for state actors to exchange resources with other state actors or with private actors. In contrast, if state structures are very much fragmented and resources are dispersed between different organizations, horizontally (for example, between different ministries and agencies) or vertically (between different levels of government, for example, in a federal system), the relevance of policy networks increases. This does not only add to the importance of resource exchanges between domestic actors, but also between domestic and transnational actors. In the context of local/regional cross-border cooperation, for example, we may thus expect a higher relevance of transnational policy networks at the border between two federal states than between two unitarian states.

The relevance of policy networks, however, does not only depend on the dispersion of resources among state actors, but also on the ability
of societal actors to mobilize an attractive resource volume as a basis for exchange with state actors. Societal interests, however, differ in their ability to organize themselves in a way that allows them to mobilize a significant volume of resources. Based on Olson’s (1965) theory of collective goods, we may assume that rather homogeneous interests are easier to be organized than heterogeneous interests and may therefore better be able to mobilize the resources which are necessary for the participation in policy networks. This assumption also has repercussions on the relevance of transnational networks, because the latter may be impeded by the absence of transnational societal actors with substantial resources. Thus, we may expect a higher relevance of transnational policy networks in a sector which is marked by a powerful role of a few big multinational enterprises than in a sector where societal interests are rather diffuse, for example, dominated by a high number of small- and medium-scale enterprises.

Taking a more institutionalist perspective, the absence of resourceful transnational actors may also be caused by important societal groups choosing national rather than transnational channels for interest representation. This decision may be caused by a long tradition of relying on the nation state to further a particular societal interest as in case of labor unions (see Streeck 1998, p.177). Examples for different degrees of the national institutionalization of societal interests again are provided by the European Union, where some groups form powerful Euro-associations in order to lobby the Commission or the European Parliament, whereas others rather prefer to go through their national governments and the Council of Ministers. The latter of course implies a more limited relevance of transnational policy networks.

Turning to the international context, transnational policy networks may also become relevant because of the activities of an international secretariat. If a secretariat such as the European Commission or the World Bank strives for (or has already been allocated) a prominent role in a given policy sector, it frequently is dependent on information and legitimacy resources provided by other (public and private) organizations. In a more general perspective, a high degree of international institutionalization can also take the form of an important role of international norms within a particular issue area (see Risse-Kappen 1995b, pp.28–32). In this case, transnational actors may use these norms in order to justify their demands (that is, increase their legitimacy resources) or may need the negotiation of a new norm to mobilize at a transnational level at all.

A further group of assumptions does not depart from characteristics of the public and private actors involved, but rather from aspects of the specific problem at hand. Here, research on domestic politics has already pointed towards the role of different policy types (Lowi 1972)
for the relevance of policy networks. In this case, redistributive policies are far less probable to be dealt with by these networks, because of their high degree of politicization. Thus, their design will hardly be decided by inter-organizational resource exchanges, but rather by public debate between fractions of government and parliament. Distributive policies, instead, incur heavy resource dependencies between donor and recipient organizations – the former need information (frequently also legitimacy) provided by the latter in order to allocate their financial resources effectively. The same mechanism may be assumed for the case for transnational policy networks where redistributive policies are supposed to lead to intergovernmental patterns of decision-making, whereas distributive policies are more conducive to transnational patterns.

5 SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

The utilization of the policy network concept in various empirical settings allows us to identify a number of framework conditions that indicate whether transnational politics can be assumed to be of high salience. All these conditions (Table 12.2) can in principle be combined with each other. Thus, the highest relevance for transnational policy networks is to be expected in a situation characterized by high international institutionalization, distributive policies, strong and homogenous societal interests without a strong institutionalization at the national level and a high institutional fragmentation of state structures. A typical case for a high salience of transnational politics thus would be in the system of EU multi-level governance, in a policy field such as regional development and involving actors from Germany (Marks et al. 1996) – or in global development policy based on the interaction of the Bretton Woods Institutions with transnational environmental NGOs (Nölke 2003).

Policy network analysis thus can be understood as a useful technique for identifying and analyzing circumstances where global politics should be understood as transnational and not as intergovernmental politics. Its

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<th>Framework conditions for a high salience of transnational politics</th>
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<td>International institutionalization</td>
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<td>Policy type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homogeneity of transnational societal interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>National institutionalization of societal interest</td>
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<td>Institutional fragmentation of state structures</td>
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main advantage is its ability to provide analytical categories that can be applied in very different settings. However, it has two main shortcomings and thus needs to be complemented by other analytical concepts for a comprehensive study of global politics. First, the inter-organizational resource dependency policy network concept is an analytical concept and thus does not include a meaningful measure for the normative evaluation of transnational politics. Thus it needs to be combined with concepts from, for example, normative political theory, democracy studies or political economy in order to determine whether transnational policy networks really can deliver on the hopes articulated by their proponents. Second, policy network analysis has been developed for the study of peaceful policy-making. Some of the most important cases of transnational politics, however, are based on rather violent means and we need to develop alternative approaches in order to systematically study the salience of transnational politics as favored by terrorist networks and organized crime.

These issues have been raised:

- Distinction between transnational and intergovernmental politics.
- Policy network analysis as a method for distinguishing between transnational and intergovernmental politics.
- Framework conditions for a high salience of transnational politics.
- Advantages and shortcomings of policy network analysis for the study of cross-border politics.

NOTES

1. For different descriptions of the resources to be exchanged in policy networks see Jansen and Schubert (1995c, p. 12) and Rhodes et al. (1996, p. 368). In a transgovernmental perspective, Keohane and Nye (1974, p. 49ff.) list funds, prestige, information, consent and legitimacy.

2. In agreement with the general discussion on policy networks, the focus is on decisions which bind a plurality of actors. Thus, for example, it may be less suitable to study decisions regarding individual actors, for example, regarding the terms of an investment of one multinational enterprise and its host country.

FURTHER READING

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