15 Communities of practice as cause and consequence of transnational governance: the evolution of social and environmental certification

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When communities of organic farmers began certifying ecologically friendly agriculture, they could never have guessed how prominent the certification model would become. Nearly four decades later, consumers can buy products not just from certified farms, but also certified forests, fisheries, and factories – with standards pertaining not only to the environment, but also to "social" conditions of labor and community development. Firms interested in "corporate social responsibility" and "ethical sourcing" can now draw on a growing set of suppliers whose labor or environmental standards have been certified by an independent body. For their part, the certification associations that oversee this activity – the Fairtrade Labeling Organization, Forest Stewardship Council, Social Accountability International, and others – find themselves entwined in an increasingly elaborate web of transnational governance, layered with evolving rules about trade and standard-setting, competing initiatives, and a variety of questions about the legitimacy and effectiveness of their activities. Certification of *quality* and product safety has, of course, existed for many years (Cheit 1990), but the transformation of certification into a mode of social/ environmental regulation has occurred mainly since the 1990s.

Most observers of certification initiatives have focused on a single sector or issue domain. Thus, we have a range of studies of forest certification, organic agriculture, Fair Trade certification, labor standards monitoring, and the sustainable management of fisheries. More general theories of this form often portray it as a solution to several types of problems. For some, the growth of private sector certification reflects its potential to address vexing problems of ecological sustainability and social justice that governments have been unwilling or unable to resolve (Conroy 2007). Others emphasize how certification can solve reputation problems faced by firms that have been

"named and shamed" by activists (Gereffi *et al.* 2001). Alternatively, some set aside the functional aspects of certification systems and treat them as symbols of rationalized virtue on the global stage (Boli 2006).

We agree with these scholars that social and environmental certification is more than a scattered set of initiatives and amounts rather to a distinctive model of transnational private regulation. We view the certification model as neither pure myth and ceremony nor fully functional solution, but rather as an evolving transnational institution-building project (Bartley 2007a, 2007b). Particular actors have seeded and cultivated the certification project, and some have even worked across different initiatives to structure a field of social/environmental certification (Bartley and Smith 2008; Dingwerth and Pattberg 2009). The expansion of the certification model is partly a function of spiraling questions of trust – that is, "who watches the watchdog?" – and partly a result of institutional entrepreneurs pushing this model of govern-ance. But conflict is also prevalent in this project. Industry associations and NGOs have repeatedly fought for control of this form. Critics on the Left often portray certification associations as little more than greenwash/cleanwash, while "market fundamentalists" charge that certification is a disguised form of protectionism. Unlike the relatively consensual communities documented elsewhere in this volume, our chapter provides a case in which cooperation and growing coherence exist alongside conflict and debate.

Examining transnational communities sheds light on two aspects of this model and the institution-building projects that underlie it. First, the initial development of influential certification programs can be traced to relatively small communities of practice, organized around political, religious, and professional commitments. Fair Trade certified coffee, for instance, grew out of the transnational work of small groups of peace and religious activists. Second, the recent growth of linkages among previously distinct certification associations – and the many actors involved in their operation – provides an infrastructure for new transnational communities of practice to emerge. As certification associations have grown and become more interconnected across national and issue-based boundaries, their identities have shifted – from mechanisms for serving niche markets to systems of standard-setting for the global economy. Through this process, new transnational communities of practice appear to be emerging as individuals from different programs come together to legitimate their activity. Even representatives of competing certi-fication initiatives have engaged in loose forms of cooperation.

At its core, the certification model is multivalent and rooted in a set of compromises. Certification inserts an alternative "order of worth" (Boltanski

and Thévenot 2006) into markets even while it embraces the market as the means to do so – that is, with a label to inform consumer choice. It suggests an alternative to neoliberal globalization, yet it resonates with neoliberal pre-scriptions (that is, the power of markets to solve social problems) and pro-scriptions (that is, against government intervention). It faces a multi-level problem of legitimacy – in markets, where it needs firm support and cred-ibility among consumers; vis-à-vis national governments; and in global gov-ernance arenas, where consistency with both NGO agendas and World Trade Organization (WTO) rules is important. In addition, certification associations face serious questions about their ability to transform conditions "on the ground," particularly as evidence mounts that private monitoring and product labeling are often ineffective (Mutersbaugh 2005; Locke *et al.* 2007; Seidman 2007). Table 15.1 lists the certification associations featured in this chapter,

Table 15.1 Dedicated social and environmental certification associations (founded before 2001)

Name	Year founded	Constituency	Industries/products
Environmental			
IFOAM: International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements	1972 (1997 as cert. assn.)	Multi-stakeholder	Food and agriculture
FSC: Forest Stewardship Council[a]	1993	Multi-stakeholder	Forest products
SFI: Sustainable Forestry Initiative/ Board	1994 (1998 as cert. assn.)	Industry association	Forest products
PEFC: Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification	1999	Industry association	Forest products
MAC: Marine Aquarium Council	1998	Multi-stakeholder	Ornamental/exotic fish
MSC: Marine Stewardship Council	1999	Multi-stakeholder	Fishing and seafood
Social/labor			
FLO: Fairtrade Labeling Organization	1997	Multi-stakeholder	Food and agriculture
SAI: Social Accountability International	1997	Multi-stakeholder	Apparel, toys, food, etc.
FLA: Fair Labor Association	1996 (1999 as cert. assn.)	Multi-stakeholder[b]	Apparel and footwear
WRAP: Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production	1999	Industry association	Apparel and footwear

Note. Cert. assn. = certification association.
[a] Though the FSC also includes social standards, it has largely positioned itself as an eco-labeling initiative and is much more closely tied to environmental organizations than to labor groups.
[b] The FLA is considered multi-stakeholder but lacks support from organized labor.

which make up the set of dedicated social or environmental certification associations founded by 2001. Other organizations that are engaged in this activity but are not dedicated certification associations – such as stand-alone certifiers (for example, Rainforest alliance) or multi-purpose standard-setting bodies (for example, International Organization for Standardization [ISO]) – are included in our analysis to the (considerable) extent that they intersect with these certification associations.

We proceed by discussing conceptions of transnational communities and their application to our case. Next we show that the roots of certification lie in transnational communities forged in an earlier period. We then examine network data on infrastructure for new transnational communities, focusing on ties to intermediary organizations – the NGOs, governments, firms, and foundations engaged with multiple certification initiatives – and community formation within and across domains.

Conceptions of transnational communities

Mayntz (in this volume) argues that transnational communities consist of individuals bound across borders into a group with a strong collective identity. Though full consensus among community members is not necessary, this definition does require that they be "equals with respect to the shared characteristic" and share a "we" feeling that transcends their differences. However, examining contentious topics such as the governance of global industries uncovers groupings that resemble communities in some ways but which lack this strong sense of collective identity. To make sense of these groupings, more expansive definitions are useful. Morgan (2001) begins by identifying a transnational *space*, or a loosely bounded arena of cross-border connections that represent something more than the negotiation of distinct national interests. A transnational community is a set of actors held together through "structured interactions [that] are based not on contracts or markets but on the recognition of a shared set of interests within a specific transnational social space" (Morgan 2001: 117), which may or may not translate into strong cognitive or affective ties. As Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) argue, strong bonds to particularistic groups, even when practiced across borders ("trans-state particularism"), may actually conflict with transnationalism in the sense of universalistic, cosmopolitan commitments.

Adler's (2005) conception of a "community of practice" helps specify the character of more loosely bounded communities. Extending research on

epistemic communities, Adler focuses on sets of actors involved in a "joint enterprise that is constantly being renegotiated by its members" and held together through "relationships of mutual engagement" (Adler 2005: 15; see Plehwe in this volume). This conceptualization is useful for studying contentious forms of global governance because it allows that communities can be organized around practical activities, motivated by multiple normative rationales; and community members are not limited to recognized experts from scientific and governmental organizations, but may also include representatives of NGOs, firms, trade unions, industry associations, and so on. Our discussion of communities of practice, then, is mostly consistent with Djelic and Quack's (in this volume) argument that communities exist when there is "mutual orientation and dependence of members; articulated around a common identity and/or a common project; a form of active engagement and involvement from at least a minority of members; . . . translating into and sustaining a sense of belonging." The extent to which the mutual orientations to a common project we are studying translate into a "sense of belonging" is not entirely clear, however. Indeed, many of the emergent community-like formations in transnational governance are conflicted, such that participants recognize mutual engagement, yet still view each other as "others." Environmentalists and executives engaged in a partnership, for instance, may develop a common language and sense of purpose yet retain a sense of serving different constituencies and reserving the right to bolster cooperation through threat of exit (see Bartley 2007a; Conley and Williams 2008). We believe that scholars of transnational regulation need new tools to understand these loose, conflicted communities of practice. At the risk of overestimating coherence, we use a permissive definition of community requiring only a weak sense of belonging.

Our analysis also raises questions about the relationship between organizations and individual members of communities. While some see organizations as parasitic on communities of individuals (Mayntz in this volume), it seems possible that this relationship could also be symbiotic. Communities of individuals may be important in the founding of new organizations, for instance. Furthermore, organizational networks and fields may serve as an infrastructure for new rounds of community formation at the individual level. Individuals representing organizations at a conference, for instance, may come to perceive themselves as part of a community of practice.[1] We find evidence that each of these dynamics is relevant to the case of social and environmental certification.

Especially important in generating new rounds of transnational community formation are organizations situated as intermediaries. Theoretically, they are

the organizational analogues to the individual "rooted cosmopolitans" that bring the legacies of different national and industrial settings into a transnational space (Djelic and Quack in this volume). Empirically, in our case, these intermediaries create indirect linkages between different certification initiatives, as with an NGO or retailer that supports both Fair Trade and forest certification. As these linkages integrate different certification initiatives and structure an organizational field, they may also create new transnational communities of individuals. We find evidence of a growing set of practice-based ties and transnational, trans-issue communities of actors with *partially* shared understandings and projects. As our analysis shows, standard-setting in this arena is deeply imbued with conflict, especially between actors based in industry and NGOs. Here, community formation has entailed some combination of mutual attention, commensuration, and competition.

Communities of practice as sources of transnational governance

Pre-existing communities of practice may be important in generating new modes of governance for several reasons. First, since such communities transcend particular organizations, their members are better situated to develop and implement projects at the level of the field rather than only within organizations. The double-embeddedness of community members should enhance their interest and ability to strategize and experiment beyond their organization's parochial interests, increasing their chances of being effective institutional entrepreneurs. DiMaggio (1991) argues that this is why professions – and professionals – are so important for institutional change. But it may be unnecessary to limit this to professions, which are just one type of community of practice – albeit with legitimated monopolies over abstract areas of knowledge (Quack 2007; Ramirez in this volume). Other communities of practice, based on political, religious, or technical bodies of knowledge, ought to be similarly situated, even if their status is lower.

Second, to the extent that they are already transnational in scope, communities of practice are well positioned to meet the growing demand for rule-making in transnational arenas. Economic globalization, the diffusion of information technologies, and the expansion of rights-based claims all generate demand for rules – whether pertaining to intellectual property, technical coordination, human rights, or environmental sustainability. Pre-existing transnational communities that can demonstrate practical experience working across borders may have unique opportunities to shape transnational rule-making

projects. Certainly, not all such communities will have an equal chance to enter arenas of rule-making, since power will partly determine who gets a seat at the table. But the combination of cross-border ties and some degree of collective identity should marginally increase the chances of actors becoming prominent players in transnational rule-making.

The rise of transnational governance at the turn of the twenty-first century can to some extent be described as a process of older transnational communities – forged in the context of twentieth-century Cold War geopolitical conflicts – being reconfigured, amplified, and integrated into new rule-making projects. In the remainder of this section, we describe how several communities of practice contributed to the initial development of social and environmental certification associations.

Much of the inspiration for the recent rise of certification comes from the development of organic agriculture. Organic farming originated as a movement and community of farmers stretching back to the 1930s. The first attempts to certify organic crops occurred in the early 1970s, with the founding of the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) group (Guthman 2004), and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) in Europe, where organic farmers argued that "the food quality and ecology crisis is no longer a national problem, but an actual international concern" (Chevriot 1972). Initially, IFOAM only issued programmatic statements, but as the organic food market grew in the 1980s and 1990s it began issuing standards and coordinating an otherwise chaotic world of competing certifiers. In 1997, IFOAM introduced a system for accrediting certifiers, making it a full-fledged certification association (Bernstein and Cashore 2007). Though some organic certification functions have now been taken up by national governments, IFOAM continues to play an important role at the transnational level, bringing together hundreds of organizations from nearly a hundred countries, such as the UK-based Soil Association, the Swiss-based Institute for Marketecology (IMO), Ecocert Brazil Certificadora, and the pioneering CCOF.

The founding role of particular communities of practice is even clearer in several other cases. Fair Trade certification for coffee and other agricultural products, for instance, has grown from a few small experiments into a vast transnational project. Currently, the Bonn-based Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) links a growing number of consumers and coffee roasters in Europe and North America with producer cooperatives in Mexico, Ethiopia, Colombia, Uganda, Guatemala, and elsewhere. Though often heralded as a testament to a new transnational civil society, the roots of this

project can be traced to older transnational communities, forged in the context of the Cold War. A set of peace activists formed of one of the earliest fair trade coffee projects. In the mid-1980s, US-based peace activists began importing and selling coffee grown by Nicaraguan farmers (calling it "Café Nica"), in defiance of a US trade embargo of Nicaragua and its Sandinista government (Rice and McLean 1999; Auld 2007). The organization behind this action, Equal Exchange, soon became the main purveyor of fairly traded coffee in the USA. Its leaders also became a driving force behind TransFair USA, which linked up with initiatives in Europe to move toward a unified fair trade certification system (Conroy 2007). European efforts had similarly been pioneered by a community of activists, this time united by religious convictions. In the late 1980s, the Dutch Christian ecumenical NGO Solidaridad (Inter-Church Foundation for Action for Latin America) created the Max Havelaar label – the first label for certified fair trade coffee, named for the protagonist of an anti-colonial Dutch novel – in response to a call from a Dutch liberation theology priest who was working with a cooperative of coffee farmers in Oaxaca, Mexico (Mace 1998; Jaffee 2007). As coffee prices plummeted after the 1989 collapse of the International Coffee Agreement, farmers and activists increasingly turned to fair trade certification as a way to counteract poverty and build an alternative system of value (Linton et al. 2004). Max Havelaar and Equal Exchange were soon joined by national fair trade labels throughout Europe, and by the late 1990s, these initiatives came together under the umbrella of FLO. While many factors fueled Fair Trade certification, several initial sparks emerged from cross-border communities of activists navigating Cold War political and religious terrains.

Communities of practice also shaped the earliest experiments with forest certification, leading to the rise of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Between 1989 and 1991, a group of environmentalists, foresters, and woodworkers began to formulate plans for an independent association to certify sound forest management practices. Central to this group were two small but ultimately influential communities of practice. One consisted of members of the Woodworkers alliance for Rainforest Protection (WARP), who first suggested establishing an "international forestry monitoring agency" (Ecological Trading Company 1990), which soon evolved into the FSC. These specialty woodworkers were bound together not only as a set of businesses facing questions from environmentally concerned customers, but also as individuals with a shared biography and sense of purpose. As described by one participant, "the community of woodworkers in the late '80s [was] represented by people who had essentially dropped out of more conventional career tracks in the '60s and

'70s. . . . That type of person was, I think, heavily represented among the early members of WARP" (interview with WARP member, 7/30/02).

   The other influential group consisted of foresters who had built up expertise, trust, and networks that helped them become key architects of the FSC. Dubbed the "Peace Corps-Paraguay mafia" by their collaborators, this group "formed very strong ties when they were working in the Peace Corps" (interview with FSC organizer, 8/22/2002) and honed their theories of sustainable forestry while working on various community forestry projects in Peru, Ecuador, Haiti, and Paraguay in the 1980s. Among other projects, they had worked with the Yanesha Forestry Cooperative in Peru, an endeavor funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) just after Peru had emerged from a Soviet-allied military government (Morrow and Hull 1996). At the Yanesha Cooperative, these foresters had applied a promising set of forestry methods (Simeone *et al.* 1993) and had begun to think more about market linkages. As one participant later noted, the Yanesha managers:

showed me a letter from their trading partner in Europe [saying] . . . due to what the company perceived to be the market demand, only a small number of the many valuable hardwood species from the Peruvian forest would be marketable. This illustrated to me the fact that the forest is part of a market chain – you can't just support sustainable forest management on the ground without learning more about the supporting marketing system. (Michael Jenkins, quoted in Koenig and Headley 1995: 44)

It was this sort of project that early FSC developers referenced when they noted that growing green markets in Europe and the USA presented a "tremendous market opportunity for the 'wood producer projects' in the US and overseas" (Donovan 1990). Furthermore, the emphasis on community forestry helped foresters and environmentalists to find a balance between "telling people not to buy tropical timber but at the same time [asking] 'how do these communities fit in and how can we support them in the marketplace?'" (interview with environmental activist and FSC developer, 8/23/02), thus building a consensus that could sustain forest certification. The "Peace Corps Paraguay mafia" also proved powerful in their ability to mobilize funding streams for the nascent FSC. One member of this community headed up a small foundation (the Homeland Foundation) that funded much of the FSC's initial development, and another joined the MacArthur Foundation and made it the first of a series of large foundations to support the FSC (Bartley 2007a). In the case of forest certification, then, one can see several ways in which early founding communities left their mark on transnational governance.

The recent rise of labor standards monitoring and factory certification is also linked, albeit indirectly, to earlier transnational communities. The rise of anti-sweatshop activism and experiments with independent factory monitoring (by civil society organizations) in the mid-1990s indirectly fueled later initiatives such as the Fair Labor Association (FLA), Social Accountability International (SAI), and the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC). In the early 1980s, dissatisfied with the AFL-CIO's (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) anti-communist cooperation with the CIA in Central America and concerned about civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, some left-wing American labor activists split from the AFL-CIO to focus on cross-border solidarity. Among the new groups formed was the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador. Created in 1981 and fearing that "El Salvador could turn into another Vietnam" (Krupat 1997: 64), this group "sponsored fact-finding delegations and released a series of reports ... condemning the AFL-CIO's policies" (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005: 19–20). With the end of the Salvadoran civil war, this group renamed itself the National Labor Committee and began drawing attention to labor exploitation in Central America. By the mid-1990s, this organization was the loudest and most active leader of the anti-sweatshop movement, "naming and shaming" the Gap, Wal-Mart, Disney, Kathie Lee Gifford, and others over subpar conditions in suppliers' factories. The ability to mount these campaigns hinged on both drumming up media interest and what the group's leader called "deep contacts on the ground in Central America" (Charles Kernaghan, quoted in Krupat 1997: 71).

Other actors in the labor rights community began building experiments with "independent monitoring" of factories, conducted by local NGOs. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Social Responsibility (ICCR) – itself formed during the Vietnam War and active in Central American peace movements of the early 1980s – forged an innovative partnership in 1995 to monitor the Gap's factories in El Salvador. As an ICCR leader explained, "Our participation created what [the] Gap couldn't create on their own–trust with the groups in El Salvador. We could provide expertise and a different perspective" (David Schilling, quoted in Zachary 2002: 3). Similar experiments were conducted in Honduras and Guatemala (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000; Armbruster-Sandoval 2005). In Guatemala, the coherence of activist communities – also forged within the framework of the peace movements of the 1980s – strengthened independent monitoring. As described by Seidman (2007), "[T]ransnational contacts – specifically, personal visits by American unionists to the region and person contacts between individual activists across borders – altered the

way American activists understood regional repression" (Seidman 2007: 109). Within Guatemala, the staff of the monitoring group consisted largely of "activists who had participated in civil society monitoring efforts of the 1980s and 1990s, and who viewed their work for COVERCO [the factory monitor] as a logical extension of earlier efforts to bring peace and democracy to their country" (Seidman 2007: 125). Though these monitors later supported the WRC and some even became accredited auditors for the FLA, factory monitoring has mostly been taken over by for-profit auditing firms with few ties to activist communities. Nevertheless, communities of practice, organized around political and religious resistance to American Cold War foreign policy, laid the groundwork for the expansion of transnational governance in the twenty-first century.

Communities of practice have been innovators, instigators, and collective institutional entrepreneurs for certification as a new form of transnational governance. all of these communities were rooted in participants' shared convictions and knowledge bases – whether religious, political, or professional – and were often intertwined with Cold War geopolitics. Most were forged through common experiences and interpersonal connections across borders. Some directly advocated the certification model (as in forestry and fair trade), while others worried that it would water down their efforts (as with labor activists). But in every case, when we trace the process by which these new forms of governance were developed, we find historically situated communities of practice, not isolated, calculating actors or structural imperatives. The next sections examine how these largely orthogonal communities became intertwined.

Inter-organizational linkages as infrastructures for communities of practice

Linkages between social and environmental certification associations have grown dramatically over a short time period. Certifiers have participated in joint projects, conferences, and umbrella organizations. Competition among industry- and NGO-sponsored programs has led to a series of formal comparisons and, in some instances, mutual adjustment (Overdevest 2005). As this world of standards has grown in size and complexity, a number of NGOs, auditors, retailers, and government agencies have become involved in multiple certification initiatives, with some becoming central intermediaries that pull different initiatives further into an increasingly structured field.

To trace these evolving linkages – and thus the lines upon which new transnational communities of practice may emerge – we developed a strategy for measuring the relationships between dedicated social or environmental certification associations and the variety of other organizations involved in their operation at two points in time, 2001 and 2006. Since certification associations have different structures and logics of participation, our strategy defines involvement broadly and looks for traces that an organization is in some way affiliated with (for example, on a board of directors, as accredited auditor, providing consultation) or referenced by (for example, as a basis for particular standards) a certification association. Data on these linkages come from certification association websites, with 2001 data collected using the Internet Archive (www.archive.org). Such websites provide valuable, if imperfect, information on the operation and self-presentation of certification associations.[2]

We examined the entire contents of each certification association's website and recorded all organizations mentioned. Given our interest in intermediaries, we excluded from analysis organizations tied to a single association. The result is a two-mode matrix of ties from ten certification associations (eleven in 2006) to hundreds of intermediary organizations (firms, NGOs, government agencies, and so on). We used NetDraw in UCINET 6.16 to develop visualizations of these networks, using the spring-embedding algorithm, which arranges nodes based on cohesion. We combined these network data with more qualitative evidence to examine the integration of certification associations within and across issue domains and to identify settings in which individual-level community-building also appears to be occurring.

Elaboration and integration in the environmental arena

From pioneers such as IFOAM and the FSC to later entrants such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), a variety of environmental certification associations have emerged. We highlight two key mechanisms – competition and diffusion – behind this expansion.

Competition among multiple certifiers accounts for much of the expansion of forest certification, leading to a conflicted and divided community of certification advocates. Soon after the FSC's founding, industry associations in North America, Europe, and several timber-exporting countries began developing their own certification systems to counter the perceived NGO dominance of the FSC (Elliott 2000). In the USA, the American Forest and

Paper Association (AFPA) converted its code of conduct into a full-fledged certification program, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). In Europe, a coalition of forestry firms created the Pan-European Forest Certification system (PEFC, later the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification). Canadian firms enlisted the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) to draw up standards for sustainable forest management, though this initiative never became an organization in its own right. Even as arguments raged about whether these systems were credible, their emergence demonstrated the attraction of the certification model that the FSC had introduced to the industry.

The results of this competition have been mixed. On the one hand, as Cashore *et al.* (2004) show, supporters of different initiatives worked strategically to attract key companies, convert opposition into pockets of support, and gain market acceptance of their label. Competition also forged mutual attention and discussions among representatives of competing programs, and made some intermediaries into brokers. Independent studies were commissioned to "objectively" compare the different programs (Meridian Institute 2001), thus making them commensurable (Espeland 1998) and easier to perceive as different instantiations of the same basic form. As Meidinger (2003) describes, conflict bred a form of integration:

all of the forest certification programs self-consciously operate in a larger context best described as a sprawling, largely unmapped, highly changeable, loosely networked social field in which there are several centers of activity that closely monitor each other. It includes many environmental organizations, large and small production, wholesale, and retail firms, trade associations, professional certifiers, labor unions, human rights organizations, indigenous groups, government agencies, [and so on] . . . Relations among them involve a complex, shifting mix of mutual observation, direct communication, trust, distrust, mutual adjustment, cooperation, coordination, and competition. (Meidinger 2003: 276)

In the case of forest certification, a field of organizations and a community of individual actors coevolved with competition over what certification should entail and who should control it.

The FSC's founding also spurred the diffusion of the certification model to other industries that helped to forge a broader community of certification experts and advocates. Of course, the FSC itself had been constructed partly out of materials imported from other initiatives, especially organics, and organic certifiers such as the Soil Association and the Institute for Marketecology (IMO) soon became forest certifiers (interviews with FSC developers, 7/8/02, 7/22/02,

7/25/02). Several years after the FSC's founding, one of its key architects and supporters, WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), began introducing the certification model into other sectors. In 1996 WWF paired with Unilever (a major purchaser of frozen fish) to develop the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) as a response to problems of overfishing and damaging commercial fishing methods. As one observer put it, "WWF sort of took the FSC model and applied it to fisheries" (interview with FSC official, 7/22/02), mimicking the FSC's accreditation and certification system, discursive frame, and even its name and "check mark" logo, while seeking to avoid the "psychotic democracy" perceived to have resulted from the FSC's governance arrangements (Auld *et al.* 2007). WWF also played an important role in the formation of the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC), designed to guarantee that ornamental, exotic fish were harvested in a safe and sustainable way, rather than using cyanide and reef-destroying practices (Bunting 2001). WWF clearly invested in the certification model and became its most important "carrier" into new industries. WWF representatives also played key roles in creating more recent certification initiatives, such as the PAN Parks program for protected areas and the Gold Standard program for carbon credits (Auld *et al.* 2007).

Figure 15.1 provides a bird's-eye view of the expansion of organizations and networks in the area of environmental certification. It illustrates the increasing number of intermediaries and the evolution of indirect ties between certification associations. The shape of the nodes represents the type of organization (grouped according to capital, labor, states, and NGOs), while the shading represents the region of the organization's headquarters, thus providing a glimpse of the transnational character of this arena.

In 2001 (top panel), a variety of different organizations occupied intermediary positions between environmental certification associations. Most were either NGOs (for example, WWF, World Resources Institute) or governments/inter-governmental organizations (for example, UK government, United Nations). Regionally, organizations based in Europe (black) or North America (light gray) predominated, indicating that intermediaries brought some degree of transnational, though not truly global, representation to this field. Reflecting their intertwined origins and early operation, FSC, MSC, and MAC share ties to NGOs such as WWF, auditors such as Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS), donors such as the MacArthur Foundation, and several governmental and inter-governmental organizations. Intermediaries also create close connections between these programs and the world of organic certification, including IMO and the Soil Association. Competing forest certification programs (FSC, PEFC, SFI) are linked through several
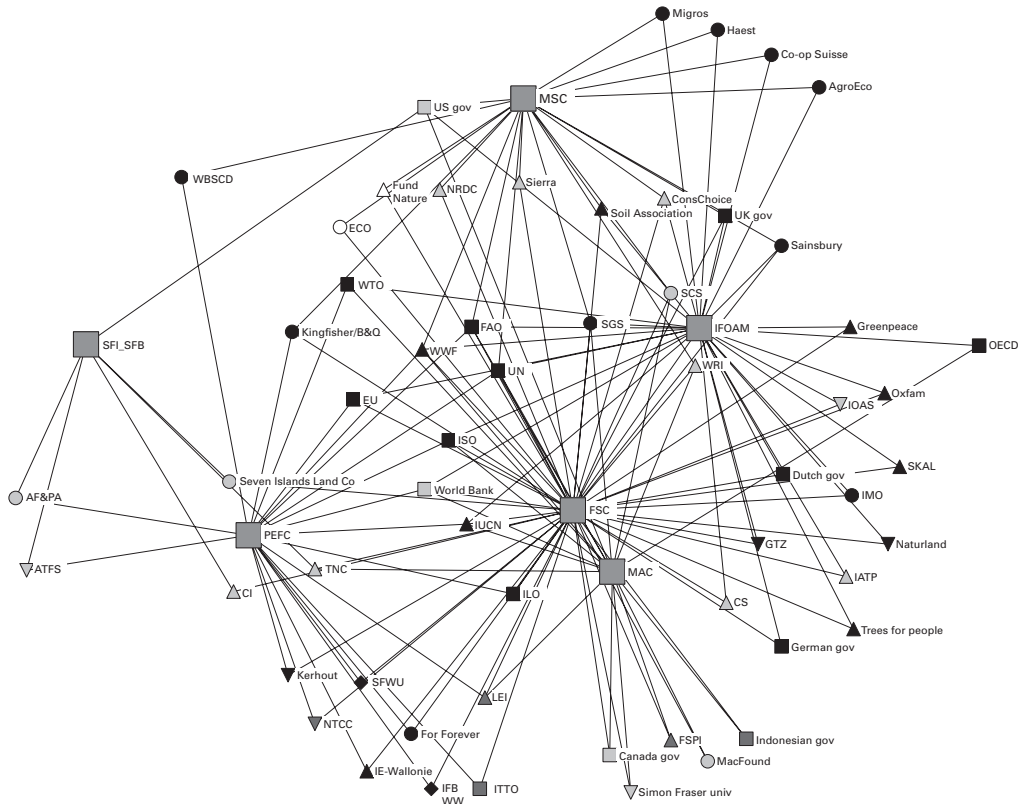
Figure 15.1a Environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2001
Note. Shapes denote the type of organization: circle = capital (company, trade association, foundation); diamond = labor; square = governmental or inter-governmental; upward triangle = NGO; downward triangle = other. Shading denotes the region of an organization's headquarters: light gray = North America; black = Europe; white = Central and South America; dark gray = other.

common ties. To some degree, this reflects their competition for the support of particular firms, such as the British retailer Kingfisher, and American firm Seven Islands Land Company, which was certified under both FSC and SFI (Patrick 2000). It also reflects some limited success by industry-backed programs in garnering support from environmental NGOs such as Conservation International (CI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) (interviews with SFI representatives, 6/26/02, 7/29/02).

The number of intermediaries had increased by nearly 140 per cent (from 109 to 260) by 2006 (lower panel), indicating a more integrated arena of transnational governance. The center of the diagram shows the most central intermediaries at this time. The most central intermediary was WWF, which was tied to all six environmental certification associations. Four others also
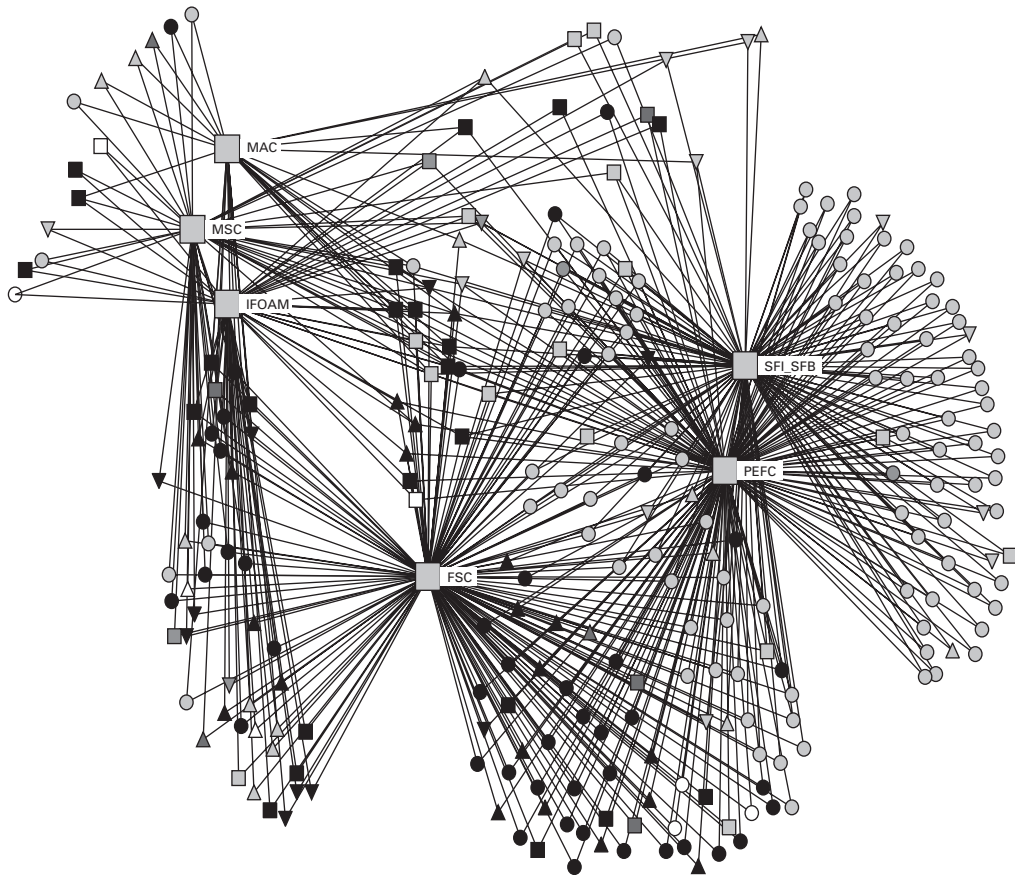
Figure 15.1b Environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2006

had six ties: SGS, a widely accredited auditor; ISO, an increasingly important developer of rules for certification itself; the US government; and the UN – the latter two interfacing with certification associations through a variety of agencies. The European Union, the Canadian government, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the German government's International Development Consultancy (GTZ) were connected to all but one environmental certification initiative.

In sum, these network diagrams show the growing interconnectedness of environmental certification and positions of various intermediaries. They also show traces of the mechanisms that we have argued are behind the elaboration of environmental certification – competition (for example, between FSC, SFI, and PEFC) and diffusion, primarily via WWF as a carrier. Many of the ties we have measured at the inter-organizational level are likely to play out at the

interpersonal level, as individuals come together in conferences and joint projects, develop a common discourse, and share experiences.

Labor and social standards

Though not as interconnected as environmental certification initiatives, programs focused on labor and social standards have also grown over the past two decades. In terms of market penetration, Fair Trade is clearly the leader, with sales of its certified coffee growing more than fivefold by volume between 1999 and 2007 (www.fairtrade.net/coffee.html) and markets for Fair Trade chocolate, tea, bananas, flowers, cotton, and wine also expanding (Raynolds *et al.* 2007). Though a variety of other labels compete with Fair Trade – including those developed by the Rainforest alliance, Utz Kapeh, and many companies – no full-fledged alternative certification associations have emerged in this arena.

Competition has led to elaboration in labor standards certification/monitoring in manufacturing industries (especially apparel, footwear, and toys). "Naming and shaming" campaigns fueled the emergence of the FLA and SAI, developed by coalitions of firms and NGOs, with support from the US government, starting around 1996. Although neither developed a product label, these two initiatives represent innovative, though controversial attempts to certify labor conditions in global supply chains and provide information for consumers.[3]

Two initiatives emerged as alternatives to these innovators. On the one side, the American Apparel Manufacturers Association (AAMA) created the Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production (WRAP) program, which was somewhat weaker than the earlier programs. Nevertheless, some of WRAP's accredited auditors, such as Intertek Testing Services (ITS) and Bureau Veritas Quality International (BVQI), have also worked with the FLA and SAI, creating more ties among these initiatives than are initially apparent. On the other side, the FLA's monitoring system (and to a lesser extent SAI's) was harshly criticized by trade unions and labor rights activists, many of which dropped out of negotiations leading to the FLA, fearing that it would repair firms' images without altering the balance of power at the point of production. In Europe, the Clean Clothes Campaign's (CCC) network of activists developed pilot projects to raise the quality of factory monitoring. American activists developed the WRC, focused on collegiate-licensed apparel, which rejected the notion of credentialing companies' claims in favor of independent investigations to "credential workers" and their claims (interview with WRC developer, 7/8/02). A series of debates about the legitimacy of the FLA and WRC ensued, while SAI faced its own set of critics (Labor Rights in China

1999). Despite these early tensions, the WRC and FLA have engaged in some cooperative activities. They cooperated tacitly in some negotiations with companies (Rodríguez-Garavito 2005) and were tied together by some individual collegiate licensing officers, most notably Rut Tufts from the University of North Carolina, who served on the boards of both organizations. The FLA, WRC, SAI, CCC, and the Ethical Trading Initiative all participated in the Joint Initiative on Corporate Accountability and Workers Rights, funded in part by the EU and the US government. Cooperation in this arena has been tenuous, however. Debates about factory monitoring continue (Seidman 2007), and few labor rights activists have fully bought into the certification model (Maquila Solidarity Network 2006).

Figure 15.2 illustrates the fragmented yet evolving field of social certification. As of 2001, intermediaries were mainly American firms such as Liz Claiborne,
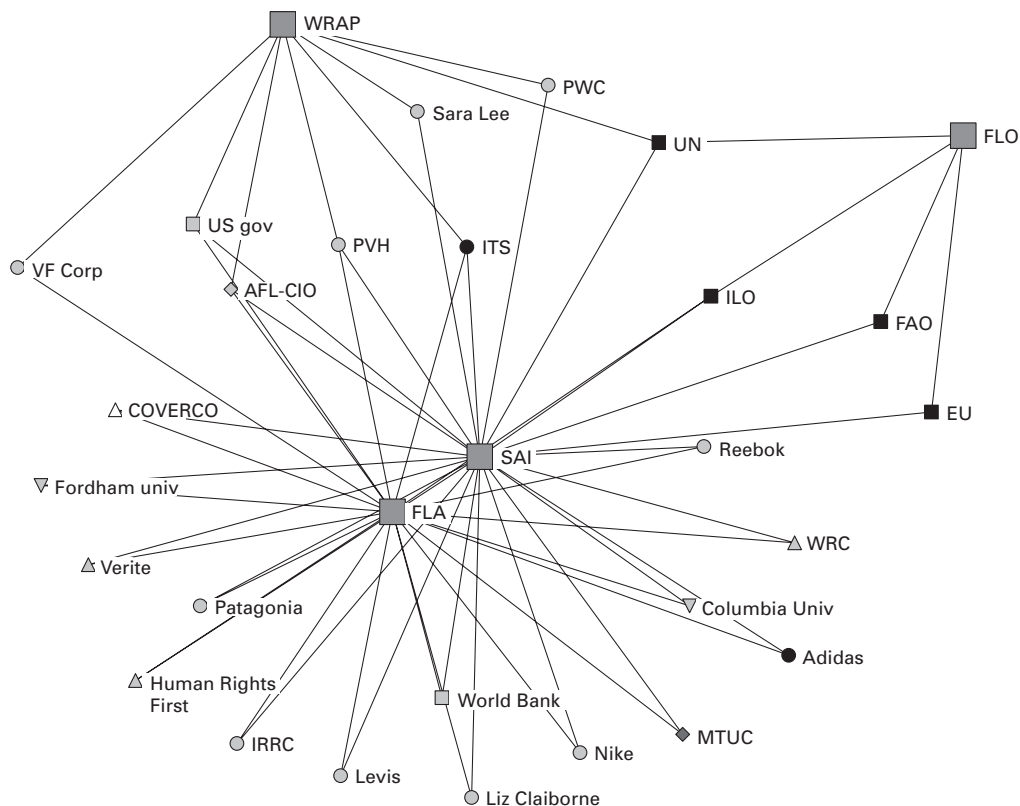

Figure 15.2a Social certification associations and intermediary organizations, 2001
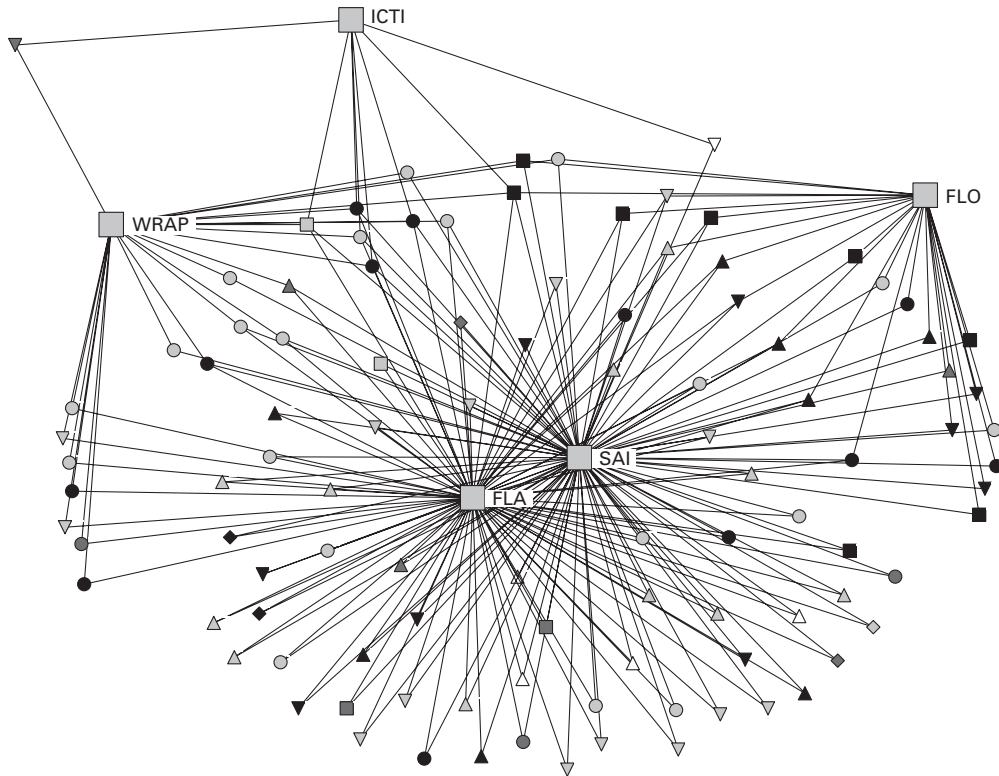*Note.* See Figure 15.1a for legend.

Figure 15.2b Social certification associations and intermediary organizations, 2006

Reebok, and PricewaterhouseCoopers, each of which was linked to two of the
three programs for manufacturing sectors (FLA, SAI, and WRAP). Fair Trade
certification (FLO) was connected to programs focused on manufacturing only
through a few inter-governmental organizations. By 2006, though, the number
of intermediaries nearly quadrupled (from 26 to 103) and Fair Trade and
manufacturing-focused programs became more integrated. There was also
greater national diversity by 2006, with more European organizations –
especially NGOs – serving as intermediaries. A new entrant, the International
Council of Toy Industries CARE program (ICTI), emerged by 2006 but was not
closely connected to intermediaries. The most prominent intermediaries in
2006 were the ILO, the US government, and three corporate auditing/certifica-
tion bodies, SGS, BVQI, ITS, and Cal Safety Compliance Corporation (CSCC).
The centrality of for-profit auditors in this arena is especially striking, with these
four auditing firms connected to *all* programs except FLO.

Although networks in this arena were certainly sparser than for environ-
mental certifiers, we nevertheless find evidence of growing integration at the

organizational level. Individuals representing these organizations have also come into contact with one another more routinely, through conferences sponsored by SAI, ETI, Intertek, Business for Social Responsibility, and several universities, for instance.

Cross-domain linkages and projects

The infrastructure for new transnational communities of practice may emerge not only *within* issue domains (that is, environmental and social certification) but also *across* them. Figure 15.3 looks at ties to intermediaries from all social or environmental certification associations.

In both 2001 and 2006, intermediary organizations were fairly diverse, though far from fully representative of all locations or stakeholders. Intermediaries most often represent capital, NGOs, or the state, rarely represent labor, and are headquartered primarily in North America and Europe. From 2001 to 2006, the number of intermediaries nearly quadrupled (from 109 to 401), reflecting, in part, greater bridging of traditionally distinct issue domains. In spite of this, there is still a rough clustering of certification initiatives by issue domain. In the top panel, labor/social certification programs cluster on the right side of the diagram, largely connected to domain-
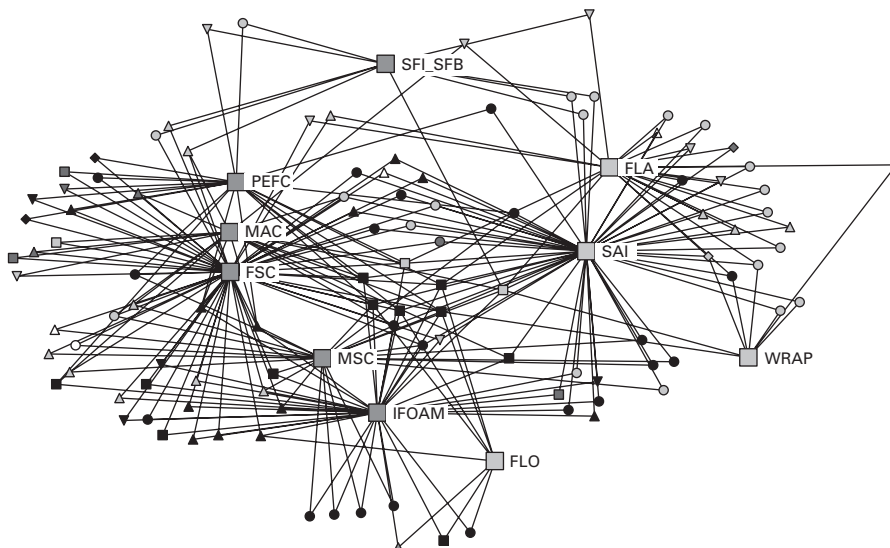

Figure 15.3a All social and environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2001
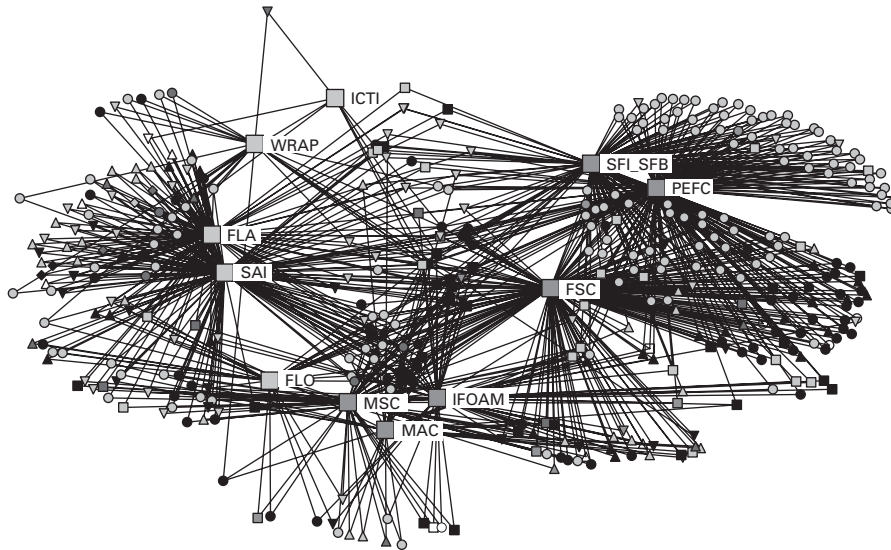*Note.* See Figure 15.1a for legend.

Figure 15.3b All social and environmental certification associations and intermediaries, 2006

specific intermediaries rather than to those also working in the field of environmental certification. The pattern remains similar in 2006, though the (arbitrary) sides of the diagram are reversed. Given this, the organizations that sit in the middle of the diagrams are the most interesting, and probably the most consequential for forging an organizational field and individual community of practice. In 2001, there were only a handful of these bridging ties, mostly governmental or inter-governmental organizations (for example, the UN, the US government and the EU) or companies (for example, SGS, Sainsbury's, IKEA), and a few NGOs (for example, Oxfam, Amnesty International). The number had expanded dramatically by 2006. Table 15.2 shows the most central intermediaries overall in that year, and their ties to environmental and social certification associations. Highly central boundary-spanners include NGOs (Oxfam and HIVOS), auditors (SGS and BVQI), retailers (Marks & Spencer), and a number of governmental and inter-governmental organizations.

This network analysis shows that a heterogeneous set of organizations has become increasingly engaged in a transnational, multi-issue standard-setting and certification project. There is also evidence that several actors in this arena have begun to strategize at the level of the field itself, in some cases working to construct both inter-organizational ties and an individual community of practice.

A number of American foundations (MacArthur, Ford, Rockefeller Brothers, and several others) have spread the certification model across

Table 15.2 Most-central intermediaries in the transnational space of social and environmental certification, 2006

Organization	No. of ties to cert. assns.	Environmental	Social
SGS (Société Générale de Surveillance)	10	6	4
US government	10	6	4
International Labor Organization (ILO)	9	4	5
International Organization for Standardization (ISO)	9	6	3
United Nations (UN)	9	6	3
Bureau Veritas Quality International (BVQI)	7	3	4
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Tech. Zus. (GTZ)	7	5	2
European Union (EU)	7	5	2
Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)	7	5	2
World Trade Organization (WTO)	7	4	3
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)	7	6	1
ISEAL alliance (ISEAL)	6	4	2
Oxfam Intl	6	3	3
Canadian government	5	5	0
HIVOS	5	3	2
International Accreditation Forum (IAF)	5	4	1
Marks & Spencer	5	2	3
UK government	5	3	2

Note. Cert. assn. = certification association.

issue domains and have built communities around the social/environmental certification project. They first became enthusiastic about the certification model with the rise of the FSC. To support the FSC and its surrogates, they created a "Sustainable Forestry Funders" network, which granted over $33 million to forest certification projects between 1995 and 2001 (Bartley 2007a). In the late 1990s, several of these foundations began supporting an expanded certification project, first making grants to support the MSC and MAC, then Fair Trade systems, then newer pilot projects such as the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council and the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance. The Ford Foundation, for instance, provided massive support for forest certification and made sizeable grants for Fair Trade coffee and the certification of eco-tourism and responsible mining practices (Foundation Center database). One program officer in particular, Michael Conroy, became a strong advocate for the certification model, later becoming a board member of the FSC, TransFair USA, FLO-CERT (the certification wing of the FLO), and an NGO that championed the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance, as well as the author of a book entitled *Branded!: How the Certification Revolution is Transforming Global Corporations* (Conroy

2007). The MacArthur Foundation provided some support to certification projects for forestry, marine life, fair trade agriculture, and labor standards in manufacturing (Foundation Center database).

Community formation has also been facilitated by face-to-face interaction among individuals working in the transnational space of social/environmental certification. Since 2003, FLO, IFOAM, and the FSC have all had their head-quarters near each other in Bonn, which should increase the possibilities for interaction. A number of conferences on certification, CSR, and ethical sour-cing have also brought together individuals from different initiatives and issue domains. For instance, looking at recent conferences sponsored by GTZ, Intertek, and Business for Social Responsibility, one finds representatives of the Rainforest alliance, Chiquita, and International Labor Organization at all three, and individuals from SAI, WRAP, FLA, Oxfam, WWF, Transparency International, Levi Strauss, Mattel, Starbucks, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and several other organizations at two of the three conferences.

Perhaps the most important factor in structuring a cross-domain community of practice has been the formation of the ISEAL alliance (International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling). This umbrella organization was formed in 1999 by "mission-driven, NGO-based" certification associations – IFOAM, FLO, FSC, MSC, SAI, and MAC – to legitimate their activity and differentiate themselves from industry-based competitors. They "faced a number of similar challenges, and they felt that if they could work together, they could pool resources to reduce costs – and having a kind of a common voice they'd actually have a louder voice" (interview with ISEAL representative, 3/8/06).[4] ISEAL developed a "Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards" and has worked to ensure that multi-stakeholder certification initia-tives are compatible with other forms of international governance, especially the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade agreement, which bans governmental stan-dards that restrict trade but is less clear on the legitimacy of private-sector standards (Bernstein and Hannah 2008). We see ISEAL as a nascent community of practice formed both to fend off challenges from industry and to build legitimacy in a transnational space of evolving rules about standard-setting. Of course, the community around ISEAL largely excludes actors from industry-sponsored certification associations. It remains to be seen whether these lines will continue to structure communities of practice in the transnational space of social and environmental certification, or whether broader settlements are possible. It is clear, however, that as this space has become more complex, opportunities and incentives for community-building among previously disconnected actors have increased.

Conclusion

With the expansion of transnational governance comes new, loosely organized, and hybridized social configurations. At the organizational level, these can be described as fields. The related concept of communities of practice allows one to consider configurations of individual actors. Our examination of social and environmental certification shows how communities of practice can be both cause and consequence of transnational governance. Older communities of practice, organized around some combination of religion, politics, and expert knowledge, played an important but often overlooked role in the emergence of certification systems. As certification expanded, however, new lines of connection, far from the visions of the early founders, developed. It is along these lines, sometimes crossing issues and constituencies, that new communities of practice appear to be emerging. Intermediaries such as GTZ and the Ford Foundation, and spaces for interaction such as ISEAL and numerous conferences, play an especially important role in that process.

There are a number of reasons to think that these new communities will shape the future of transnational governance. First, community formation may give new actors a "seat at the table" in defining and negotiating rules for the global economy. For instance, to the extent that communities form around those certification initiatives that are not dominated by industry associations, this may establish new actors as legitimate standard-setters for global industries. Such communities are unlikely to garner the credibility afforded to professions or the resources available to industry associations, but they may nevertheless be recognized as knowledgeable, authorized transnational actors.

Second, one would expect certification-oriented transnational communities of practice to carry this model into even more settings. Such a community might successfully frame a variety of global problems – climate change, poverty, financial regulation, and others – as amenable to the certification solution. To a growing extent, one might see a solution in search of problems. Though this could indeed bring about some positive changes, it would also represent an elaboration of neoliberalism – albeit a particular form of neoliberalism that seeks to build new markets to rectify market and government failures. Some observers have begun to worry that principles of democratic citizenship would be neglected in such a shift (Seidman 2007).

Finally, in considering the significance of certification communities, it is important to remember that for all the language of multi-stakeholder engagement, there is still inequality in terms of representation and voice in this arena. On

the one hand, advocates of multi-stakeholder certification systems are forced to mobilize to establish their right to set international standards and gain a seat at tables that are typically closed to all but business and government elites. Even in the communities surrounding multi-stakeholder initiatives, however, some actors clearly have more power than others. Labor unions – especially those from developing countries – are, for a variety of reasons, under-represented in these arenas (Fetzer in this volume). Though some locally based NGOs representing indigenous communities, small farmers, and migrant workers are engaged with certification associations, they are certainly not central actors. Clearly, not all potential transnational communities are equally capable of organizing globally or equally powerful when they do so.

NOTES

1. One might even question the assumption that organizations cannot identify with one another sufficiently to constitute a community. While it is surely true that organizations cannot "feel" in the same way individuals can, neither can organizations make rational decisions or associate with others in quite the same way that individuals can. Nevertheless, this does not prevent us from considering them as actors in markets or networks. Organizations function in that way by developing routines for decision-making, raising the question of whether they might also utilize routines for identifying with other organizations. Indeed, this is what theorists of organizational fields imply in defining a field as "a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside of the field" (Scott 1994: 206–07).
2. The disadvantage is that that the content of websites may be only loosely coupled with the concrete practices of the organization. Yet for organizations of this sort, websites are important tools for information-dissemination and self-presentation. Even if a certification association presents itself as *unlike* some other organization, this indicates one sort of attention that constitutes an organizational field and increases the probability of interpersonal contact, compared to those actors that "fly under the radar."
3. The FLA does not "certify" particular factories but does use factory audits to certify that the labor compliance activities of its participants meet basic standards.
4. Another umbrella project, the Ethical Certification and Labelling Authentication Project (www.eclspace.org) is led by individuals from Rockefeller Brothers, ISEAL, FSC, Imaflora, Unilever, and others, but appears to have done little since its creation in 2003.

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