

## **Panel 7: Beyond national institutions and institutionalisms? Policy-making in a transnational world**

**Organizers: Dr Amanda Smullen (University of Amsterdam) and Dr Menno Fenger (Erasmus University Rotterdam)**

### **Introduction to the panel's theme**

'The future of the nation state' is one of the three key topics in the NIG Research Program. In its research program, the NIG includes a focus upon challenges to the nation-state from 'below' (decentralization, regionalization) and from 'above' (internationalization, globalization). Whereas the nation-state used to be the 'preferred' policy-making institution for the larger part of the 20th century, in contemporary societies policy-making increasingly is affected by transnational actors and institutions. This panel sets out to theoretically and empirically assess the role of transnational actors and transnational institutions in national policy-making.

There is a burgeoning academic literature discussing the rise of transnational policy and regulation communities (see Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Holton 2008). These public and sometimes private actors set normative standards about what constitutes good practice, as well as establish explicit regulations regarding the contents and directions that national policy makers should take or can learn from. The European Union's Open Method of Coordination in the area of social policy illustrates this, as do the network collaborations that characterize policy making in EU agencies (Zeitlin, Pochet & Magnussen 2005; Coen & Thatcher 2008). There are also numerous other transnational actors that aim to have impact on national policies. These actors might be formal institutions like the World Bank, the European Union, or ASEAN, and increasingly civil society organizations - who are also extending their activities around the globe. However, not much empirical evidence is available on the specific activities of these organizations. There is little knowledge about what strategies these organizations use to simultaneously influence a large number of national policy arenas, and the effects of these strategies within nation states remain under studied. How for instance do nation states incorporate these trans-national pressures within their own policy-making traditions.

In public administration theory, the conceptualization of institutions relies heavily on the sociological institutional approach, in which institutions are considered as social mechanisms. Accordingly, many sociological institutionalists emphasize the highly-interactive and mutually-constitutive character of the relationship between institutions and individual action. When they act according to social convention within a policy community, individuals simultaneously constitute themselves as social actors, in the sense of engaging in socially meaningful acts, and reinforcing the convention to which they are adhering (Hall & Taylor, 1996). In contrast to sociological institutionalism's interest in social norms and standardizing practices (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006), historical institutionalism has focused more upon material political administrative traditions and policy origins to explain policy outcomes through path dependency (Pierson, 2004). But the emergence of transnational institutions and fields of policy making present a challenge to national traditions of policy making (and potentially path dependency), particularly when they involve adopting and adapting to transnational policy communities. They also pose questions for traditional conceptualizations of change within institutional theory since change is generally not being instigated by crisis (see Streek & Thelen 2005; Sabel & Zeitlin 2006).

Another way in which transnational institutions raise problems for institutional theory concerns the notion of the duality of institutions. This is because there are no global interactions in a global society that gave shape to institutions in transnational contexts. Questions arise about the capacity of existing institutional theories to respond to and be useful for understanding trans-national policy making processes and outcomes. This is despite empirical observations that indicate that transnational institutions exist and are asserting influence on national policies (see, for instance, Carney & Farashahi, 2005; Scott, 2007). Besides an empirical interest in considering transnational policy making processes at the trans-national level and/or how they affect the nation state, this panel is also interested in how these developments transcend the boundaries of institutional theories themselves.

In considering the future of the nation state this panel sets out to examine the role of transnational actors and transnational institutions on policy-making. Concerning the role of transnational actors, we are interested in both the role of non-statist transnational actors like social movements, expert committees, think tanks; as well as policy making within international governmental/supranational organizations and so. Concerning the role of transnational institutions, our key research interest is how transnational institutions develop, evolve, travel and have impact on national policy-making.

### **Relation to the NIG research program**

This panel closely relates to the NIG-theme 'The future of the nation state'. It elaborated on the idea of the nation-states' hollowing out from 'above', i.e. from the international context. However, by focusing in-depth on transnational actors and institutions, it enabled systematic analysis of this trend. Moreover, it contributed to knowledge on the development of transnational actors and institutions.

## Contributions

This panel welcomed all kinds of papers dealing with the impact of transnational actors and transnational institutions on policy-making. It was interested in the actors and institutions involved in setting trans-national policy agendas and the way that these policies and standards are diffused within and across national contexts. Furthermore, papers discussing current theoretical limits or developing theoretical frameworks aimed at understanding transnational actors and institutions were welcome.

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