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The making of a comprehensive transnational discourse community

Dieter Plehwe

Introduction

The critique of state-centered approaches to international relations and international political economy has resulted in a rapidly growing literature focusing on a variety of “private authorities” in international relations (Cutler *et al.* 1999). In this literature, arrays of transnational communities are prominent subjects of analysis. Epistemic communities promoting new environmental standards, discourse communities pushing for new public management across borders, and advocacy coalitions shaming the perpetrators of human rights abuses, for example, have been observed and conceptualized in order to shed light on the extent to which dispersed actors from diverse locations can build and maintain crucial links, and develop social identities across borders. In turn, these have been found important for setting political agendas, acquiring a voice in policy implementation processes, policing compliance, and spreading ideologies more generally (Haas 1992a; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Bislev *et al.* 2002; Djelic 2006). At the same time, it is becoming clear that many of these transnational communities recruit their members among private as well as public constituencies. A study of these communities thus also needs specifically to address the linkages between civil society, business, and the public sphere.

Transnational community research has also contributed to the rise of social constructivist approaches in international relations (Risse 2007). However, given the increasing attention paid to knowledge, ideas, and discourse, it is surprising how little international relations scholarship in general, and transnational community research in particular, have had to say so far about the global rise of neoliberal discourse. Even the neo-Gramscian international political economy literature has focused so far mostly on corporate planning groups and the rise of neoliberalism. Only recently has more attention been paid to the wider role of intellectuals and knowledge production (Plehwe *et al.* 2006; Horn 2009). Popular accounts of neoliberal hegemony once again

privilege structural features of the remaining superpower, the USA, in combination with the power of global financial institutions or the financialization of big business, and pay scant attention to the role of intellectuals and the formation of actor preferences (Harvey 2005). The earlier rise of Keynesianism, by contrast, has been subjected to comparative analysis with one eye on the role of ideas and intellectuals at the national level (Hall 1989), and the authors were rightly scolded for ignoring the transnational dimension (Hirschman 1989). Given the present global financial and economic crisis, a better understanding of how neoliberalism became a key ideology for explaining the world is central to assessing how likely it is that alternative interpretations will become authoritative and politically relevant, both in leading global policy circles and among the general public.

In order to grasp how interests come to be understood and actor preferences formed in transnational communities which influence global policy-making, it becomes necessary – and particularly interesting – to attain a better understanding of intellectual efforts to develop, shape, prioritize, and possibly generalize preferences and perspectives. It certainly is not accidental that much research on private authority focuses on transnational communities specializing in matters of knowledge and expertise – sometimes, unfortunately, even at the expense of addressing the links between knowledge, interpretation, and interest. Specific and particularistic interests can attain the status of general interests only if they are well understood, expressed, and advocated, as well as effectively legitimized. Efforts to obtain authority and legitimacy for knowledge involve substantive, strategic, and tactical knowledge processing and, more often than not, claims about the scientific accuracy and truth of the generated results. In order to effectively organize the chain of knowledge required in this process, what was originally only an intuitive understanding of the intellectual division of labor has been developed more consciously since World War II in response to the important nexus of knowledge and power, the increasing importance of national and international media, and the ubiquity of information at the current stage of the knowledge society (Walpen 2004; Plehwe and Walpen 2006). At the same time, the relevance of ideology in the politics of knowledge has been effectively disguised by ubiquitous claims to scientific status (Fischer and Forrester 1993).

The argument in the present chapter is twofold. First, it is necessary to consider – both separately and together – the generation of philosophical or upstream knowledge, the production of disciplinary academic knowledge, and, further downstream, applied knowledge such as policy advice and journalistic information in order better to grasp the ways in which transnational communities rise and function. Second, a sufficiently detailed analysis of the

organization of knowledge chains along the policy cycle and during specific stages (of alerting, agenda-setting, policy proposals, implementation, and so on) can yield important insights with regard to the influence of private authorities in international relations and the evolution of global knowledge fields.

In what follows, I will briefly discuss epistemic community, advocacy coalition, and discourse community research to establish why yet another category of transnational community is needed to understand the role and impact of transnational communities that are capable of knowledge production and processing well beyond the types that have been conceptualized and studied so far. The main body of the chapter investigates the historical roots and evolution of the comprehensive community of neoliberal intellectuals. The potential theoretical and empirical advances arising from a more systematic analysis of comprehensive transnational discourse communities are discussed in the conclusion.

Types of transnational community: commonalities, differences, and open questions

International relations scholars have observed and conceptualized various types of transnational communities in respect of their distinctive capacities for international policy-making. However, little is known about the emergence of the basic values and principled beliefs on which the working and regulatory impact of such communities are based. Typically, these values and beliefs are taken for granted, with no effort to analyze their origin. This can be argued, for instance, for three types of transnational community – epistemic communities, advocacy networks, and discourse communities – that are at the core of debates among international relations and international political economy scholars.¹

Transnational epistemic communities

Epistemic communities have been conceptualized in an effort to explain preference formation in the face of new and challenging issues confronted by traditional players without prior experience and sufficient expertise. Foreign affairs officials, for example, operate in conditions of relative or substantial uncertainty. Haas (1992b: 1) emphasized the “growing technical uncertainties and complexities of problems of global concern,” requiring improvements in international policy coordination. He challenged realist assumptions about easily identified state interests directly determining state

preferences in international relations. Decision-makers are considered ill-prepared, if not incapable of identifying and pursuing interests if they are not sufficiently familiar with the technical aspects of specific problems.

In this context, epistemic communities of scientists and experts are seen as influential groups able to shape policy agendas. An epistemic community, according to Haas (1992b: 3), is “a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area.” Characteristic are shared normative and causal beliefs, shared notions of validity, and a common policy enterprise. An incipient epistemic community can be turned into a collective force when such individuals discover each other, and forge an alliance with social agency capabilities beyond a mere combination of individual capacities.

Various case studies (for example, free trade in services [see Drake and Nicolaidis 1992] and the ban on chlorofluorocarbons [see Haas 1992a]) evidence the power of epistemic communities to set new agendas in international policy deliberations. A networked community’s power can be seen to be waning, however, once the policy process moves downstream into formal arenas allegedly dominated by state interests, and thus into the realm in which traditional international relations approaches focusing on the explanatory power of national interests and relative positions of power are considered adequate.

While rightly praised for bringing into focus important transnational actor constellations in specific and important knowledge production areas relevant to agenda-setting processes, Haas focuses too strongly on the expert status of epistemic community members. In terms of the groups studied, however, such communities may be better understood as power elites in C. Wright Mills’s sense due to their weight as corporate research directors or heads of public research institutions, for example. And their influence may not always be as positive as in the case of banning chlorofluorocarbons. The epistemic community approach has also been criticized as limiting the attention paid to such unofficial influence on agenda-setting, as well as to basic knowledge aspects within transnational epistemic communities (Bislev *et al.* 2002: 208; Adler 2005). Others have challenged the approach’s elite focus, proposing consideration also of more stratified transnational advocacy networks.

Transnational advocacy networks

These can be considered transnational communities even if the authors settled for a different name. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998: 2), members of

transnational advocacy networks are “bound together by shared values, a common discourse, dense exchanges of information and services.” In issue areas such as human rights, ecology, gender, development, and peace such networks have built “new links among actors in civil societies, states, and international organizations” and thereby “multiply channels of access to the international system” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 1).

Advocacy networks do not differ from epistemic communities because of the absence of shared values, as Keck and Sikkink (1998: 1) claim, but in terms of social composition and resources. While the latter are communities of scientists and experts primarily mobilizing their scientific knowledge, the former comprise a broader range of social strata and relatively weak – in terms of ready resources – non-governmental organizations that obtain influence due to their ability to gather and report reliable information (information politics), to dramatize facts (symbolic politics), to effectively exert material pressure by linking the issues to money, trade, or prestige (leverage politics), and to exert moral pressure by publicly scrutinizing the extent to which organizations adhere to principles they have endorsed (accountability politics). Another distinguishing feature is the degree of immediacy inherent in the two types. Members of epistemic communities are likely to know each other, while transnational advocacy networks are likely to operate frequently as distant, largely imagined communities many of whose members know *of* each other at best (see Djelic and Quack in this volume).

Finally, transnational advocacy networks have been shown to influence policy-making beyond the agenda-setting stage of the policy process. Keck and Sikkink (1998) observed a wide range of campaign influences. Such networks are found to be capable of correcting agendas, enforcing agenda elements, and punishing their neglect. These may be regarded as modification, maintenance, or reproduction functions in addition to the initiation and innovation functions attributed to epistemic communities. While focusing on a single issue such as tropical deforestation, the authors also account for the way in which a single environmental issue is linked to other environmental issues, and pay attention to interlocking epistemic communities, for example, linking environmental and social issue areas.

Curiously, all the examples studied are progressive transnational advocacy networks, which seems to reflect a normative bias and/or limits with regard to an analytical understanding of civil society in this framework – despite the conceptual understanding of civil society as a sphere of struggle between competing forces. By drawing too sharp a distinction between business and business-related actor groups and civil society actors, which are effectively

identified with non-profit or third sector groups, Keck and Sikkink (1998) do not examine the extent to which a broader range of “private” knowledge actors – and neoliberal and neoconservative forces in particular – are likewise involved in the highly uneven formation of transnational civil society, for example, in the field of legal services. This contrasts with the work of Dezalay and Garth (2002) who strongly emphasize “top-down participatory development” in the field of human rights, designed to secure legitimacy for neoliberal capitalism rather than advance a genuine agenda for bottom-up networks.

Transnational discourse communities

Transnational discourse communities, in contrast, have been observed predominantly at the conservative end of the political spectrum. Bislev *et al.* (2002: 208) go beyond analysis of the production of basic knowledge in transnational epistemic and advocacy communities, and highlight the transmission of prescriptive knowledge. This implies a critical view of knowledge as part of the social power structure, which differs from the perception of knowledge as a “neutral” resource that prevails in much of epistemic community and advocacy coalition research (Fischer 2003). The analysis of discourse communities, therefore, avoids the normative and problem-solving bias that characterizes much of the transnational community research previously discussed.² But transnational discourse communities are found to influence knowledge transfer far beyond the agenda-setting stage. The promotion of public–private partnerships in local government and commercialization in higher education are illustrations.

According to Bislev *et al.* (2002), activities supported by the German Bertelsmann Foundation were crucial in developing and maintaining a transnational network of civil society actors and local public officials, and ultimately in transforming local government practices. Schöller’s and Groh’s (2006) work on a Bertelsmann-related discourse community in the field of higher education shows how Foundation officials have managed to concert an unlikely group of fellow travelers, including neoliberal think tanks such as Germany’s Ludwig Erhard Foundation, as well as traditional constituencies of social liberalism such as Germany’s Social Democrats, trade unionists, and Greens. They all embraced the Foundation’s vision of marketizing higher education. Alas, neither study shows how the Foundation’s neoliberal fundamental values and principled beliefs, evidenced in its promotion of new public management and the commercialization of culture, emerged in the first place.

Open questions: the origins of basic values and principled beliefs

While the international relations and international political economy literature, as summarized above, discusses the practices and effects of various types of transnational communities, the origins of their underlying values and principled beliefs remain obscure. In order to clarify them we must leave behind specific transnational epistemic, advocacy, or discourse communities and take a more comprehensive approach. Adler's (2005: 22) notion of transnational communities of practice³ attempts to provide a more generalized account of the ideational dimension of cross-border social formations. "Most of the transnational communities described in the IR literature are in fact species of communities of practice," according to Adler (2005: 16).

From this perspective, transmission of meaning rather than the provision of "objective" information is considered the most important contribution of transnational communities to policy-making. The most far-reaching effect of epistemic communities, according to Adler (2005: 16), "is cognitive evolution, i.e., the constitution of new practices that may be used by both present and future generations of practitioners and may constitute the basis of transformation of the identities and interests of an increasing number of people." However, Adler's effort to address the yawning gap in the literature with regard to the explanation of shared values and principled beliefs unwittingly turns into an effort to stress the fundamental importance of social communication and constructivism in general. At least, he fails to explain the origins and political nature of the social construction of fundamental values and principled beliefs like the other transnational community scholars who unequivocally emphasize their fundamental importance.

Considering different levels of abstraction, more concrete and competing meanings are crucial in solving the puzzle of value origins. "Values emerge in experiences of self formation and self transcendence," writes Joas (1999: 255) in his summary of classical contributions by Nietzsche, Durkheim, Dewey, and others. But unlike Adler he proceeds to clarify possible misunderstandings arising at such a general level of anthropological abstraction. For our purposes it is interesting to look at his reflections on the polysemy of the word "origin."

First, "origin" can refer to the historically first announcement of a value. Second, it can refer to the efforts of a small, eventually growing group of disciples championing this value – an original community. Third, it can mean the rise of new ties between individuals and values (for example, conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism), which are not historically new – the

joining of an imagined community. And fourth, it can refer to the revival of weak, almost forgotten values (Joas 1999: 257).

In the case of transnational epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, and discourse communities we are probably dealing with origin in the third and fourth senses of Joas's enumeration – joining an existing imagined community and reviving a community – since it is unlikely that the values and principled beliefs uniting fairly recent and specific transnational communities are historically new. In order to understand the historical origins and evolution of fundamental meanings and values in the first and second senses, a certain amount of *longue durée* historical efforts to account for the birth of new philosophical systems (religious or secular, for example, Enlightenment, social democracy, and so on) are indispensable for understanding when and why intellectuals first announced and started to champion historically new values and principled beliefs, which in turn makes it possible for others eventually to convert to or revive them.

In order to explain the origins of neoliberal values and principled beliefs, and the evolution of knowledge based on neoliberal philosophical foundations, I suggest, one has to go back to a transnational community of neoliberal intellectuals (Walpen 2004; Plehwe and Walpen 2006; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009), which is best understood as a comprehensive discourse community. This is an organized network of intellectuals who originally conceive of or recombine, recognize, maintain, and further develop a distinct set of fundamental values and principled beliefs that constitute their social identity or an important part thereof. They forge a normative and transdisciplinary basis or worldview informing the development of knowledge and expertise, scientific and otherwise, as well as other professional competencies in multiple domains. Claims to authoritative policy-relevant knowledge within multiple domains or issue areas can be made within the community and in discourse coalitions. A comprehensive discourse community can be conceived as or turn into a transnational comprehensive discourse community depending on the circumstances of the making of the community.

Transnational roots and evolutions: the comprehensive community of neoliberal intellectuals

The term “neoliberalism” has a prehistory in early twentieth-century political and economic thought (Walpen 2000). But the post-World War II concept of neoliberalism developed and shared by the members of the neoliberal transnational discourse community first came into view in the 1930s.

Contemporary neoliberalism emerged as a result of intellectual confrontations triggered by the Great Depression. Mass unemployment and social unrest challenged the very existence of the capitalist order. This led the early associates of the emerging neoliberal community to face the shortcomings of traditional liberal values and principled beliefs, in addition to confronting the perceived threat of socialism and planning.

Uprooted cosmopolitans: neoliberalism in exile

Many of the participants in the initial neoliberal deliberations of the 1930s had already interacted across borders in numerous ways for at least a decade. Quite a few had passed through Vienna and Ludwig von Mises's *Privatseminar* during the 1920s, for example. In Vienna, the efforts of Austrian economists such as von Mises and von Hayek were dedicated to disputing the socialist claims to knowledge authority in the famous socialist calculation debate. By the mid-1930s, however, the participants in a by then more closely knit neoliberal community had experienced the collapse of traditional liberalism in country after country, and many had become uprooted cosmopolitans. Unlike Tarrow's rooted cosmopolitans (see the introduction to this volume), prominent Austrian, German, and Italian academics had become conservative refugees from the countries ruled by Nazis and fascists, and needed to develop flexibility with regard to their home bases. Swiss members of the incipient neoliberal community, such as William E. Rappard, provided a safe haven for the likes of Wilhelm Röpke, Ludwig von Mises, and Luigi Einaudi. Other Austrians and Germans found refuge in far away New Zealand (Karl Popper), the UK (Friedrich von Hayek), the USA (Gottfried Haberler, Fritz Machlup), and Turkey (Alexander Rüstow) (Feichtinger 2001).

If the Vienna of the 1920s displayed a very lively "science between cultures" (Feichtinger 2001), the exiled members of the transnational community were forced to cross cultures and to find a pedigree in a transnational community they themselves were nurturing jointly with like-minded colleagues from the UK and the USA, in addition to Switzerland, France, and a few other scattered places in Scandinavia, Mexico, and South Africa (Walpen 2004). Later characteristics of the comprehensive transnational community of neoliberals – internationalism, interdisciplinary work, and the mobilization of private business and corporate foundation resources for the advancement of academic and other projects – can be discerned in the formative life experiences of leading neoliberals. Many neoliberal intellectuals were not welcome at the universities of their home countries, but quite

a few were unable to secure jobs at universities in their host countries either and so had to look elsewhere for ways of making a living. Entrepreneurship and cosmopolitanism thus were not just key aspects of economic theorizing; they had a distinct existential and emotional appeal apart from providing the material basis needed to procure economic – and intellectual – independence (Plehwe 2009a).

Partly due to emigration and parallel experiences the term “neoliberalism” started to appear in multiple contexts in the 1930s (in France, Switzerland, Germany, and the UK, for example), eventually to become established as the main designation of a new intellectual/political movement (Walpen 2000). An important discussion took place in France from 1935 onwards. A loose group of economists, philosophers, and sociologists⁴ located in Paris would later be involved in organizing the Colloque Walter Lippmann (CWL 1939).

Walter Lippmann’s book *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society* published in 1937 (Lippmann 1937) contained a principled statement of the superiority of the market economy over an economy planned by the state. He restated many traditional liberal values and principled beliefs in terms of individual freedom, private property, and so on, but the book also featured a clear understanding of the fundamental and far-reaching positive role of the state in providing protection from interest group politics. Such a strong and impartial state was regarded as necessary for tasks that went far beyond the liberal night-watchman state, albeit in ways different from the planning state of the social liberals. This state was to be enabled to guide the population by learning what they want, namely a free capitalist economic and social order, as advocated by neoliberal intellectuals, and not socialist planning. Lippmann thus wanted individuals to be free to choose only what he and other neoliberals perceived as the best social order, and the state was regarded as quintessential to securing such an order. Traditional liberal political values such as the right to form coalitions and voting rights had at the same time become fundamentally suspicious due to the rise of socialist trade unions, and social democratic, communist, and fascist political parties. Significantly, “totalitarianism” was discussed by Lippmann primarily with regard to the absence of private property rather than the more commonplace reference to a lack of democracy or countervailing political power.

The French philosopher Louis Rougier invited over thirty intellectuals to Paris to discuss Lippmann’s book at the Colloque Walter Lippmann: a total of twenty-six participated, and fifteen of those (among others Raymond Aron, Louis Baudin, Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Michael Polanyi, Wilhelm Röpke, and Alexander Rüstow) would participate in the founding

of the Mont Pèlerin Society nine years later. The participants discussed the need for a new liberal program in science and society, which was eventually labeled “neoliberal.” The term won out over alternatives such as positive liberalism. The group launched a project agenda, a journal (*Cahiers du Libéralisme*), and a think tank with several locations (Denord 2001). The concept of “neoliberalism” was defined in 1938 as including:

- the priority of the price mechanism;
- free enterprise;
- competition; and
- a strong and impartial state (Walpen 2004: 60–61).

While opposing social liberalism and socialism, the participating intellectuals had to stop thinking of the state in mostly (if not purely) negative terms after the Great Depression, and formed the nucleus of the transnational neoliberal discourse community. The German contingent of economists, such as Walter Eucken, Alexander Rüstow, and Wilhelm Röpke, at this point had already gone further than the London-based scholars around Lionel Robbins and F. A. von Hayek in distancing themselves from classical liberalism. They were already discussing the tasks of a “new liberalism” on the eve of the Nazis’ rise to power. Significantly for later developments, Rüstow explicitly called for a “liberal interventionism” (Ptak 2004).

The outbreak of World War II put an abrupt stop to this nascent attempt to consolidate the transnational community and to organize (neo)liberal forces. At the Paris conference it was also not yet time to further clarify the set of neoliberal values and principled beliefs. Twelve years later at the first meeting of the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) considerable work would be invested to this end by way of drafting this group’s statement of aims. However, the clear recognition of a two-pronged effort – against socialism and naturalistic liberalism (compare Foucault 2004) – guided the work of the carefully selected intellectuals who were invited to join the subsequent discussion, deliberately excluding representatives of the other new liberalism, mainstream social liberalism.⁵

Consolidating the transnational discourse community

With the conclusion of the fighting in 1945, several members of the neoliberal community were eager to resume the tasks neglected during the war. A number of well-known intellectuals in Europe and the United States eventually assembled for more than a week over Easter in Mont Pèlerin, a village close to Lake Geneva. A Swiss businessman, Albert Hunold, and Hayek were

the main organizers. The internationalist outlook and organizational effort were made possible by some timely corporate/institutional support. The Foundation for Economic Education in Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, which dated from 1946 and employed Ludwig von Mises, and the William Volker Fund based in Kansas City provided subsidies, as did European and US universities that employed community members (LSE, Chicago, and so on). The Volker Fund was led by future MPS member Harold Luhnow and provided travel funds for the US participants. Of the total conference costs of 18,000 Swiss francs, the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (today Credit Suisse) paid 15,000 (Steiner 2007). US historian George H. Nash (1998 [1976]: 26) described the mood of the post-War community of neoliberals:

[T]he participants, high in the Swiss Alps, were only too conscious that they were outnumbered and without apparent influence on policy-makers in the Western world. All across Europe, planning and socialism seemed ascendant.

But the failure of classical liberalism continued to be high on the agenda as well. Traditional liberalism was doomed, according to Hayek, because of crippling conceptual flaws, and the only way to diagnose and rectify them was a withdrawal into a small and tightly controlled group – a comprehensive transnational discourse community. As Hayek said in his opening address at the first meeting:

[E]ffective endeavors to elaborate the general principles of a liberal order are practicable only among a group of people who are in agreement on fundamentals, and among whom basic conceptions are not questioned at every step . . . What we need are people who have faced the arguments from the other side, who have struggled with them and fought themselves through to a position from which they can both critically meet the objections against it and justify their own views . . . this should be regarded as a private meeting and all that is said here in discussion as “off the record” . . . it must remain a closed society, not open to all and sundry. (Hayek 1967: 149, 151, 153, 158)

Longstanding ties across borders had been important with regard to the early recruiting efforts of the MPS: Hayek, Mises, Polanyi, Robbins, and Röpke were MPS founding members who had already participated in the 1938 Colloquium, and other CWL participants (including Raymond Aron, Louis Baudin, and Alexander Rüstow) were involved in the efforts to launch the MPS (Walpen 2004: 84f., 388, 391). Despite the precautions taken over original membership and participation, it was by no means easy for the early MPS members to specify precisely what held them together, and even more what they wanted to achieve. But the forging of a purposeful transnational community required at least some clarification of the common

understanding and objectives. To this end, the participating members engaged in a prolonged discussion of what eventually became the official statement of the aims of the Mont Pèlerin Society. Lionel Robbins was charged with drafting the statement:

The central values of civilization are in danger . . . The group holds that these developments have been fostered by the growth of a view of history which denies all absolute moral standards and by the growth of theories which question the desirability of the rule of law. It holds further that they have been fostered by a decline of belief in private property and the competitive market; for without the diffused power and initiative associated with these institutions it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved. Believing that what is essentially an ideological movement must be met by intellectual argument and the reassertion of valid ideas . . .⁶

[. . .]

The group does not aspire to conduct propaganda. It seeks to establish no meticulous and hampering orthodoxy. It aligns itself with no particular party. Its object is solely, by facilitating the exchange of views among minds inspired by certain ideals and broad conceptions held in common, to contribute to the preservation and improvement of the free society. (Hartwell 1995: 41–42)

The statement of aims thus expressly refers to views inspired by certain ideals and broad conceptions. Among the key principled beliefs was a very clear understanding of the political character of the social order, and the state. To “preserve and improve” conditions for a “free society,” individual “initiative,” and a “liberal order,” key neoliberal values, some of the sacred cows of traditional liberalism had to be slaughtered. Henceforth the debate was not about whether or not to intervene and regulate, but how and to what extent. Due to the recognition of social, political, and economic dynamics, a belief in immutable and universal liberal values, with the notable absence of democracy and timeless economic truths such as market competition and initiative, was combined with full recognition of the need to safeguard and protect such an order. The members of the comprehensive transnational community anticipated a wide range of battles to be fought – ranging from explaining the present crisis over redefining state functions and minimal standards to rewriting history. The tasks neoliberals felt in need of tackling indicate that not only Antonio Gramsci understood the preconditions of hegemony, the importance of civil society, and a long-term “war of position” necessary to exert influence. The neoliberal comprehensive discourse community in fact took a right-wing neo-Gramscian perspective at the transnational level.

At subsequent MPS meetings the transnational community made strong efforts to clarify the general understanding of neoliberalism in respect of more specific questions and issue areas. Discussion was dedicated to the question of the relationship between liberalism and Socialism, Christianity, or European integration, among other things. The Swiss MPS member and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* journalist Carlo Mötteli reported on the debate on liberalism and underdeveloped countries in Beauvallon, France (1951) as follows: “But while the old system of *laissez faire*, *laissez aller* is as much out of the question in underdeveloped areas as elsewhere, hope exists that the principles and policies of neoliberalism will find a promising field of activity and development there” (Plehwe 2009b).

By means of the Mont Pèlerin foundation we can more easily observe the composition of a major part of the comprehensive transnational community of neoliberal intellectuals, which managed to consolidate during the 1950s and 1960s. At Mont Pèlerin and subsequent meetings university professors mingled with journalists, foundation/think tank executives, business executives, and publishing houses. By 1951 several leading political figures (including Ludwig Erhard and Luigi Einaudi) were accepted into the ranks. Throughout the history of the neoliberal discourse community members have been recruited with an eye to combining the academic and professional qualifications necessary to last the distance in public debates and battles of opinion. Alongside academics come more than a hundred members employed in partisan (advocacy) think tanks founded or run by MPS members, for example, and journalists of major (business) newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* have regularly been recruited (compare Plehwe and Walpen 2006; Plehwe 2008 for further analysis of membership composition).

The neoliberal transnational community demonstrated comprehensiveness and considerable capacity with regard to both the conception of values and principled beliefs, and the pursuit of a wide range of knowledge projects. Only once so far, and relatively early, has the community experienced a serious crisis. In the late 1950s/early 1960s a group of community members led by Wilhelm Röpke and Albert Hunold wanted the Mont Pèlerin Society to go public directly with straightforward political, anti-communist messages. Other members, led by Hayek, objected, and the community almost disintegrated (cf. Walpen 2004: 145f. on the Hunold–Hayek affair). The crisis was solved by adhering to the original ideas about communal seclusion, combined with intermediate and decentralized public intervention relying on partisan think tanks. While the group lost a few of its prominent members as a result of

the crisis, politicizing the community would surely have led to greater fatalities, and more likely than not discontinued the comprehensive neoliberal discourse community. Further and full consolidation of the original identity and purpose of the community instead provided the basis for future extension.

Expanding the community

The MPS community rapidly adjusted to the US post-War rise to economic hegemony in terms of membership,⁷ though Europe arguably remained of equal if not greater importance as an epicenter of the neoliberal discourse community. When membership reached 500, the leaders of the MPS decided against further growth in an effort to preserve at least some of the immediacy and intimacy of the original community effort. By the end of the 1970s certainly many more community members existed than card carrying members of the MPS, and the immediate community of directly connected neoliberals had succeeded in creating an imagined community of intermediately connected neoliberals around the world. Partly responsible for this were dedicated efforts to establish partisan think tanks. By the late 1970s, more than thirty had been founded, even before the neoliberal think tank boom of the 1980s and 1990s (Walpen 2004). To accommodate more active community members, local groups were formed akin to the Mont Pèlerin Society in several countries, for example, the Philadelphia Society in the USA. By the time Reagan and Thatcher rose to power in the United States and the United Kingdom respectively, the comprehensive transnational community of neoliberal intellectuals was a well-established if barely visible para-political force around the globe.

Even if operating with 500 members already precludes the close acquaintance of most community members, the MPS can be considered an extremely important social context for the ongoing reproduction of an immediate neoliberal community. A quantitative analysis of participation in MPS general meetings from 1947 until 1986 proves that quite a number of members frequently and jointly participate in the general meetings.

Key community members attended 75 percent of the meetings held during particular periods or more (Plehwe 2008). Unsurprisingly, such frequent fliers include most of the key officials who formally served the MPS as presidents or general secretaries, but also includes a group of journalists and publishers, corporate leaders, think tank officials, and a politician. Marie-Thérèse Genin, a French publisher who helped to get major books by neoliberal authors translated and published, is the only woman among the regulars. She is among the few frequent attendants who never chaired a panel or gave a paper, a fate shared by

the few other women who were among the earlier community members (Plehwe 2008). Only more recently have women moved higher up the ranks of the MPS; Professor Victoria Curzon-Price from Switzerland was elected president in 2004. Many MPS members met not only at conferences organized by the MPS, but also in other professional venues, and privately. Commenting on an early draft of Hartwell's (1995) MPS history, Christian Gandil (1986) named several friends he had made among US-based MPS members, and whom he visited privately when he travelled to the United States. Gandil explains that "the basis for a friendship is to be in agreement concerning outlook on life."

Beyond forging community ties among members, arguably the most important practical activity of the comprehensive neoliberal discourse community has been the founding and running of think tanks. More than a hundred think tanks can be identified with MPS members as founders or leaders (Plehwe and Walpen 2006). Think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Cato Institute in the USA, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute in the UK, and the Stiftung Marktwirtschaft in Germany have grown into major research, consulting, and lobby organizations. In both Guatemala and Argentina, efforts originally restricted to think tanks eventually led to the founding of major universities (Goodman and Marotz-Baden 1990). A few members of the comprehensive neoliberal discourse community have been instrumental in replicating think tank methodologies across the world. Antony Fisher, founder of the Institute of Economic Affairs, has been the key person behind neoliberal think tank entrepreneurship, founding the Atlas Economic Research Foundation in the early 1980s to assist and coordinate global think tank activities. Key neoliberal policy projects such as privatization, deregulation, or flat tax proposals were propagated first in neoliberal think tank circuits, and then conquered regulatory politics (Cockett 1994; Yergin and Stanislaw 1998; Frost 2002; Plehwe and Walpen 2006). It is impossible to explain the rise of regulatory capitalism (Levi-Faur 2005) without acknowledging the multiple role and singular agenda-setting power of the comprehensive neoliberal discourse coalition.

New frontiers: comprehensive transnational community and coalition research

The transnational community of neoliberal intellectuals introduced in this chapter differs in important ways from the transnational communities that

have been studied so far, although it shares and combines important characteristics of epistemic communities, advocacy networks, and discourse communities. The comprehensive neoliberal discourse community comprises a knowledge elite membership similar to the one described in epistemic community research. But a careful look at the organizational background reveals the *partisan* political character of a knowledge power elite rather than conforming to the image of the international academy proposed by Hayek. The comprehensive transnational community of neoliberal intellectuals was capable alone or in discourse coalitions (Hajer 1993) of setting agendas and influencing agenda-setting, for example with regard to deregulation and privatization of regulated industries and public service monopolies. The community was subsequently active in correcting agenda-setting in these and many other issue areas, for example, suggesting stronger oversight regulation in cases where overdoses of unsupervised competition yielded disastrous results. The comprehensive discourse community was also able to orchestrate transnational publicity and lobby campaigns, against state aid in development for example. The community made it possible to monitor compliance with international treaty obligations protecting property rights, and even to develop a property rights approach allegedly to fight poverty. But members of the same community also opposed economic approaches to environmental policy-making and continue to attack the growing consensus on global warming (Stone 1996; Plehwe 2000; Plehwe and Walpen 2006; Weller and Singleton 2006; Mitchell 2009; Union of Concerned Scientists 2007; Plehwe 2008).

The academic members of the MPS have also been crucial in establishing and promoting internationally academic (sub)disciplines such as public choice and law and economics, disciplinary schools of thought (such as monetarism in economics), and transdisciplinary research perspectives such as rational choice-based neo-institutionalism. When looking at the comprehensive neoliberal discourse community within and around the MPS we can thus also observe a transnational community of academic intellectuals with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, which differs from the pluralist transnational communities of scientists and scholars who are more or less united by a common professional understanding of scientific inquiry and disciplinary boundaries and norms (compare Mayntz in this volume). Neoliberal scholars certainly take part and sometimes play major roles in scientific communities, but they can and indeed have established strong communities within such communities, even if such invisible colleges are rarely and fully visible. To establish more precisely if and to what extent the collaboration of intellectuals within the comprehensive neoliberal discourse community helped in shaping and transforming academic

disciplines and academic communities of scientists is one of the important research topics for the future study of the Mont Pèlerin Society (most importantly but certainly not restricted to economics).

While all the different knowledge/power functions – initiating, innovating, monitoring, agenda correcting, enforcing, and so on – evidenced by the multiple involvements of neoliberal intellectuals deserve further attention, arguably the most important function has been the social construction of fundamental neoliberal values and principled beliefs, of a specific meaning that has been attached to many different bits and pieces of knowledge. The values and principled beliefs shared (in relative distance to socialism, conservatism, and traditional liberalism) enabled the members both collectively and individually to develop new interpretations of economic, political, social, and even cultural matters. While there is no such thing as a timeless and essential neoliberal truth shared by each and every member of the neoliberal discourse community, the range of interpretations emanating from this community is not openly pluralist either. The key strength of this comprehensive transnational community of neoliberal intellectuals has been a conscious nurturing of a pluralism within neoliberal confines that is still poorly understood by many observers (compare Feulner 2000 on the recruitment of different neoliberal wings of “academic” staff at the Heritage Foundation).

The neoliberal discourse community in any case can be considered comprehensive both in terms of linking upstream (philosophical) and downstream (academic and policy) knowledge spheres, and in developing a wide range of social technologies (and organizational bases) dedicated to the advance of neoliberal agendas in many countries, discourse fields, and issue areas. The community as a whole has mastered the art of consecutive and parallel processing of knowledge and expertise. The establishment of partisan think tanks such as the Foundation of Economic Education or the Institute of Economic Affairs in London (Cockett 1994; Frost 2002) was crucial with regard to the latter aspect, and presently several hundred neoliberal think tanks, of which at least 150 are linked to MPS members, are globally coordinated to a certain extent by the US-based Atlas Economic Research Foundation (www.atlasusa.org) (see Plehwe and Walpen 2006).

The story of the comprehensive transnational community of neoliberal intellectuals has long been one of a transnational community of intellectuals *and organizations*. The partisan think tanks founded and run by community members in the meantime provide for much of the longevity, stability, and resilience of the community, which has had to weather severe storms over the past two decades, and most recently has been declared a huge failure on

various occasions (various financial crises due to Washington Consensus politics, Enron/Arthur Anderson, hedge fund collapses, and so on). The current global financial and economic crisis has also rightly been blamed on radical market recipes of neoliberal provenance. But many observers underestimate the staying power of the neoliberal community, which mostly remains ill understood. Recent critiques point to a takeover of the neoliberal community within the Mont Pèlerin Society by think tank professionals, and use the present MPS president Depaak Lal as a case in point. Lal is presented as someone from the Cato Institute and a radical anti-environmentalist (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* 11/24/08). Alas, Depaak Lal is a regular professor at UCLA. Although he considers eco-fundamentalists and Marxists as radical enemies of capitalist growth, he is a highly respected academic. A think tank professional – Ed Feulner of the Heritage Foundation – did indeed play a major role as president of the MPS, but this was arguably during its most successful period, the neoliberal heyday of the 1980s. Whether the influence of the neoliberal community withers or not remains to be seen. Among the solutions to the present global financial crisis advocated by important experts and politicians the social market economy figures prominently. Unfortunately for all who declare the neoliberal community dead, the origins of the idea of a social market economy can be traced back to Ludwig Erhard, Alfred Müller Armack, Wilhelm Röpke, and other German members of the Mont Pèlerin Society (Ptak 2009). If a number of neoliberal policy projects are presently endangered, the fundamental values and principled beliefs of the comprehensive neoliberal discourse community are certainly alive and kicking.

But the current challenge to neoliberal ideas, and the recognition and scrutiny of the “neoliberal international,” will hopefully lead to the identification of other comprehensive transnational discourse communities, for example, based on ecological, communitarian, or Islamic values and principled beliefs, and possibly help to advance a comparative research agenda with an eye to common and idiosyncratic features of comprehensive discourse communities and coalitions in the present age of globalization.

NOTES

1. Critical communities represent another subtype, small groups of critical thinkers credited with creating new ideas (Rochon 1998).
2. See the issue of *Critical Sociology* guest edited by Joan Roelofs, Robert Arno, and Daniel Faber (2007) for a number of articles that critically examine the impact of foundations on left-wing media, think tanks, and mass movements, for example.

3. Security communities, as a specialized type of community of practice, were first observed by Karl Deutsch (1957; see also Adler and Barnett 1998).
4. Raymond Aron, Marcel Bourgeois, Étienne Mantoux, Louis Marlio, Louis Rougier, and Jacques Rueff all belonged to the French group (see Denord 2001).
5. Hayek remained unconvinced by Popper's advocacy of a wider pluralism (Nordmann 2005: 218). He also disregarded interventions by von Mises who objected to "interventionists" such as Röpke and Rüstow (Walpen 2004: 100).
6. Six points were listed as worthy of further study, for example, the redefinition of the role of the state and social minimum standards.
7. Total US membership was 437, amounting to almost half of MPS numbers (Walpen 2004: 395).

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