

Theme 4.

Global Action Networks

Creating collaborative change in new political spaces

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This paper presents work in progress. It studies Global Action Networks (GANs) as new political spaces. GANs as global governance arrangements (also addressed as 'global issue networks' or 'global public policy networks'), are often based on civil society initiatives, and aim to fulfil a leadership role in the protection of the global commons or the production of global public goods.

As governance arrangements they can be placed between social movements and formalized partnerships.

- A social movement often has a charismatic leadership and/or a unifying value system; no articulated governance structure or permanent membership.
- A formalized partnership has a more or less hierarchic governance structure with clear described tasks and responsibilities of members.

Most GANs are not 'designed' in great detail beforehand. Originally they have a network structure. Their development is based on learning by doing. Their currency is communication.

This paper answers the question:

How GANs create coherence amongst the diverse relevant actors as the network moves towards solutions in the political arenas they are active in?

The paper studies GANs as political spaces with the help of a social network methodology.

Here space needs to be understood in the figurative sense, e.g. a new form of interaction.

In political spaces nobody dictates from a single governing centre what is going to happen. Instead, nodes, meeting points, power centres you might call them too, have developed where specific functions related to public issues are performed.

The location of these meeting points is new, namely outside the formal political decision making structures, or only loosely connected to them. It is also new that they are formally recognized as important tools to keep the process of progressive change going. For example, they have become an intrinsic part of the governance arrangements in the global sustainable development sought in the aftermath of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The paper analyzes these political spaces on three levels of abstraction:

- On the first level, GANs are studied as single collaborative arrangements. Attention is focused on how they are created, how they operate, and what determines this.
- On the second level, attention is turned to the external effects of GANs. The arrangements are seen as tools for deliberate societal change.
- On the third level attention is focused on the changes that GANs make in the configuration of political decision-making structures.

