

Knowledge Networks and Global Policy¹

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Abstract

In the expanding literature on global governance, scholars have increasingly emphasised the importance of access to, and control over, key forms of knowledge in determining the way power is constituted and used. As authority over global political, social and economic activity is globally diffused among a variety of public and private actors, knowledge networks become crucial arbiters and co-ordinators in policy formulation. This paper outlines the notion of ‘knowledge network’ or KNET and distinguishes it from related network types of ‘transnational advocacy coalition’ and ‘global public policy network’. The primary mission of KNETs is knowledge creation and dissemination unlike the other network types that are directly political and policy oriented. However, KNETs not only control the provision and interpretation of information, some play an important role of ‘reputational intermediary’. However, the nature of their influence can be more pervasive than simply functioning as an intermediary. Accordingly, the ‘epistemic community’, ‘discourse coalition’ and neo-Gramscian network approaches are applied to illuminate the wider sources of power of knowledge networks. The paper concludes by addressing networks as structures of governance and raising questions about transparency and representation.

1. Introduction: Transnational Policy Related Knowledge Networks

A world scientific community is in the making, one dominated by the scientists of the rich industrialised countries. The crucial factor, though, is that by analogy to the significance of the world market for the economy, the ‘world scientific community’ is becoming the frame reference of science. Local, national, international and global research is increasingly densely networked.²

If the above quote holds true, then there is a significant shortcoming in scholarly work and inadequate conceptual and empirical attention given to how knowledge organisations have become transnational entities. A particular silence in the literature relates to how individual experts, institutes and knowledge networks are responding to global and regional demand for policy research. The European Union, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are just some of the international organisations that have become important funders and consumers of research and policy analysis.

This paper explores the *transnational* features of knowledge agencies. The specific focus is upon the *policy related* roles of university researchers and other experts who may be based in consultancy firms, philanthropic foundations, independent research institutes and think tanks and who interact in *knowledge networks (KNETs)*. The discussion is based on the assumption that there is a dynamic relationship between (global) governance and knowledge. Networks that provide connections between knowledge producers and policy makers are a primary mechanism for the spread of knowledge – ideas, research, analysis, normative understandings – into supra-national policy realms. Knowledge producers are likely to have greater impact through advocacy and alliance with societal forces. Over time the relations they form institute a new structural dynamic in global governance. That is, networks as structures where policy happens.

The following section introduces the idea of ‘global knowledge networks’ and how they connect to, but are different from, ‘transnational advocacy networks’ and ‘global public policy networks’. The primary mission of KNETs is knowledge creation and dissemination unlike the other network types that are directly political and policy oriented. The third section addresses

² Dirk Messner, *The Network Society: Economic Development and International Competitiveness as Problems of Social Governance*, (London: Frank Cass) 1997, pp. 47-48.

how global knowledge networks are a contemporary manifestation of long-standing debates about the link between ideas and politics. The epistemic community, discourse coalition and neo-Gramscian network approaches provide different foci of analysis – science, discourse and ideology – for the interpretation of the sources of power of knowledge networks. The fourth and final section discusses networks as governance structures addressing how knowledge/policy research relates to policy-making in global and regional dynamics and raising questions about transparency and representation in the global agora.

2. Knowledge Networks and the Global Agora

The Global Agora

The focus of this paper is on the nexus between governance and knowledge in the *global agora*. The dictionary definitions of this Greek word differ to mean ‘market-place’ or ‘a place of assembly’ or a ‘public space’. It is used here precisely for these varied meanings in recognition of the dynamic dual role of public and private actors in the agora as well as the multiple identities and functions of networks.

The term derives from ancient Athens where there are ancient references to the Agora as the center of civic activity. Evidence from archaeological digs – public documents inscribed on stone, weight and measure standards, and jurors' identification tickets and ballots – reflect the administrative nature of the site.³ The agora was the locale for public life. That is, a large, open public space which served as a place for assembly of the citizens and, hence, the political, civic, religious and commercial center of a Greek city. Whilst the agora was a physical place, it is used here to signify a conceptual space.

In its contemporary meaning, ‘agora’ is borrowed from Nowotony *et al* who refer to a social or public space in which science interacts and is constituted. In their words the agora is:

³ The Athenian Agora Excavations: <http://www.agathe.gr/introduction.html>. See also: <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/agora.htm>

... the space in which market and politics meet and mingle, where the articulation of private emotions and meanings encounters the formation of public opinion and political consensus.⁴

Their term is appropriated to the global domain. This global agora ‘consists of a highly articulate, well-educated population, the product of enlightened educational systems ... who face multiple publics and plural institutions’.⁵ It is an ‘open space’ onto which social action, administrative practice and public institutions are not fully writ. The term also captures the sense in which global and regional public space or market place are jointly constituted and inseparable.

Knowledge networks – as well as other kinds of network – contribute to the shape, diversity and (in)equality of the global agora. Networks can be thought of as a form of assembly. As civil society organisations, they are potentially a means for civic engagement and a vehicle for expanding participation. This is neatly captured in the social movement character of ‘transnational advocacy coalitions’ (TANs).⁶ TANs accommodate a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and activists. They are bound together by shared values or ‘principled beliefs’ and a shared discourse where the dominant modality is information exchange. They are called advocacy networks because ‘advocates plead the causes of others or defend a cause or proposition’.⁷ TANs usually have a strong normative basis for moral judgement in seeking to shape the climate of public debate and influence global policy agendas. However, they are not well integrated into policy making and operate more like ‘outsider groups’.

Although not a focus of this paper, the ‘agora’ is also an economic sphere of commerce and market exchange. In this regard, networks can be a force for ‘market deepening’.⁸ For instance, business-related networks such as the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) or the

⁴ Helga Nowotny, Peter Scott and Michael Gibbons, *Re-Thinking Science: Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty*, Oxford, Polity Press 2001, p 183.

⁵ Ibid, pps. 204-205

⁶ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca NY., Cornell University Press, 1998. See also the essays in Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁷ Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 8.

⁸ Ibid.

Transatlantic Business Dialogue (TABD) have an advocacy orientation not dissimilar to TANs.⁹ However, they operate more as ‘insider groups’ given their closer connections with governments.

Accordingly, many networks are also arrangements that allow in certain areas of public concern for the administration, adjudication and regulation of public space. This idea is conveyed in the literature on ‘global public policy networks’ (GPPNs) that deliver and/or regulate global public goods.¹⁰ GPPNs are trisectoral in character; that is, they are alliances of government agencies, international organisations, corporations and elements of civil society. Official involvement gives a quasi-public veneer and ‘insider’ status to GPPNs. Actors invest in these communities to pursue material interest but have in common a shared problem. Their interactions are shaped by resource dependencies and bargaining. They tend to cohere around international organisations and governments that have entered into a policy partnership for the delivery of public policy. The transnational character of policy problems establishes rationales for co-operation. These problems have led to new forms of ‘soft’ authority recognised in these networks.¹¹ Examples include the Apparel Industry Partnership, the Roll Back Malaria Initiative, the ISO 1400 process and the Global Environment Facility. There are, however, many more networks. Virtually, all draw in experts and advisers found in KNETs along with various NGOs, community groups and business interests specific to the policy focus of the network. Over time the network may become institutionalised with the creation of formal arrangements such as advisory committees, consultation procedures and recognition by state and multilateral agencies in the implementation of policies.

⁹ A personal membership organisation of 46 chiefs of European companies, ERT has been a strong advocate of benchmarking as a regular tool for guiding EU policies, and of the ‘new European knowledge economy’ (*Financial Times*, 20th March 2001: 16). Further information at: www.ert.be. The TABD companies work with governments to foster regulatory co-operation. See Maria Green Cowles, ‘The Transatlantic Business Dialogue: Transforming the Transatlantic Dialogue’, in Mark A. Pollack and Gregory C. Shaffer (eds.) *Transatlantic Governance in the Global Economy*, Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001. Further information at: www.tabd.org

¹⁰ Wolfgang Reinicke and Francis Deng, *Critical Choices: The United Nations, Networks and the Future of Global Governance*, Canada, International Development Research Center, 2000.

¹¹ See the working papers at: www.globalpublicpolicy.net/

In this diversity of both actors and activity, the agora is also an unequal environment. Unlike liberal thinkers who see the rise of non-state actors as a progressive contribution to a global civil society, this paper is less optimistic. Rather than this organisational density and diversity disrupting hierarchies and dispersing power, networks can also represent new constellations of privatised power. Instead of being civil society manifestations of bottom-up, non-statist globalisation, networks are viewed as ‘mutually implicated’ in the affairs of states and international organisation.¹²

Use of the term ‘agora’ also represents some dissatisfaction with the idea of a ‘global polity’.¹³ The polity concept draws attention to growing political interconnectedness, interlocking sites of decision-making, a ‘thickening of global community’ and the weakening effect of globalisation on the domestic polity. This paper does not deny that polity-like structures are being mooted. Indeed, networks may well be considered as global governance structures. However, if this is the case, these structures are more likely to contribute to competing polities and multiple venues of both participation and control rather than a singular form of global political authority.

An alternative would be to adopt the terms deployed by writers on ‘democratic cosmopolitanism’ who draw attention to trends of ‘governance without government’ alongside the emergence of global civil society.¹⁴ Indeed, one leading ‘democratic cosmopolitan’ describes political communities as ‘overlapping networks of interaction’.

These networks crystallize around different sites and forms of power – economic, political, military, cultural, among others – producing diverse patterns of activity which do not correspond in any simple or straightforward way to territorial boundaries’.¹⁵

¹² Gideon Baker, ‘Problems in the Theorisation of Global Civil Society’, *Political Studies*, 50(5) 2002, p 936.

¹³ Morten Ougaard and Richard Higgott (eds), *Approaching the Global Polity*, London, Routledge, 2002.

¹⁴ Nick Stevenson, ‘Cosmopolitanism and the Future of Democracy: Politics, Culture and the Self’, *New Political Economy*, 7(2) 2002, p. 257.

¹⁵ David Held, ‘The changing contours of political community: rethinking democracy in the context of globalization’, in Barry Holden (ed.), *Global Democracy: Key Debates*, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 19.

However, for global civil society to develop there is need for the development of a ‘global public sphere’¹⁶ and to ‘rethink the idea of democracy’.¹⁷ Unlike cosmopolitan writers for whom the democratisation of the world order is a central ideal, this paper makes no such assumptions about the global agora.

The networks that intersect and help compose public spaces, can be a force for democratisation by creating a venue for representation of ‘stakeholder’ interests, a means for wider participation in modes of global governance and a venue for societal voices. In short, networks are ‘gateways’. However, these same networks can also be exclusive, elite and closed to deliberative decision-making. For instance, the discourse and techno-scientific language as well as professional credentials of those within KNETs can be a form of ‘gate keeping’. Governance in the agora need not be democratic.

Knowledge Networks

The idea of knowledge network – KNETs – has not been subject to much definitional examination. This is in spite of increasing usage of the term.¹⁸ If knowledge is ‘an organised body of information’ then knowledge network is one mode of organising information. However, ‘knowledge’ is a broad and contested term. To narrow the scope of this paper, knowledge will refer to ‘codified’ forms of knowledge produced by recognised intellectuals in the form of research and analysis. In the main, these knowledge actors are based in universities, think tanks, scientific laboratories and foundations as well as the research departments of government bodies and international organisations.

The construction of what are generally considered as powerful theories, indisputable data, or best practice is a collective process. These theories, facts and standards are sustained or kept alive in scholarly and policy domains through the networking and professional practices of

¹⁶ J. S. Dryzek, ‘Transnational Democracy’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7(1) 1999, pp. 30-51.

¹⁷ Held, 2000, pp. 27-30.

¹⁸ See *inter alia*, Development Grant Facility of the World Bank, ‘Governing Global Programs: Challenges, Principles and Practice’, Technical Note, October, Washington DC., World Bank, 2001. Also Geoffrey Allen Pigman, ‘A Multifunctional Case Study for Teaching International Political Economy: The World Economic Forum as Shar-pei or Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing?’ *International Studies Perspectives*, 3, 2002, pp. 291-309.

knowledge actors. Networking gives durability to certain knowledges and attaches identities. 'Those wanting to build an argument therefore must enrol others in their project, ensuring that the argument does not get too dramatically transformed in the process and recognised authorship is maintained'.¹⁹

One of the few definitions of 'international knowledge network' is that of 'a system of coordinated research, study (and often graduate-level teaching), results dissemination and publication, intellectual exchange, and financing across national boundaries'.²⁰ This definition places greater emphasis on co-ordination and the transnational dimensions of knowledge. However, two further considerations should be added. Although somewhat tautological, another characteristic of knowledge networks is that they engage in networking. Furthermore, they are often engaged in 'capacity building'; that is mobilising funds and other resources for scholarships and training, supporting institutional consolidation that facilitates both network regeneration and knowledge construction.

Knowledge networks (KNET) incorporate professional bodies, academic research groups and scientific communities that organise around a special subject matter or issue. Individual or institutional inclusion in such networks is based upon professional and/or official recognition of expertise as well as more subtle and informal processes of validating scholarly and scientific credibility. The primary motivation of such networks is to create and advance knowledge as well as to share, spread and, in some cases, use that knowledge to inform policy and apply to practice.

Sometimes, knowledge networks are identifiable from their organisational composition. For example, transnational think tank networks have proliferated.²¹ Examples of regional networks include the Open Society Institute policy related think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe,²²

¹⁹ James Keeley & Ian Scoones, 'Environmental policy-making in Zimbabwe: discourses, science and politics', *IDS Working Paper*, 115, 2000, p. 6.

²⁰ Inderjeet Parmar, 'American Foundations and the Development of International Knowledge Networks', *Global Networks*, 2(1) 2002, p. 13.

²¹ Raymond. J. Struyk, 'Transnational think tank networks: purpose, membership and cohesion', *Global Networks*, 2(1) 2002, pp. 83-90.

²² Open Society Institute, *Open Society Institute Related Public Policy Centers*, Activity Report – June, Budapest, Open society Institute, 2001.

(OSI 2002) and the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Affairs – ASEAN-ISIS. The latter became particularly prominent in the 1980s and 1990s as the ‘establishment academics’ associated with ASEAN-ISIS were incorporated into a regional policy community that was coming to terms with resurfacing security tensions in a post Cold War context. Through ‘track-two diplomacy’ these experts and their institutes became influential in security dialogues that informed the development of the governmental ASEAN Regional Forum and the semi-governmental Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific.²³

An example of a global knowledge network is the Global Development Network (GDN), a World Bank supported initiative for research capacity building among developing country policy institutes, think tanks and academic centres.²⁴ However, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (hereafter CGIAR) is a more prestigious network of institutes and laboratories engaged in agricultural research. It is the oldest of the World Bank’s ‘global programmes’, now composed of 62 member countries, international/regional organisations and foundations. Its mandate is “food security and poverty eradication in developing countries through research, partnerships, capacity building and policy support, promoting sustainable agricultural development on the environmentally sound management of natural resources”.²⁵

Transnational knowledge networks can be organised by their issue orientation. For example, the South Asian Research Network (SARN) on Gender, Law and Governance is composed of feminist research groups from five countries.²⁶ By contrast, the Evian Group conducts trade-related research and convenes high level dialogues on the future role of the WTO.²⁷ In a different arena, the Rural Development Forestry Network (RDFN) was created in

²³ Sheldon Simon, ‘Evaluating Track Two Approaches to Security Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific: the CSCAP Experience’, *Pacific Review*, 15(2) 2002, pp. 167-200.

²⁴ Diane Stone, ‘The “Knowledge Bank” and the Global Development Network’, *Global Governance*, 9, 2003, pp. 43-61. More information can be found at: www.gdnet.org

²⁵ Operations Evaluation Department, *The CGIAR at 31: An Independent Meta-Evaluation of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research*, Volume 1: Overview Report, Washington DC., World Bank 2003, p. 1. More information can be found at: www.cgiar.org

²⁶ Shirin Rai, ‘Networking Across Borders: South Asian Research Network (SARN) on Gender, Law and Governance’, *Global Networks*, 3(1), 2002, pp 59-74. More information can be found at: <http://sarn-glg.net/>

²⁷ Further information at: www.eviangroup.org

1985 under the auspices of the Overseas Development Institute, London's leading think tank on development issues, to conduct research on and raise awareness of forestry issues.²⁸

Often networks have a strong ideological character like the US based International Center for Economic Growth (ICEG) whose member institutes adhere to liberal principles of economic and political organisation.²⁹ Knowledge networks can be temporary structures – for example, the Blue Bird project in South Eastern Europe³⁰ – or more permanent entities like the Third World Network (TWN)³¹ which is a non-profit international network of organizations and individuals involved in issues relating to development, the Third World and North-South issues. Typical of many academic collaborations, Blue Bird was a three year long research project composed of a cross-national team of researchers who are co-ordinated by the Central European University. The project assumes that the invention of the Southeast European region requires the construction of a common regional vision and the emergence of a regional public debate. Accordingly this knowledge network was about altering, indeed creating new terms in which region is thought about in the Balkans. However, it is ad hoc and temporal in structure, outside policy debates.

There are other distinctions between KNETs. At one extreme, groups such as GDN can be categorised as 'open assembly' in organisational style given that involvement is open to interested stakeholders.³² By contrast, at the other extreme, Evian is more exclusive, closed and club-like. These examples of KNETs indicate the variety, different power bases and diverse motivations of networks. They create different images of the global agora and have local roots in dramatically different constituencies.

²⁸ RDNF disseminates research information on key issues in tropical forestry to 2900 members in 130 countries. It aims to influence policy and decision-makers (about 30% of its membership) in both governments and international aid agencies. To do this it disseminates information provided by its strong base in the research community (about 37% of its membership), which is validated by the day-to-day project experience of the Network's NGO and consultancy members (about 30% of its membership). <http://www.odifpeg.org.uk/network/index.html> Accessed 17th June 2003.

²⁹ Further information at: www.iceg.org

³⁰ Further information at: www.ceu.hu/cps/res/res_bluebird.htm

³¹ Further information at: www.twinside.org.sg

³² Struyk, 2002.

Many KNETs are engaged in the so-called ‘disinterested pursuit and exchange of knowledge’ – and this is a key feature distinguishing them from ‘transnational advocacy networks’ and ‘global public policy networks’. However, knowledge production is not divorced from the social and political worlds of the policy process. Whilst at one level this may be obvious, a number of social practices are engaged by many in knowledge networks to give their product – ideas, publications, analysis – a patina of scientific objectivity and technocratic neutrality. Sophisticated computer modelling, positive economic theories or scientific papers published in refereed professional journals create ‘communication codes’ that construct some knowledges as more persuasive or reliable. These codes are not only expensive to reproduce but difficult to access.³³

Nevertheless, KNETs can be drawn into policy development, business-related advocacy and civil society activism. KNET is not a pure type. Instead, these networks blur and blend with other network types. Knowledge networks are not in isolation or hermetically sealed from other networks. More often than not, KNETs overlap with, or sometimes collapse into, GPPNs and TANs in a ‘web’ of interactions that also intersect with official decision-making venues. Consequently, SARN has the features of both a KNET but also in some degree, that of a TAN given its advocacy of women’s rights. The overlapping network styles also allow some knowledge actors to traverse scholarly/policy subject fields and sometimes to act as ‘brokers’ or what has been recently called ‘reputational intermediaries’ between insider and outsider communities.

The Uses of KNETs

The idea of ‘reputational intermediary’ was developed in the context of self-regulatory features of UK and US securities markets where accounting firms, investment banks, law firms, bond rating agencies and stock analysts perform a powerful independent role monitoring firms and enforcing regulatory standards.³⁴ Notwithstanding the degraded reputations of big accounting firms to undertake independent audit and provide objective advice to shareholders, with a little conceptual stretching, the concept offers some virtues for this paper.

³³ Keeley & Scoones, 2000.

³⁴ See James Shinn and Peter Gourevitch, *How Shareholder Reforms Can Pay Foreign Policy Dividends*, New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 2002. pp. 27; 36-37.

KNETs informally mediate and interpolate in the global agora in the relative absence of formal institutions of governance and regulation. Networks and/or professional communities have ‘boundary transcending’ qualities that allow them to act as mediators.³⁵ That is, these intermediaries have the ‘power and intellectual resources allowing them to do this work of articulation between the ‘sectoral’ and the ‘global’ levels’. Mediation is required in the ‘necessary reciprocal adjustment of the increasingly divergent sectoral activities within the framework of encompassing and constraining global conceptions of society’.³⁶ However, rather than providing sound assurances and evaluations for shareholders, the policy research of KNETs is for the consumption of ‘stakeholders’ in global governance arrangements in which: ‘They manage the ideological operation of ‘decoding’, interpreting and reformulating socioeconomic reality in accordance with the sociocultural project of the global society’.³⁷

As a ‘reputational intermediary’, a knowledge network performs two broad functions. First, the transnational communication and dissemination of knowledge can be undertaken in a co-ordinated fashion with KNETs acting as intermediaries within and between national and local (social) scientific/intellectual communities. Networks also build common infrastructure for communication via web-sites, newsletters, reports and other publications as well as through meetings and conferences.³⁸ Moreover, a network presents a united or at least a collective voice. Sometimes this collective voice takes the form of a ‘policy narrative’; that is a programmatic cause and effect story that is highly persuasive. Narratives are compelling in that they shape perceptions of a problem, guide subsequent behaviour of individuals or groups with a structuring effect on policy.³⁹ RDFN describes its success, status and longevity as being due, in large degree, to the Network’s ability to create a persuasive policy narrative regarding participatory

³⁵ Krause Hansen *et al*, 2002, p. 108.

³⁶ Stephane Nahrath, ‘The Power of Ideas in Policy Research: A Critical Assessment’, in D. Braun and A. Busch (eds.) *Public Policy and Political Ideas*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2000, pp. 44-45.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸ But networks also suffer from the Olsonian ‘collective action’ dilemma. Unless the number of members in a network is relatively small, rational self-interested members experience difficulty in achieving common group interest. Alternatively coercive measures or selective incentives may make members act in their common interest. See OED, 2002.

³⁹ Keeley & Scoones, 2000, p. 6

forest management.⁴⁰ In short, a network creates an internalised space for discussion, setting agendas and developing common vision regarding ‘best practice’, policy or business norms and standards. This can not only help prevent duplication of effort but also reduce the cost of maintaining the infrastructure of ‘communication codes’.

Second, and more as interlocutors with external audiences, networks can have greater ability to attract media attention, political patronage and donor support than an individual or single organisation. A network amplifies and disseminates ideas, research and information to an extent that could not be achieved by individuals or institutions alone. Moreover, a network mutually confers legitimacy and pools authority and respectability in a positive-sum manner where the network becomes perceived as a locus for scientific authority. Its critical mass of expert opinion and adherence to professional or scientific procedures of peer review gives its representatives some credibility in shaping problem definition, determining research agendas and posing questions for policy deliberation. Networks are a social technology to propel knowledge into policy deliberation.

Governments and international organisations are using knowledge organisations to assist in the monitoring of international agreements, to undertake policy evaluations and to help diffuse analysis on international best practice. For example, the World Bank has adopted the discourse of knowledge sharing in its development programmes. Indeed, one objective of the Sustainable Development program of the World Bank Institute (WBI) is to ‘build broad-based constituencies and partnerships for sustainable change and development *and promote knowledge networks*’ by facilitating a learning dialogue and disseminating innovative approaches to sustainable development, primarily among policy-makers and opinion leaders.⁴¹ This is to be achieved through, *inter alia*, intensified partnership within and outside the Bank, harmonizing programs with other multilateral institutions, and expanded use of distance learning technologies. One programme is the Water and Media Network designed to help journalists examine the social, environmental, regulatory and financial issues relating to water.⁴²

⁴⁰ <http://www.odifpeg.org.uk/network/history.html>. Accessed 17th June 2003.

⁴¹ <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sdenvmanagement/index.html>. Accessed 17th June 2003. Up until late 2000, this WBI Division also co-ordinated Environmental Economics and Policy Network (EEPNET) which appears to have folded.

⁴² <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sdwatermedianetwork/aboutus.html>. Accessed 17th June 2003.

Many international organisations are not directly involved in the production of knowledge. Instead, the World Health Organisation ‘...acts as the ‘international public sector’ of health research and has a key global stewardship role to play as an intelligent catalyst in forming creative partnerships’.⁴³ Under Framework 6, the EU is funding the creation of academically oriented ‘networks of excellence’.⁴⁴ Independent ‘blue ribbon’ international taskforces – such as the Commission on Global Governance or the UN’s Global Compact – not only stimulate demand for policy research (thereby giving it a transnational form) but they also require reputable agents to transmit and broadcast their messages.

Knowledge networks are essential for the international spread of knowledge, norms and what is deemed international ‘best practice’ on privatisation, environmental sustainability or corporate citizenship emanating from these global policy discussion venues.⁴⁵ International ‘public sector’ organisations and other multilateral initiatives require policy analysis and research to support problem definition, outline policy solutions, to monitor and evaluate existing policy as well as to provide scholarly legitimation for policy development. They contract think tanks, universities and consultant firms as a source of international policy advice. KNETs represent an organisational form to co-ordinate the flows of research and analysis, and for more regularised interaction.

This section has discussed both KNETs as reputational intermediaries and knowledge (cognitive tools, scientific theories) in an instrumental sense as neutral products put to use by

⁴³ Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries, *Enhancing Research Capacity in Developing and Transition Countries*, Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries, Berne: GEOGRAPHICA BERNENSIA. 2001, p. 264.

⁴⁴ Networks of Excellence (NoE) are transnational multipartner projects grouping together the main players in Europe on a given research topic. Networks of Excellence are conceived as incentives for structural and organisational change to overcome the fragmentation of the European research landscape. The main objective is a durable restructuring and reshaping of the way research is carried out on that topic in Europe. For more information see http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/instr_noe.htm

⁴⁵ Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz – one of the architects of the Global Development Network – argues think tanks and policy institutes are a contemporary means to spread knowledge about ‘best practice’ in ‘Scan

policy makers as a ‘contribution to the rationalising process of public action’.⁴⁶ The emphasis has been on public action that is not circumscribed to a national sphere but is more frequently taking shape via transnational networks. Networks are envisaged as ‘transmission belts’ or ‘bridges’ between the separate worlds of knowledge production and policy making. However, there are competing explanations as to how knowledge influences political thinking, if at all. Where this section has identified three overlapping *types* of network that are traversing the global agora – TANs, GPPNs and KNETs – the next section draws on an additional set of network frameworks but to a different purpose. That is, to provide varying conceptions of *how* networks might exert influence.

3. Questions of Policy Influence

The ‘epistemic community’, ‘discourse coalitions’ and ‘embedded knowledge network’ frameworks share the position that ideas, research or knowledge are endemic to the policy process but do so from quite different standpoints. Respectively, the network models posit first, science, objectivity and rationalism; second, the influence of discourse and subjectivity; and third, the role of hegemony and material interests as the source of influence within knowledge networking. Moreover, these frameworks do not simply posit the view that ‘ideas matter’. In varying degree, ideas (or knowledge) are treated in a constructivist fashion as constituting the wider social reality. In other words, the focus is on the social construction of policy problems, policy belief systems and identity. The development of ‘intersubjective knowledge’ – common understandings and shared identities – is the dynamic for change.⁴⁷

Accordingly, researchers and policy analysts are one set of actors producing and articulating shared sets of meaning. Learning (and interest formation) is endogenous to the policy process arising from social interactions.⁴⁸ Policy change arises through increased propensity for

Globally, Reinvent Locally: Knowledge Infrastructure and the Localization of Knowledge’, Diane Stone (ed.) *Banking on Knowledge: The Genesis of the Global Development Network*, London, Routledge, 2000.

⁴⁶ Nahrath, 1999, p. 42

⁴⁷ Emanuel Adler, ‘Constructivism and International Relations’ in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (eds.) *Handbook of International Relations*, London, Sage Publications, 2002.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the literature, see Jeffrey W. Knopf, ‘The Importance of International Learning’, *Review of International Studies*, 29 (2) April 2003, pp. 185-207.

cooperation and collective action. As such, global knowledge networks are venues for social learning and the development of mutual understanding and common discourses that can lead to cooperation. Rather than simply regarding knowledge as a tool used by policy or business consumers, knowledge is constitutive feature in any network. In short, the ‘ideas’ that are manifested in research reports and professional discourse are intrinsic to the collective identity of actors and of the definition of their collective and individual interests.

Epistemic Communities

In contrast to the stronger normative basis and advocacy orientation of transnational advocacy networks, epistemic communities are ‘scientific’ in composition, founded on ‘codified’ forms of knowledge.⁴⁹ Professionals consultants, researchers, scientists share common ideas for policy and seek privileged access to decision-making fora on the basis of their expertise and scholarly knowledge. Epistemic communities assert their independence from government or vested interest on the basis of their commitment to expert knowledge. This concept builds in (social) scientific knowledge as an independent force in policy development. Epistemic communities have:

1. shared normative and principled beliefs which provide the value based rationales for their action;
2. shared causal beliefs or professional judgements;
3. common notions of validity based on inter-subjective, internally defined criteria for validating knowledge;
4. a common policy enterprise

The status and prestige associated with the expertise of epistemic community members and their high professional training and authoritative knowledge regarding a particular problem is politically empowering and provides some communities limited access to the political system. This is especially the case in conditions of ‘uncertainty’ – conflict and crisis – where decision-makers can not make decisions on the basis of existing knowledge or past experience and approach expert groups for assistance.

Consequently, epistemic communities require political patronage in order for ideas or science to become policy relevant and often need to make alliances with TANs or enlist other

⁴⁹ Peter Haas, ‘Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination’, *International Organization*, 46(1) 1992, pp. 1-35.

sources of support. However, it is also the case that different networks compete, not only for political attention to institute their way of thinking but also for funding.⁵⁰ Although often a powerful force, (social) science is not inherently or automatically persuasive in policy debates. The neo-liberal orthodoxy on free markets and trade integration – such as that propounded by most members of the Evian Group – is founded upon neo-classical economic theories that are dominant in the economics discipline and within international financial institutions. However, this world view is contested by NGOs, social movements and other intellectual communities. The Evian Group secretariat finds it an on-going necessity to publicly challenge the discourses of ‘protectionist forces’.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Alexander Cooley and James Ron, ‘The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action’, *International Security*, 27(1), 2002, pp. 5-39.

⁵¹ In the 22nd June 2002 email to members of the Evian Group ‘Brains Trust’, Jean-Pierre Lehman, Director of the Evian Group states the following. “There is now a coalition of NGOs know as Trade Justice Movement, which recently held a demonstration in London that was allegedly ‘well received’ by Tony Blair. The problem is that while they get it half-right, they are still biased on two fronts: (1) favouring protectionism in developing countries, (2) remaining viscerally anti-corporate. ... Two further points to bear in mind: (1) they are much more numerous – and much better funded!!!!; (2) public sympathy tends to be very much on their side. All this to continue to stress that we do have an important mission. The idea of having ... Evian defined as ‘a coalition for liberal governance’ is especially relevant in the current context. Your active support remains critical as the Evian Group is one of the very few global vehicles that has the voice, the credibility and the respect required to continue the struggle for an open global economy and an open global society”.

Discourse Coalitions and Communities

The 'transnational discourse community' approach identifies symbols, language and policy narrative as a source of power. First, this framework emphasises the transnational qualities of professional groups and secondly, the role of discourse.

Public sector professionals, traditionally expected to represent a specific national view on any issues in their international activities, no longer only do that. In fact, by foregrounding their professional identity, they transcend the power of the nation-state system to impose its categories of identity upon them. They also tend to assume a global or regional rather than national outlook on key issues ... ⁵²

Global networks are venues where national identities of researchers, donors and international civil servants are complicated by the professional commitment to questions of development or reform that are increasingly less questions of national determination under the impact of globalisation. Transnational identities are further enhanced by global and regional interactions brought about by face-to-face communication at international meetings as well as the communication advances wrought by information technology.

Second, drawing upon Foucault, the coalition concept locates discourse at the interface of power and knowledge. Discourses generate 'effects of truth'; that is, naturalizing specific ways of thinking and normalizing certain ways of doing things. Furthermore, power and knowledge operate through discursively informed social and institutional practices such as networks.

Professionals create a transnational community through a boundary drawing discourse that defines who and what is to be considered inside and outside the community, establishing a distinction between professionals and non-professionals, and between good and bad professionals. The specific vocabulary and jargon, the speech and meeting rituals etc. create possibilities for the professionals who master them.⁵³

Transnational discourse communities construct identifiable discourses which serve to establish the goals of reform, justify the necessity of change, describe the means to achieve better results

⁵² Hans Krause Hansen, Dorte Salskov-Iversen and Sven Bislev, 'Transnational Discourse Communities: Globalizing Public Management' in R. Higgott & M Ougaard (eds.) *Understanding the Global Polity*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 109.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 111

and predict outcomes. Boundary-drawing helps a community to canonize certain viewpoints at the cost of others, elevating them to unquestioned status and superior position.

A related concept is of discourse coalitions which makes useful distinctions between the formation of coalitions, the extent to which a coalition achieves discourse structuration, and finally, institutionalisation.⁵⁴ Discourse coalitions seek to impose their ‘discourse’ in policy domains. If their discourse shapes the way in which society conceptualises the world or a particular problem, then the coalition has achieved ‘discourse structuration’ and agendas are likely to be restricted to a limited spectrum of possibilities. If a discourse becomes entrenched in the minds of many as the dominant mode of perception, it can become distilled in institutions and organisational practices as the conventional mode of reasoning. This latter process is ‘discourse institutionalisation’. The framework captures better how discourses are transformed in their articulation through the policy cycle.

(Dis)Embedded Knowledge Networks

Networks can also be viewed as (anti-)hegemonic projects. Not dissimilar to institutionalised discourses, ‘embedded knowledge networks’ are ‘ostensibly private institutions that possess authority because of their publicly acknowledged track records for solving problems, often acting as disinterested ‘technical’ parties in high-value, high-risk transactions, or in validating sets of norms and practices for a variety of service-provision activities’.⁵⁵ The approach emphasises the importance of authoritative judgement making built and sustained through trade journals, professional associations and research departments (of investment banks) or consultancies. Credit rating agencies such as Moody’s or Standard and Poor are one example.

This approach treats knowledge, discourses or ideas as a tool of power used by dominant interests in maintaining the capitalist order. Knowledge networks are part of the ‘micro-politics of contemporary hegemony’ and symptomatic of the ‘war of position’. Think tanks, foundations,

⁵⁴ Maarten Hajer, ‘Discourse Coalitions and Institutionalisation of Practice: The Case of Acid Rain in Great Britain’, in F Fischer and J Forester (eds.) *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*, London, UCL Press, 1993, p. 47. Also, Frank Fischer, *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁵⁵ Timothy J. Sinclair, ‘Reinventing Authority; Embedded Knowledge Networks and the New Global Finance’, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 18, 2000, pp. 487—502.

consultants and research institutes are one component of ‘globalizing elites’: that is, a ‘directive strategic element within globalizing capitalism’.⁵⁶ Ideas do not have independent power (as implied in discourses approaches) but are closely related to social and political interests via networks.

Ideas are treated in a constructivist manner as intersubjective meanings that shape perceptions of social structure. However, the identification of the agents, innovators or carriers of knowledge and how they use ideas to legitimise policy is also important. What becomes considered to be the truth involves gaining control over material resources and this includes knowledge networks. The emphasis is on ‘organic intellectuals’ playing a central role in hegemonic projects where specific sets of ideas are funded, generated and disseminated by foundations, think tanks, publishing houses and NGOs. Consequently, global knowledge networks can be viewed as an evolving contemporary social mechanism to make certain ideas – put in league with particular social forces – more powerful and hegemonic. However, the global agora can also become a site of ideological contest.

Networks are often composed of contradictory knowledges or reflect discursive competition. Hegemony is incomplete and partial. The approach posits a degree of intentionality or purposiveness to knowledge agents and networks that is not necessarily the case. A grid-like complex of ideas shaping consciousness and dominating the global order gives little credence to alternative world-views and sites of intellectual resistance.

A further approach drawing upon subaltern studies and the critical feminist literature sees knowledge-makers as ‘those engaged in historical transmissions as well as those in defiance of dominant epistemological flows of power’.⁵⁷ The perspective loosens the hegemonic grid-like power of the neo-Gramscian approach. It also overlaps with discursive frameworks in that it draws on Manuel Castells to speak of ‘communication codes’ that help integrate and expand networks.

Expansion and integration (into networks) go hand in hand with a recognition of ‘the same communication codes’. The questions we need to ask here are: expansion to and for what? Integration with and into what? And how can communication

⁵⁶ Stephen Gill quoted in Sinclair, 2000, p. 494.

⁵⁷ Rai, 2002, p. 61.

codes be made more accessible, or how are these used to assert dominance of codes over others? In sum, how do networks legitimize and/or challenge flows of power? This is a difficult issue at a local level, but more so when we consider global networks operating on an epistemological terrain reflecting the material power of global capitalism'.⁵⁸

Knowledge for Policy Influence

The different understandings of networks outlined above provide conceptual tools to address the policy relevance of KNETs and their relations with international organisations and other actors in governance. This not meant to force a conceptual synthesis, but to indicate the multiple styles of KNET connection to policy. It is more of an atmospheric mode of influence, affecting the climate of debate, rather than the instrumental utility outlined earlier.

The 'embedded knowledge network' framework stresses the role of ideas being connected and subsidiary to interests. KNETs represent a means for sustaining the neo-liberal capitalist order through the reproduction of ideas supportive of it. Consequently, policy becomes a battle of ideas and knowledge is a weapon in the service of material interests. By contrast, the 'transnational discourse community' perspective allows scope for ideas to have independent force and inherent power, diffusing into consciousness. Discourse is less directed or strategic. The epistemic community framework is more rationalistic. Epistemic communities cohere around a preferred technical rationality and have a tendency towards technocratic policy-making.

Of the knowledge networks mentioned in this paper, some can be identified as epistemic-like in character. Notwithstanding internal disagreements among individuals, the Evian Group is supportive of neo-liberal order. It is informally connected to powerful social forces within the WTO, the EU and leading corporations such as Nestlé and Unilever. The academics, journalists and bureaucrats of this knowledge group play a supporting role in constructing the terms of debate, building consensus for open trade, clarifying concepts and writing technical papers on the implications of WTO rules that feed into the wider public discourse. But Evian is in competition to 'win hearts and minds' where other KNETs or TANS may construct more compelling or emotive narratives about free trade or story lines about the threats of globalisation.

⁵⁸ Rai, 2002, p. 61, my inclusion.

Similarly, ASEAN-ISIS is epistemic-like and embedded. Over more than two decades, it has developed a relationship of trust with governments of the region through the processes of ‘track two diplomacy’.⁵⁹ Interestingly, the dominance of this group in regional policy debates on security and human rights has generated, in opposition, a regional TAN.⁶⁰

CGIAR also has epistemic community characteristics, however, it is a very broad and loose coalition of forces. It lacks shared normative beliefs and exhibits a range of causal beliefs. Accordingly, CGIAR is better thought of as an arena where different ‘food security’ communities interact and compete for policy attention. This is also the case with the GDN. Although the development discourse of economists is dominant, other social science narratives are audible.⁶¹ Given the nature of their sponsorship and political support, both CGIAR and GDN might be considered as embedded. Yet, their respective capacities to set policy agendas and structure public discourse is highly unstable and mediated by the considerable scientific competition within these networks as well as outside them.

ICEG is more like a discourse coalition. It was founded in 1985 in San Francisco as an organization working with a network of policy research institutes dedicated to providing market-based solutions to economic reform problems. Today, ICEG has expanded both its mission and network to include more than 5,000 economists, central bank presidents, ministers, and former heads-of-state, in more than 300 member institutes in over 100 countries. ICEG discourse (if not the network itself) is challenged and opposed by another network, Third World Network. Its objectives are to engage in research and publication on economic, social and environmental issues pertaining to the South; and to provide a platform representing broadly Southern interests and perspectives at international fora such as the UN conferences and processes.⁶² Notwithstanding their research interests, both networks have a strong advocacy roles not dissimilar to the style of TANs.

⁵⁹ Simon, 2002.

⁶⁰ Herman Kraft, ‘Track three diplomacy and human rights in Southeast Asia: the Asia Pacific coalition for East Timor’, *Global Networks*, 2(1) 2002, pp. 49-63

⁶¹ Stone, 2003.

⁶² <http://www.twinside.org.sg/twnintro.htm> Accessed 17th June 2003.

The OSI is a much larger entity with diverse pursuits and has the features of a TAN with its discourse on the ‘open society’ and direct funding of policy advocacy institutes and citizen groups. However, in the OSI’s ‘engagement with globalization’ and ‘recognition of the critical significance of policy’, it is evolving more towards a KNET by ‘building its own policy advocacy capacity’.⁶³

The specialist group RDFN has exhibited through its history characteristics of a discourse coalition. This lies in its role as having been a key agent in the mainstreaming of the importance of people in tropical forests over the last fifteen years through its research and activities on village tree planting and participatory forest management. RDFNetwork co-ordinators use the term ‘narrative’ not only to account for the impact of the forestry network but also to signify the strategic approach of network research. Indeed, they claim they have ‘established a new area of discourse’.⁶⁴ Now that the development agenda in this policy field has been ‘set’, the RDFN has a stronger research character. Indeed, a sign of its long term success is flagging interest from donors to support the network.

In ascertaining influence, the neo-Gramscian frameworks help identify knowledge networks lacking political influence or choosing to challenge dominant policy discourses. SARN and Blue Bird are ‘dis-embedded’. Blue Bird is too disaggregated and short-term to fully develop and advocate a coherent policy discourse. It has a policy agenda – an alternative vision to reconstruct the terms in which we ‘see’ and comprehend South Eastern Europe – but this is more an intellectual endeavour undertaken by loosely connected individual researchers. Similarly, SARN is a subaltern KNET. Notwithstanding their lack of policy or political influence, these networks perform wider societal roles. They are either quasi-academic bodies motivated more by the mission of knowledge creation. Indeed, some in SARN see dangers of co-option in engagement. “Working against the grain can be difficult; access to influence can exact the price of losing control of agendas for research and around which to build a political argument ... The seduction of influence can blunt the critical edge of subaltern politics’.⁶⁵

⁶³ Thomas Palley, ‘The Open Institute and Global Social Policy’, *Global Social Policy*, 3(1) pp. 17-18, 2003, p.18.

⁶⁴ <http://www.odifpeg.org.uk/network/history.html>. Accessed 17th June 2003.

⁶⁵ Rai, 2002, p. 70; see also Baker, 2002.

KNETs cannot be fully independent or completely autonomous as they are reliant on funding support from donor agencies or governments. However, this is not to suggest conspiracy, centralised direction, or conscious global strategy of policy intervention and control. Instead, power is discontinuous. Where there is power, there is also resistance and this resistance is plural in form.⁶⁶ Power and knowledge are dispersed in the agora and take form – like SARN or Blue Bird – in local or regional institutions and networks. In ‘sites of domination’ knowledge actors can provide ‘unique information resources’ and help form ‘alternative definitions of reality’.⁶⁷ However, the lesson for SARN and Blue Bird from the experiences of RDFN and ASEAN-ISIS is that changing perceptions and shifting policy agendas can take decades.

While Evian and GDN are synchronised with the bureaucratic interests of the WTO and the World Bank respectively, and the network of ICEG institutes is ideologically aligned with the neo-liberal orthodoxy, these networks are neither hegemonic nor unthinking mouthpieces for their funders and patrons. By the same token, networks that appear to have little policy impact or to be espousing unorthodox policy perspectives are neither completely ineffectual nor hopelessly marginalised. Instead, subaltern KNETs are symptomatic of how ‘dominated people form identities through common language and understanding and mobilize resources in resistance’.⁶⁸ Alternative visions of the world with competing ideological principles and policy positions are finding their way into public debate. Clearly, some KNETs are more powerful and better resourced than others, but new configurations emerge, new coalitions develop and with them, new constructions of knowledge. In global governance, however, of relevance is which discourse or knowledge is selected, where knowledge networks are politically patronised, by what groups and for what reasons?

⁶⁶ Leslie A. Pal, ‘Knowledge, Power and Policy: Reflections on Foucault’, in S. Brooks and A-G Gagnon (eds.) *Social Scientists, Policy and the State*, New York, Praeger, 1990.

⁶⁷ Thomas Conway, (1990) ‘Background Reading: The crisis of the Policy Sciences’, in S. Brooks and A-G Gagnon (eds.) *Social Scientists, Policy and the State*, New York, Praeger, 1990, p. 172.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

4. Networks of global governance and civil society

With the trend toward multi-level governance – negotiated, non-hierarchical exchanges between institutions at the transnational, national, regional and local levels⁶⁹ – experts and researchers are gravitating closer to centres of strategic decision-making. These centres in government and international organisation also pull selected thinkers towards them and in so doing recognise the value of their advice and analysis thereby enhancing the authority of institutes individually and the network as a whole. In short, think tanks, expert bodies and researchers are gradually moving from being persuasive societal actors to acquire through network structures, *political* or *public* authority in addition to their epistemic authority. The policy functions of KNETs are most obvious when they act as reputational intermediaries. Yet, there are also deeper implications of network activity for the global agora.

Knowledge and Policy Nexus

First, the expansion of knowledge networks as sites of authority potentially accelerates the ‘normalisation of the dominant discourses of power’.⁷⁰ Networks systematise knowledge generated by diverse individual and organisational knowledge actors and impose a rationality that gives precedence to a particular conception of knowledge – usually of a codified, technocratic, secular, westernised variety. Participation is informally restricted and regulated through boundary drawing discourses by the network to exclude or devalue indigenous or protest knowledge that does not conform to techno-scientific criteria.

Recognising think tanks, law firms and research institutes as centres for expert, scientific and authoritative advice occurs not only because of the scholarly credentials of these organisations (and their self referential habits) but also because of the relationship with policy makers and donor groups that a network structure facilitates. Through their club-like tendencies, networks both accrue and accredit authority through the collective policy entrepreneurship of their members. As reputational intermediaries, KNETs draw their power and policy influence by combining epistemic, discursive and ideological practices.

⁶⁹ B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, ‘Developments in intergovernmental relations: towards multi-level governance’, *Policy and Politics*, 29(2) 2000, p. 132.

⁷⁰ Rai, 2002, p. 62.

Networks are not simply linking knowledge and policy arenas as posited by the reputational intermediary concept. Instead, the interaction of knowledge and policy is one of mutual construction.

Thus, the seemingly mundane daily activities of scientists and bureaucrats engaged in the preparation of scientific papers or consultancy reports, the elaboration of models, participation in workshops, meetings or email discussion groups, and engagement in formal and informal policy briefings are a central part of the joint production of science and technology.⁷¹

Knowledge construction within and between different kinds of networks linking various actors in universities and think tanks, ministries or executive offices, international organisations and NGOs, propels the globalisation of policy processes.

States as well as international organisations require the creation and widespread acceptance of persuasive accounts ‘public policy problems’ as the basis of legitimate policy and just laws. Public institutions depend on groups of ‘experts’ whose views on such issues are considered authoritative. Knowledge networks or communities not only provide such expert interpretations and scientific narratives, they also create self-supporting structures of authority to incarnate as ‘neutral’ reputational intermediaries. That is, networks become a globalised locus of authority. In sum, KNETs do not simply ‘crystallize around different sites and forms of power’,⁷² the network is a site and form of power.

Privatization and Pluralisation of Policy

Second, when involved in global policy developments, knowledge networks – alongside other partnerships, alliances and private regimes – set in motion a structural dynamic that both excludes and opens up policy making to certain groups. Relatedly, networks privatise knowledge as well as turn it into a public good.

Policy networks are a flatter and more horizontal structure (compared to public sector hierarchies) that are porous to participation of private and third sector actors. Yet, networks also privatise decision-making to stakeholders. Dominant epistemic/discourse communities attempt to

⁷¹ Keeley and Scoones, 2000, p. 7.

⁷² Held, 2000, p. 19.

harden the boundaries of a policy network. It is in their ‘cognitive interest’ to do so.⁷³ Consequently, a network can develop a carapace sometimes in the interests of internal network cohesion and unity but also to exclude those who do not speak the same specialised language. Policy debate is not taken out of the public domain but it is cordoned off from those not deemed to be so-called ‘stakeholders’ or those without mastery of the communication code.

On the other hand, knowledge networks represent a means to protect and preserve the public status of knowledge; that is, a means to deliver a public good.⁷⁴ The web-sites of knowledge groups and networks provide a wealth of information. Toward the Evian Group mission of educating and informing on economic governance, policy briefs are made available, a newsletter in circulation, meetings and conferences organised, and a guide to trade experts constructed. Similarly, TWN provides information on global economic governance from a very different perspective. The institutes that compose CGIAR are important institutional loci for the public production of research in molecular biology or as curators of gene banks.⁷⁵ What might be described as an inter-generational public good – the ‘Young Evian’ network – has been cultivated to communicate more effectively with younger generations. It is an indirect, long-term, non-guaranteed means to gain greater understanding and commitment for the multilateral rules-based system of global economic governance and to provide support to the next generation of leaders.

Even so, questions can be raised regarding the extent to which networks represent a dual dynamic for the concentration as well as dispersion of knowledge. The widening of the knowledge generation gap between South and North and between the countries of the South

⁷³ In their professional context, specific groups of knowledge producers – whether they are economists, anthropologists or statisticians – have a cognitive interest in the selective use of their mode of problem definition, methodological approaches and policy solutions. It becomes a self-reinforcing dynamic that encourages resistance to other perspectives or disciplinary approaches. See Knut G. Nustad and Ole J. Sending, ‘The Instrumentalisation of Development Knowledge’, in Diane Stone (ed.), London, *Banking on Knowledge: The Genesis of the Global Development Network* Routledge, 2000.

⁷⁴ see *inter alia*, Stiglitz, 2000; DGF, 2001.

⁷⁵ Henry Shand, ‘The CGIAR at a Crossroads?’, in Christopher D. Gerrard, Marco Ferroni and Ashoka Mody (eds.) *Global Public Policies and Programs: Implications for Financing and Evaluation*. Proceedings from a World Bank Workshop, Washington DC., The World Bank, 2001.

reduces the pool of institutions and individuals that can be drawn into knowledge networks. Researchers from developing countries characterised by weak enabling environment (such as inadequate political commitment) and the lack of a research culture are at a disadvantage in seeking to participate in networks even though the network may be effective in disseminating knowledge downwards. As such networks become transnational, further distancing can ensue. They are more likely to revolve around international research agendas and Northern policy concerns.⁷⁶ The lack of ownership and empowerment in shaping research agendas and donor driven intellectual priorities can establish a ‘non-decision making’ dynamic that sets up subtle modes of exclusion.

Network participation is resource intensive. Access to global public policy networks requires time, commitment and funds. Many developing country knowledge agencies do not have sufficient resources to devote to national policy deliberations let alone global dialogues. At other times, network participation can have perverse consequences. As indicated by one World Bank official: ‘In Benin, we discovered there were more networks than scientists – this leads to no time to do their own jobs’⁷⁷. Indeed, their participation may be irrelevant in the absence of a ‘communicative code’ that is decipherable by all potential partners. The dominance of OECD actors in regional and global policy debates is notable. Accordingly, ‘openness’ and ‘closure’ is not an evenly balanced dynamic across networks. Instead, access and exclusiveness varies considerably across networks, over time and according to issue area or policy field.

Governance via Network Structures

Third, networks are becoming a mode of governance whereby the patterns of linkages and interaction are the means through which joint policy is organised. In short, there is a functional interdependence between public and private actors whereby networks allow resources to be mobilised towards common policy objectives in domains outside the hierarchical control of governments.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See the essays in Wolfgang Gmelin, Kenneth King and Simon McGrath, (eds) *Development Knowledge, National Research and International Cooperation*, Edinburgh, Bonn & Geneva, CAS-DSE-NORRAG, 2001.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Keeley & Scoones, 2000, p. 35.

⁷⁸ Tanja Börzel, ‘Organizing Babylon -- on the different conceptions of policy networks’, *Public Administration*, 76 (summer), 1999, pp. 253-73.

Although the agora is a structured space, it is wrong to attempt to subdivide it again into sectors like markets, politics or media. ... these forms of differentiation are beginning to break down and to be replaced by fluid and dynamic (and pervasive) interlinkages. As a public space, the agora is shaped by the interaction of its actors/agents. Some are more visible, easier to identify and recognize and more powerful than others.⁷⁹

Furthermore, the network logic itself is being diffused by international organisations with their advocacy of partnership and tripartite policy coalitions as method to deal with global problems.⁸⁰

Networks as mechanisms for the delivery of (global) public goods is most clearly drawn in the GPPN framework. In the absence of global or regional institutions, these trisectoral networks carve out new policy space as knowledge creators, service providers and standard setters. They also play a central role in policy monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, there is significant scope for policy entrepreneurs to mark out the ill-defined contours of the global agora and, as suggested in the epistemic community framework, respond to policy uncertainty and the institutional hiatus at the global level with policy solutions. For example, as noted by the organisers of RDFN:

When new directions are first taken in a particular subject, there is often no obvious forum for new findings and nowhere to turn for comparative experience. This is what happened in forestry in the early 1980s, when concerns about desertification and fuel-wood shortages created strong donor pressure for tree-planting programmes with local people.⁸¹

The RDFN not only filled this 'knowledge gap' but interacted with donor agencies and researchers to put ideas into practice via the network medium.

Global Civil Society

Fourth, networks are part of global civil society. Networks with a strong advocacy character or directed towards the promotion of international norms like TANs are relatively permeable to broad societal participation. By contrast, epistemic communities and GPPNs are

⁷⁹ Nowotony *et al*, 2001, p. 209.

⁸⁰ Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Partnership for International Development Rhetoric or Results?* Boulder CO., Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.

⁸¹ <http://www.odifpeg.org.uk/network/history.html>. Accessed June 17th 2003.

more elite and exclusive. The rich ecology of knowledge networks adds to the diversity and plurality of this civil domain. Some regard networks as effective at building trust, consensus or what has been called ‘global social capital’ helping to ameliorate the ‘democratic deficit’ in the global agora.⁸² For example, in discussing ‘how the WTO can best function for the enhancement of global prosperity’ the Evian Group seeks to build ‘confidence between members of the global economic community’. But in generating trust and a consensus on the benefits of a liberal trading order, Evian also notes that ‘multilateral corporations must exercise global responsibility commensurate with their knowledge and influence’.⁸³ As Thomas Risse notes: “The more that tripartite networks of global governance are inclusive, their procedures and decisions transparent and subject to public deliberation, the more the democratic deficit of transnational governance can be tackled”.⁸⁴

Yet, the nature of the relationship of non-official experts, their organisations (think tanks, foundations, etc) and their coalitions with states and international organisations presents important questions about representation, accountability and legitimacy; that is questions relevant to any idea of a global polity or a cosmopolitan world order. Nevertheless, global or regional networks are not ‘public’ entities – that is, accountable to formally elected representatives of the public or a sovereign authority. A network may be accountable to network members but these member organisations and individuals cannot be considered as representative of the ‘global public’. Global or regional networks are usually private organisations (notwithstanding public sources of support or the production of public goods) and are not subject to the usual reporting and accountability requirements of public bodies in liberal democracies.⁸⁵ The public, even the well informed of OECD countries, are still largely unaware of the roles, reach and influence of global networks. Newspapers and the electronic media do not report on the CGIAR or the Evian Group. Combined with the technocratic character of many such networks, the public is excluded and political responsibility is undermined. As a consequence of the lack of transparency and mechanisms for public representation, and lack of knowledge about them, these networks act with relative autonomy and in some anonymity. In any event, they are more able to thwart challenges

⁸² Reinicke and Deng, 2000.

⁸³ www.eviangroup.org: Accessed June 17th 2003.

⁸⁴ Thomas Risse, ‘Transnational Actors and World Politics’ in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (eds.) *Handbook of International Relations*, London, Sage Publications, 2002, p. 270.

⁸⁵ But see the mechanisms developed by the Development Grant Facility, 2001.

to their activities or calls for transparency by emphasizing their non-state, private status. This tendency is compounded in knowledge networks that also stress their disinterested, scientific and politically neutral endeavours.

Consequently, this paper will end on a cautionary note regarding the democratic potential and deliberative capacity of global (knowledge) networks. They may well be sites of social capital but this kind of capital has negative as well as positive implications. The global agora is not a level playing field for networks. It is characterised by an uneven distribution of resources and a hierarchy of discourses where ‘subaltern knowledge networks see the spaces for negotiations and deliberations leading to radical outcomes decreasing’.⁸⁶ The global agora is a public space but one where relatively few can be public actors. Accordingly, the extent to which global and regional networks become a focal point of public affairs has meaning primarily for those who have the resources, patronage or expertise to enter and traverse the agora.

⁸⁶ Rai, 2002.