Networks as Transnational Agents of Development

Abstract

The term network has become a hallmark of the development industry. In principle networks have the potential to provide a more flexible and non-hierarchical means of exchange and interaction that is also more innovative, responsive and dynamic whilst overcoming spatial separation and providing scale economies. Although the label networks currently pervades discourses about the relationships between organisations in development, there has been surprisingly little research or theorisation of them. This article is a critical evaluation of the claims of developmental networks from a theoretical perspective. While networks are regarded as a counter hegemonic force we argue that networks are not static entities but must be seen as an ongoing and emergent process. Moreover theory overlooks power relationships within networks and is unable to conceptualise the relationship between power and values. These observations open up a research agenda that the authors are exploring empirically in forthcoming publications.

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INTRODUCTION

The term network has become one of the hallmarks of the development industry and is central to its discourses and self-image. It is impossible to find a development agency that does not claim to be involved in some type of network. Networks are a strategic response to the challenges and opportunities facilitated by the globalisation of capital and technological changes particularly the expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In comparison to other relationships between organisations they have the potential to provide a more flexible, flat and non-hierarchical means of exchange and interaction which promises to be more innovative, responsive and dynamic whilst overcoming spatial separation and providing scale economies. These supposed advantages of networks as an organisational form fit closely with the self-image of much of the non-state development industry and particularly with its presumed comparative advantage over the state and market. The aid industry emphasises collaboration and co-production and has created a range of relationships including partnerships, alliances and networks. Whilst this reflects the trend in development practice for codetermined outcomes it should be noted that the development industry has created networks for its own purposes. The purpose of this paper is to outline theoretical approaches which can be used to critically evaluate the claims of developmental networks. In particular we examine the extent to which their structure enables them to be effective tools in democratising development through empowering the marginalised.

Although the label networks currently pervades discourses about the relationships between organisations in development, there has been surprisingly little research or theorisation of them in this context. The use of the term network in the dominant development discourses is relatively new and participation in them particularly by non-state development actors appears to be increasing. However, developmental networks are clearly not new phenomena. For example, Keck and Sikkink trace the

history of transnational developmental networks from the anti slavery movements of the 18th and 19th centuries.[1] The paper will problematise the gap between development and networks and will discuss how the different conceptualisations of networks could help in the study of important development actors.

Before discussing their role in development, we will briefly outline our epistemological approach to networks. We regard developmental networks as socially constructed by actors who are conscious of their participation in networks and who understand these relationships as networks. As Keck and Sikkink point out, academics came late in the day to this subject, and practice rather than theory drives the analysis of development networks.[2] The term network is an analytical tool used by researchers from diverse disciplines and theoretical traditions to conceptualise relationships within and between institutions and organisations. Although the paper focuses on the role that networks play as development actors we are aware that our definition of networks is not necessarily shared by these actors. Furthermore, we are not focusing exclusively on theories labelled as 'networks theories' or 'network analysis'.[3] Instead, we adopt diverse theoretical approaches to analysing forms of association and practices labelled as networks and discuss the salient contributions and limitations of these approaches.

We begin the paper by outlining the types of transnational networks involved in international development. We then discuss some of the reasons why the analysis of networks appears to have been overlooked in mainstream Development Studies. We then discuss the contribution that researchers from organisational studies have made to understanding networks particularly the properties of networks and what makes them distinct from other forms of association. Additionally, we outline the limitations of this analysis by examining the role of networks in development. Following this, we

outline how Development Studies has analysed the role of transnational development networks.

There are gaps revealed in this exploration, and in the final section, we will show what implications this has for the study of development networks. We focus on how networks have the properties and attributes of both actors and social structure, as well as their relationship with their environment particularly the impact of resource imbalances. We then go on to investigate the interrelationships between power and values within transnational networks focusing on whether the supposed attributes of networks have implications for development studies. We conclude by suggesting ways forward in the study of transnational development networks.

Types of transnational development networks

At the outset it is important to outline the types of development we are analysing. Cowen and Shenton distinguish between *intentional* development, that is the dominant approach focusing on the efforts to "ameliorate the disordered faults of progress" made by development agencies and *immanent* development, the evolution of globalised capitalism.[4] Whilst accepting the validity of the distinctions in this broad conception of development and that the activities of developmental networks may straddle both categories, we focus primarily on the role of networks in intentional development or development as practice rather than immanent development.[5] Our aim is to raise general questions about networks and intentional development, particularly the ways that actors intervene in the unfolding of global capitalism in order to implement their visions of a good society. Thus, our approach goes beyond a focus on projects and examines how networks as developmental actors shape structures and the context of development. We examine the network as a form of association involving development agents and agencies, as relationships between

individuals and between organisations. As such, we examine how networks can exhibit properties of both structure and actors.

For the purposes of this paper our non-exhaustive typology of transnational developmental networks includes:

- NGOs, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) involved in lobbying, sharing or disseminating information and capacity building;

- networks of development policy makers;

- diaspora groups including transnational ethnic and hometown associations;

- social movements including transnational networks of women and environmental networks;

- advocacy networks including debt relief networks, human rights groups, anti-landmines and anti-dam campaigns;

- international federations of Trade Unionists.

Gaps in the development literature

Networking currently pervades all aspects of development practice and has become central to the self-image of most development agencies. Although development agencies are networking and presumably thinking about networks this is not yet apparent in Development Studies. Whilst there is much information on the ground about networking in the form of reports from the development industry and online networks, there has been little input from academics. We have identified several reasons for this. First, networking is now so deeply ingrained in the development discourse and practice that it is taken for granted and not analysed. Second, networking falls under other names and analytical categories such as globalisation, ethnicity, reciprocity and social capital. Thus, whilst the phenomena has been

exhaustively investigated it has not been labelled as networking and the specific opportunities and limitations of associating in the network form have been overlooked. Third, the analysis of networks straddles different academic disciplines and there are no agreed ways of conceptualising networks or methods of investigating them. Different researchers may well label a variety of relationships as networks and this is particularly problematic for Development Studies, as many agents of development are aware that they are participating in networks. The limited conceptualisation of the relationships between networks and development may reflect a more general lack of theoretical rigour in Development Studies.

NETWORKS AS STRATEGIC RESPONSES - THE CONTRIBUTION OF ORGANISATIONAL STUDIES

In this section we address the issues of what networks are and how they operate. It is apparent that businesses were the first to discuss and conceptualise networks as a strategic response to changes in the environment and of the organisation's place within it. Many firms appreciated the need for flexible specialisation and new organisational forms to facilitate optimal resource sharing; these themes were later developed by the non-profit sector. Therefore, organisational studies provides some of the most salient contributions to theorising networks and is a logical starting point to understanding how the types of networks outlined above operate. Whilst much of their analysis is relevant for exploring developmental networks we highlight the many gaps and differences of emphasis between the profit and non-profit sectors.

In organisational studies, networks are conceptualised as relationships based on a form of exchange and distinct from markets and hierarchies. Networks are regarded as an intermediary between markets and hierarchies as they have less uncertainty than the former and less complexity than the latter.[6] This conception of networks helps us locate their role in development as a potential 'third way' between the

globalising market and hierarchies, such as the state, which were once regarded as the main agents of purposive development. However, it should be noted that some researchers such as Powell reject clear cut distinctions between markets and hierarchies and this serves as a warning to other researchers to avoid artificial dualisms.[7] Accepting that networks can be hierarchical highlights one of the main limitations to the organisational studies literature; namely that they do not appear to take any account of power relations within networks. This also serves as a point of departure for other theoretical approaches to social networks, such as Actor Network Theory (ANT) which focus primarily on the establishment of hierarchies in networks.[8]

Organisational studies regards networks as a strategic inter-organisational response to a globalised and increasingly dynamic and complex business environment inhabited by more sophisticated consumers. According to these approaches networks are located in areas where neither markets nor hierarchies facilitate optimal relationships of exchange. For example, Powell argues that networks have a particular advantage over markets and hierarchies when it comes to exchanging information as the value of information is not easily measured and it is, therefore, not easily traded in markets or disseminated through corporate hierarchies.[9] Whilst for Egan information exchange and adaptation are the key to inter organisational networks.[10] This point is central to understanding the role of networks in development as it demonstrates that they are a strategic response to a particular set of environmental circumstances.

The dominant perspective in organisational studies regards networks as organisational practices based on horizontal patterns of exchange, interdependent flows of resources and reciprocal lines of communication. Powell characterises networks as a form of exchange involving indefinite transactions governed by normative rather than legalistic sanctions.[11] These trust-centred, long-term

relationships are based on mutual debt and involve non-market relationships. Within the networks, exchange takes the form of individuals engaged in mutually supportive action and the networks are in a constant state of flux as objectives and members change. Networks involve committing resources to mutually acceptable objectives, sharing risks and long term collaboration. Powell argues that each party is dependent on resources controlled by another and benefits are gained by pooling resources as both benefits and burdens are shared, "in essence, the parties to a network agree to forego the right to pursue their own interests at the expense of others."[12] This approach is shared by Egan who emphasises that the characteristics of networks include dependence on others for resources in relationships based on reciprocal transfer.[13] However, it is clear that between and within networks there are varying degrees of commitment to networks with some being very lose whilst others use up much resources and time.

Many of the attributes of networks have resonance with the process of international development. For example, flexibility, fluidity and the importance of collaboration are all key elements of the self-image of the development industry and reflect an environment characterised by a high degree of uncertainty. The literature highlights the centrality of trust in these informal networks although it is treated as an unproblematic property of networks rather than being critically analysed. However, the extent to which they reflect practices within the development industry and particularly relationships between the industry and its beneficiaries are more questionable. In the conclusion we return to the recurring issue of the use of the term networks to conceptualise a diverse range of relationships between developmental actors. Some of the characteristics outlined above are applicable to relationships between northern NGOs in networks, but the position of southern participants may be more questionable. Furthermore, northern NGOs have a tendency to establish southern NGOs in their own image and for their own purposes.

The prevailing organisational studies approaches appreciate that networks differ and can be categorised according to the degree of interdependence and bonding of actors within the network, influenced by the character of the product exchanged within the network. This approach is a significant advance on the quantitative and functionalist approach to network analysis outlined by Knoke and Kuklinski which focuses on the frequency and quantity of interactions rather than analysing the qualities of relationships between actors in a network.[14]

However, whilst the qualities and durability of networks are related to their utility, organisational studies approaches take a highly materialistic view of actors' interests and motivations and subordinates non-material aspects of these relationships. As an approach to the study of networks in purposive development, organisational studies approaches have limitations related to the concerns of the discipline and the questions it seeks to answer. The limitations outlined below lead us to seek other means of understanding networks. We will briefly outline the salient limitations which will then be discussed at greater length later.

First, organisation studies places networks in the middle of a continuum with markets and hierarchies occupying the poles, but rarely do they take any account of power relations within and between networks. Second, the approach suggests that people associate for purely material reasons i.e. in order to maximise competitive advantage. However, in understanding developmental networks we must also analyse the reconstruction and negotiation of values as a primary basis of establishing and maintaining networks. Third, whilst this approach regards networks as adaptations to changes in the environment it does not conceptualise networks as actors shaping the environment in which they operate. In order to analyse the role of development networks we must engage with theoretical approaches that can

conceptualise networks as both agent and structure. Fourth, the environment is portrayed as neutral - hence, it is necessary to locate development networks in the context of international civil society, north-south power relations and the access to resources.

Rather than dismissing the contribution of organisational studies out of hand it can be used to broaden the discussion to encompass debates over the nature and extent of NGO, CBO and CSO competitive advantage over the state and market.[15] These approaches have particular resonance for development management as they relate to the debates about the relationship between professionalism and core values in development agencies. Some may also regard the increased emphasis on networking as an example of development agencies attempting to increase their legitimacy by adopting the discourses and/or practices of business. In the remainder of the paper, we will be focusing on these issues outlined above with particular reference to development.

KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

The approaches to networks outlined above tend to blur describing their functions and analysing their qualities. In this section we discuss what brings development agencies together in networks and analyse how this impacts on their effectiveness. In the absence of an established body of research into developmental networks we rely heavily on the work of Keck and Sikkink and Stone.[16]

We outlined above how according to the dominant approach to networks taken in organisational studies networks evolved as a means of exchanging information. This logic has been followed in Development Studies where research into the role of networks in purposive development has focused primarily on knowledge networks. Keck and Sikkink, in the key text on transnational developmental networks, apply

social movement theories to this approach and focus on the importance of information exchange in the process of mobilisation within networks.[17] Likewise, Castells emphasises how in an era of globalisation, the characteristics attributed to networks, such as flexibility and dynamism facilitate the dissemination of information, particularly digital information.[18] These approaches provide and advance on the organisational studies literature by examining what it is that binds networks together.

The main functions of knowledge networks include the collective production, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge and the enhancement of the participants' resource base and political status. Both Keck and Sikkink, and Stone, discuss the effectiveness of these networks by looking at their specific qualities. They follow the pragmatic approach of the organisational studies literature illustrating how the network structure builds on the effectiveness of its nodes. For example, Stone argues that "a network amplifies and disseminates ideas…to an extent that could not be achieved by individuals or institutions alone. Moreover, a network mutually confers legitimacy and pools authority and legitimacy in a positive sum manner. In other words a network can often be greater than its constituent parts".[19] Crucially she outlines the importance of, and critically examines the immanent properties of, networks focusing on analysing their bases of association. This body of literature has conceptualised a range of transnational knowledge networks distinguishing between policy communities, transnational advocacy networks and epistemic communities. These distinctions are based on examining two key issues. Firstly, what it is that binds these networks together and, secondly, the nature of their relationships with the external environment particularly decision takers.

Using an approach developed by Sabatier, Stone defines policy communities as stable networks of actors from inside and outside government who are integrated into policy making and share core values.[20] She states, "a policy community can include

journalists, researchers and policy analysts as well as elected officials and bureaucratic leaders. That is, people who share a common set of basic values, causal assumptions and problem perceptions".[21] According to her, these networks only function in a consensual environment and may become institutionalised through formal committees, consultation or other forms of state or multilateral recognition. This group can be regarded as acting as an intellectual strata articulating the interests of sectors of globalised capital.

Epistemic communities are composed of knowledge actors who share common policy ideas and seek access to decision making on the basis of their expertise. They are more likely to operate in conditions of conflict than policy communities and are more autonomous from policy makers. Their independence and legitimacy is based on perceptions of their expertise. These groups are consensual in terms of methods and key assumptions. Stone stresses that epistemic communities may be ad hoc focusing on the resolution of a particular policy problem or more constant and aimed at "the establishment and perpetuation of beliefs and visions as dominant social discourses".[22]

Transnational advocacy networks are international networks which are bound by shared values, dense exchange of information and services and a shared discourse and seek to shape the climate of public debate and influence global policy on behalf of others. However, the view that networks are based on shared values is somewhat simplistic and has been contested; one critic is Hajer who emphasises the discursive processes within networks.[23] Stone argues that transnational advocacy networks have less scientific validity than the experts in the policy communities and draws a strong conceptual distinction between transnational advocacy networks which "cohere around 'principled beliefs' – normative ideas that provide criteria to distinguish right from wrong – unlike epistemic communities which form around

'causal beliefs' – cause and effect relationships. As a consequence, transnational advocacy networks are more effective in valuing grassroots, traditional and non-scientific knowledge".[24]

However, some of these distinctions are questionable. As discussed later, northern participants in transnational advocacy networks may attempt to legitimise themselves to donors and states by reference to their membership of such networks whilst simultaneously legitimising their relationship with southern partners by reference to their expertise.[25] The claim that transnational advocacy networks are somehow more responsive to 'traditional knowledge' is also questionable since it is highly likely that they are legitimising their own beliefs and practices or at best articulating their interpretations whilst presenting them as the views of the marginalised. This approach reflects a lack of understanding of the operation of power within these networks. Furthermore we dispute the existence of a distinct 'traditional knowledge' to be juxtaposed with 'scientific knowledge', as this dualism implies that knowledge in these societies is static and has developed in isolation from the rest of the world.

As we saw according to the dominant approaches to networks in organisational studies the main function of networks is sharing information between organisations. However, some developmental networks also share other resources, but to date there has been little analysis of developmental networks involved in activities other than campaigning. The other activities of transnational development networks relate to the process of northern NGOs evolving from an emphasis on short term relief to longer term community based projects to the building of the capacity of communities to sustain their own development and more recently advocacy.[26] Further research could critically examine the effectiveness of networks as development actors and how effectiveness is defined in these networks and by whom.

The other main area of research into transnational networks of relevance to Development Studies examines the nature of transnational communities. The majority of current research focuses on the development of diaspora consciousness with emphasis on what binds migrant communities together particularly the evolution of hybrid cultures within transnational networks and how linkages are maintained with various homes.[27] However, until recently there has been little research into the relationships between these identities and development. Exceptions to this include a growing literature on the role of African diasporas in development.[28]

TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY - THE ARCHITECTURE OF DEVELOPMENTAL NETWORKS

We have highlighted the need for the analysis of networks in Development Studies and the limitations in the existing literature on networks. We will now investigate the related issues of the interplay between developmental networks and their environments and the internal architecture of networks focusing particularly on power dynamics and the role of values. We begin by locating developmental networks in transnational civil society following a neo-Gramscian approach, which regards developmental networks as vehicles for collectives of intellectuals to construct and contest the hegemony of global capital. The analysis of networks in transnational civil society highlights the importance of power relationships and imbalances of resources. This provides an avenue to critically analyse some of the claims made about development networks relating to their democracy and empowerment. We examine the extent to which the internal dynamics impact on their role as potential counter hegemonic forces. In particular, we propose that it is necessary to rigorously evaluate the interrelated issues of power and values to challenge the claims that networks are democratic and empowering.

Developmental networks and transnational civil society

We begin by tracing how the relationships between development networks and the environment shape the nature of networks. We use two complementary approaches; a resource dependency perspective (RDP) and neo-Gramscian one. RDP emphasises the vulnerability of organisations to their environment, particularly their dependence on resources that are controlled by others within the environment. In her summation of this approach, Hatch states that the "dependency the organisation has on its environment is not one single, undifferentiated dependency, it is a complex set of dependencies that exist between an organisation and the specific elements of its environment found in the inter-organisational network".[29] We follow this line of reasoning and examine how development networks are dependent on material resources, such as funding from external bodies. However, in line with Yanacopulos, we broaden this definition of the developmental resource environment to include perceptions of actors' legitimacy.[30]

We begin by exploring Neo-Gramscian approaches to locating the role of intellectuals in the construction and contestation of the hegemony of global capital. This leads to outlining how policy and epistemic communities provide the intellectual basis for legitimating the hegemony of globalising capital whereas much of the literature on transnational advocacy networks implicitly regards them as counter hegemonic forces.

Both Stone and Parmar highlight the importance of resources in the production of knowledge and illustrate that this is an overtly political process which promotes western notions of good societies.[31] Parmar examines how during the cold War US foundations "consciously have helped to construct a US hegemony" through promoting 'liberal internationalism' and fostering a pro-US environment of values and methods.[32] He argues that research foundations acted as an organic intellectual strata for the US corporate political economy which "was projecting its power and

vision overseas, in co-ordination with the American state".[33] He illustrates how the foundations used their resources to construct networks including US and local academics, the local elite and military which promoted a unilinear path of 'modernisation' in the developing world in order to resist the twin evils of Marxism and their own traditions. A major strength of Parmar's approach is that it places the process of transnational network construction and maintenance in historical context to show how participants in the foundations referred to their own histories of domestic activism and legitimised the process by arguing that they were applying lessons learnt domestically. Parmar adopts a Gramscian approach to analysing the role of these intellectuals in disseminating a particular worldview across social groups through using their financial power and resources to dominate agenda setting. Parmar advances our conceptualisation of networks by placing resource distributors within the networks and illustrating how they are both the key actor in the network and members of other larger networks. This is more than a question of semantics as locating the forces controlling resources within the network allows us to more fully conceptualise the nature of power relationships within networks.

However, Parmar is somewhat deterministic and gives these groups little autonomy from the interests of metropolitan capital and crucially gives little attention to the potential of other intellectuals to contest the dominant discourses and develop counter discourses, a process central to Gramscian analysis of power and knowledge. His analysis of oppositional forces is limited to questioning the extent to which foundation ideals were appropriated by their recipients and locates counter hegemonic tendencies in other states such as the Soviet bloc rather than in the host country.

Keck and Sikkink (amongst others) have analysed transnational advocacy networks implicitly as counter-hegemonic forces.[34] There is some debate as to whether the

spread of ICTs has strengthened their position or has democratised and reduced the costs of the construction of counter networks. The research into counter hegemonic forces owes much to Castells who suggests that transnational advocacy networks are counter hegemonic to the neo-liberal orthodoxy of globalised capitalism.[35] This research also has a heritage in Development Studies, which rejects the notion that development agencies in the North should decide how other people should be developed and propose a process, which involves redistribution of power and transforming institutions transnationally. This form of development as vision challenges the dominant approaches labelled as development as practice.[36] These networks can use transnational linkages to enable people to become agents of their own development at the micro and meso levels. The main limitation of these anti development and people centred approaches is that they provide few details on how their prescriptions can be scaled up. Thus, of particular interest for Development Studies are claims that networks can overcome this.

Evans discusses this issue suggesting that transnational advocacy networks can operate as counter hegemonic forces by connecting marginalised communities in the south to political actors in the north.[37] Similarly, Castles outlines the development of counter hegemonic transnational and interdisciplinary research networks which have features of both epistemological communities and transnational advocacy networks.[38] These networks have developed participatory methods focusing on both the local and the global. This provides an alternative theoretical framework from liberal pluralist approaches which emphasise a process of competition between the representatives of relatively equal interest groups trying to influence a disinterested decision-maker. Instead it emphasises that decision-makers have their own interests. In common with Keck and Sikkink, they regard much policy discussion as confined within particular discourses and that the role of counter hegemonic development agents is to frame debates. They illustrate that various shifting groups are attempting

to shape policy and that the production of knowledge is an inherently political process in which a great deal of control rests with funders who wish to generate knowledge which serves their own interests.

The discussion of how networks can be both actor and structure and on their relationship with the environment lead into another major point of departure from approaches to organisational studies. The RDP focuses on how the environment shapes networks and accepts that networks can impact on the environment. However, two clear distinctions can be made between this analysis and the activities of developmental networks. Firstly, the primary purpose of developmental networks is to change the environment in which they operate through lobbying and campaigns or the impact of interventions such as projects. Secondly, many developmental interventions are inherently political and can have a range of unintended impacts on their environment such as reinforcing or undermining existing power relations within or between communities. Whilst these approaches tend to adopt a critical analysis of policy and epistemic communities, they seem to be less rigorous in their analysis of transnational advocacy networks often accepting their claims at face value.

Power within and between networks

The Actor Network Theory perspective argues that the resources which have power relations embedded within them are actually actant nodes within the networks and by virtue of this are actors as they have a significant effect on the whole network. This can also be linked to debates over the legitimacy of development agencies which owes much to the heritage of the work of Edwards.[39]

One of the most fundamental limitations in much of the networks literature is that although there is some understanding of the power relationships between networks and their environment there is little theorisation of power relationships within and

between networks. Here we suggest theoretical approaches that could be used to analyse power in networks and highlight insights from other approaches to understanding these relationships.

Networks are often idealised as egalitarian or flat forms of organisation and distinct from hierarchies since, in theory, they lack an ultimate arbiter. These attributes have the potential to allow networks to act as a distinct institutional arrangement between organisations and individuals with highly variable levels of power, status and resources. One of the central claims of northern NGOs within transnational advocacy networks is that they link southern grassroots communities to northern policy makers. Although this claim is central to NGOs' claims for legitimacy, its validity is rarely questioned and it is clear that some networks exhibit hierarchical tendencies. Hudson critically examines the meanings of legitimacy in transnational networks by exploring the accountability of NGOs in them; his central argument is that that legitimacy is "socially constructed and, therefore shaped by the network form of organisation that NGOs transnational advocacy takes"[40]. This allows him to examine the power relationships within networks in the context of the wider development environment. Thus he argues that "NGOs have to balance and prioritise multiple and diverse relationships" such as northern and southern governments, donors, corporations and southern NGOs.[41]

Other research has made more limited investigations into power relationships within networks. Jacobsen argues that policy networks can be elitist and exclusive as gatekeepers base inclusion on recognition of the validity of credentials[42], whilst Stone points out that these networks are not public bodies as they are not accountable to elected representatives but are only accountable to the members of the network.[43] However, this seems to assume that all members of the networks have an equal ability and interest in ensuring accountability. Stone concedes that "while there are

many positive attributes to sharing knowledge and spreading policy ideas from one context to another, there are issues of appropriate transfer, criticisms about coercive transfers, and questions of power come to the fore".[44] This is an important starting point, there has been little critical research into how networks as a distinctive form of association manage the power imbalances inherent in international development differently from other forms of association. It becomes necessary to critically evaluate how the distinctive attributes of networks as a form of association in development impact on the power relationships within them.

In order to understand power relationships within developmental networks we must look for other sources. One of the main contributions of Actor Network Theory (ANT) is that it focuses on the mechanics of power within networks. ANT uses a Foucauldian conception of power to focus on its effects rather than sources. Law suggests that ANT does not provide a theoretical approach to analysing power within networks but provides contextually rooted case studies of the operation of power within specific networks.[45] For Law, social structures such as networks are verbs not nouns as they are sites of struggle and relational effects that reproduce themselves.[46] This approach makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the power relationships within developmental networks by regarding the ordering of networks as a process rather than an outcome. This leads to analysis of the ongoing processes of contestation and resistance within networks.

Whilst this conception of power relationships within networks is contingent rather than theoretical, several salient points emerge for our analysis. Networks are never static but are constantly evolving through contestation and resistance; the mechanics of power within the networks become of critical interest. By conceptualising all nodes of a network as actors that impact on the network as a whole, ANT highlights how power relationships are embedded in, for example, the technological advances which

have facilitated the rise in transnational developmental networks can become a central object of research.

In the transnational networks literature the main and often only objects of analysis within the networks are the northern actors with southern perspectives being marginalised and only being of importance when they impact on the legitimacy of northern actors. In this research southern NGOs only appear to be important when they make demands of northern NGOs. As such, northern experiences of participation in transnational networks are privileged over southern ones which marginalises their agency. To avoid this marginalisation research into transnational development networks should follow the example of other parts of development studies and focus on southern perspectives and understandings as part of an explicit project of facilitating empowerment through networks.

At a theoretical level this underplaying of southern agency is also evident in the narrow conception of 'intellectuals' used in this literature as they are regarded as synonymous with experts. This is at odds with Gramsci's conception of organic intellectuals who operate at every level of society. Future research into networks could focus on the role of the various southern intellectual strata such as members of the urban elite, 'traditional leaders' and political activists. These groups act as organic intellectuals by providing their constituencies with competing interpretations of the world which legitimise strategies for advancing economic and political interests.

Values and network maintenance

Analysis of the role of values within networks is closely related to questions of power relationships. Whilst the knowledge network and policy community literature provides an advance on other approaches to networks it is limited by a lack of theoretical

underpinning of both power and values and particularly the interrelationship between the two. The dominant approaches to the role of values within developmental networks are closely associated with Sabatier, and Keck and Sikkink who suggest that these networks are bound together and driven by shared values. From this approach one of the defining characteristics of transnational advocacy networks is that they "cohere around 'principled beliefs' – normative ideas that provide criteria to distinguish right from wrong"[47]. However, this seems to reflect the public discourses of some transnational networks and their need for legitimacy rather than the experience of participants in networks.

Keck and Sikkink and Stone produce sophisticated understandings of the relationships between power and discourse in policy arenas.[48] They identify that the key strategy of the competing parties is to attempt to exclude opposing views from the frame of public discussion. However, they do not seem to have applied this approach to analysing processes within networks as they overlook the lack of consensus within many transnational development networks. For example, the Jubilee debt networks illustrate how attachment to different discourses such as debt relief and debt cancellation are the cause of significant divisions within the network.[49] Thus, rather than being the cement that binds networks together, these values have proved divisive within the network and its component parts. Assuming that all members share core values obscures the reality of competing definitions and interests within networks and promotes a conception of networks as stable institutions rather than dynamic and constantly evolving.

A major advance in understanding the role of values in networks is provided by Hajer's study of environmental networks in which he problematises the role of values in networks and produces a sophisticated account of the process of norm creation within networks.[50] He illustrates that norms within networks are created by repeated

social practice and that this can be both an inclusive and exclusive process. This provides us with a conception of values within networks as constantly reconstituted processes of contestation and resistance rather than static determinants as implied by Sabatier.[51] This conception of the role of values in maintaining networks becomes more clear if one regards them as being largely symbolic. Symbols can play a central role in maintaining networks by allowing a combination of self-interest with emotive feelings of self-belonging. The power of symbols is illustrated by Cohen who suggests that "symbols are effective because they are imprecise. Though obviously not contentless, part of their meaning is 'subjective'. They are, therefore, ideal media through which people can…behave in apparently similar ways…without subjecting themselves to a typology of orthodoxy. Individuality and commonality are thus reconcilable".[52] Symbolic matters can be central to the maintenance of networks because they allow people to behave differently whilst retaining membership of the network. Furthermore they allow the group to contrast contested views of itself in terms of its norms and practices with other groups in order to reconstruct itself and adapt to new circumstances.

These discourses are contested by competing sectors within the network to define who they are and facilitate strategies to take advantage of future opportunities. At present there has been little research into how differences are subsumed strategically within developmental networks. A starting point would be to investigate how shared values are framed within networks and used strategically to manage the processes of contestation and resistance which are inherent to networks composed of actors bringing competing and evolving values.

CONCLUSIONS

The recent expansion of networks is a strategic response by development agencies to changes in the environment and has been facilitated by the expansion of ICTs.

This supports much of the research into networks from organisational studies which stresses how organisations have increased their competitive advantage through participating in networks. However, it is believed that some of the attributes of networks have the potential to allow new and once marginalised groups of people to become agents of development. In particular they are seen a flat, non-hierarchical and relatively loose means of association which in comparison to the state and market are more appropriate to deliver empowering development in an environment characterised by uncertainty. They tend to be regarded as a key element in global civil society as these properties can overcome spatial divisions and mitigate the effects of differences in resources and power.

However, when these expectations are examined it is clear that there is limited empirical evidence to back them up and virtually no theoretical underpinning. Given that they regard networks as a counter hegemonic force it is paradoxical that the literature on networks and international civil society tends to overlook the nature of power relationships within networks and with a few exceptions it is unable to conceptualise the relationship between power and values. Future research must critically examine both how power relationships within networks affect their effectiveness and how they impact on the orientation of networks focusing on how the attributes of networks and their relationship to the environment affect the ongoing nature of power dynamics within networks. In particular we can investigate the extent to which networks as opposed to other forms of organisations can mitigate imbalances of power between members of networks. Related to this are issues such as assessing the power relationships that are embedded in the technological advances that have facilitated the expansion of transnational networks. Thus we can explore how networks are inclusive in the sense that they can overcome spatial divisions yet potentially can be exclusive by entrenching the digital divide. Power relationships can be further explored by gathering qualitative data on the experiences

of participants in networks in both the north and south. This research must be underpinned by a theoretical approach, which regards networks as an ongoing process and not a static outcome.

Closely related to investigating the mechanics of power within networks is a rigorous examination the process of establishing and maintaining networks through reconstructing values. We concur with Hajer[53] that values and norm creation are crucial in the establishment of networks and thus any study of the process of maintaining or ordering networks should focus on the role of contesting the values that are regarded as underpinning them. Future research must appreciate that there is a dialectical relationship between networks and values and that there is a constant process of them being contested. Emphasis can be placed on how the official or dominant values of networks are a result of contestation and resistance within networks. This conception of the relationships between power, values and discourse enables us to resist approaches that regard shared values as somehow mitigating imbalances of power and resources within networks. Allied to this we can explore how different actors place different meanings on these supposedly shared values.

Some of the properties and attributes of networks that make them of interest as potential vehicles for delivering development also create methodological difficulties and ambiguities for researchers. For example, we have emphasised that networks have properties of both structure and actor, thus they can be simultaneously institutions and processes. They are not only defined by what they exchange but also by the environment in which they operate. We need to develop an approach to understanding developmental networks which is not deterministic and appreciates that whilst networks are influenced by their environment they also change it. Indeed, the purpose of development is to change the social, political and economic environment. We must develop qualitative methodological and epistemological

positions to develop a conception of networks as a analytical tool which can appreciate their fluid, contingent and unstable natures which make them a distinct form of association.

Endnotes

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2   Keck and Sikkink (1998).
3   Network Analysis is closely associated with Knoke and Kuklinski (1982; 1998). This form of quantitative sociology applies the 'insights' of structural functionalism to analyse statistical data on interactions within networks in order to develop 'scientifically valid' models of the relationships within these networks.
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7   Powell, W. W. (1994). 'Neither market nor hierarchy: network forms of organisation'. <u>Organisations: Cases, issues, concepts</u>. R. Paton. London, Paul Chapman Publishing: 241-252.
8   ANT developed from the sociology of technology and is informed by post-modern philosophy.
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