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Chap. 6.

Collaborative Event Ethnography as a strategy for analyzing policy transfers and global summits

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Abstract:

The notion of Global governance is well embedded by the rise of UN mega-conferences, and more generally « Mega-events ». This kind of very large and complex summits, with their archipelago of meetings, and the number and diversity of actors involved, can be considered as a very important spot for the global economy of policy transfer. This chapter will present the challenges and pitfalls of a new methodology called Collaborative Ethnography, tuned for tackling this complexity. First, we describe the methodological challenges in studying mega-events as a place for policy diffusion. Second, we offer an overview of the roots of this approach in the literature referring to political sociology of global agency. Then, we describe and evaluate the different protocols already experimented. The last part of the chapter comes back to the diffusion process within these events, global governance in the making and the manufacture of transnational social hierarchies and configurations.

Keywords: collaborative ethnography, mega-events, UN conferences, transnational network, translation.

Global governance, is well embodied in the rise of UN mega-conference, and more generally *mega-events*, that must be considered as a part of an emergent world political culture. This kind of complex summits - with the number and diversity of actors involved and their archipelago of meetings - must be considered as important arenas for the global economy of policy transfer. Studying them would be particularly useful for scholars focusing on cooperation institutions, transnational policy ambassadors (Porto de Oliveira 2017), think tanks (Stone 2001) or multilateral organizations (Pal 2012). They are places where emergent global policies are legitimized and launched, where the complex configurations of individuals and organizations that perform transfers are visible, namely a network of intergovernmental bureaucracy, with States officers, think-tanks, professional communities, representatives of business and civil society. Scholars can witness during such conferences the 'micro-dynamics' of policy transfer (Hadjiisky, Pal and Walker 2017), and how some transnational policy coalitions showcase new policy instruments or launch new policy initiatives (on "instrument constituencies", see Chapter 12 written by Howlett & Saguin in this volume). This is the place where high-level policy entrepreneurs, searching for global audience, are able to foster the rapid diffusion of their policy ideas and instruments.

However, the empirical analysis of these UN conferences brings new methodological challenges for social scientists, in particular for policy transfer analysts. This chapter will present the challenges and pitfalls of a new

methodology coined by Brosius & Campbell (2010) “Collaborative Event Ethnography” particularly appropriate for tackling this complexity. Examples of diffusion dynamics presented in this chapter stem from the fields of sustainable development and climate change, and from a original collective project called CLIMACOPⁱ.

The chapter is divided in four steps. The first section describes specific features and methodological challenges of this unique object called « mega-event » for diffusion scholars (1). The second proposes a brief bibliographic overview of main origins of our approach and of investigation projects that have already experimented CEE (2). The third section offers an evaluation of the main components of our CEE methodology for further experiments (3). Finally, the fourth one focuses on the observation of main mechanisms of the upstream political diffusion: the manufacture of global policy arena as structure for diffusion, and early translations in the making (4).

- I - Mega-event, methodological challenge and policy diffusion

In order to clarify the methodological challenge that the study of mega-events represent for social scientists, and especially for ethnography, it is worth deepening the concept of “mega-events”. This will lead then to exposing the importance of this kind of research project for diffusion scholars.

Why analyze the rise of mega-events?

The category of mega-events is more inclusive than the very object at stake here: UN conferences or similar high-level global political meetings. Why still use it in labeling this approach nurtured by political science as well as anthropology?

This larger frame leads to to a better approximation of a structural process that encompasses UN conferences: the slow emergence of ‘world polity’ and even of some elements of an hegemonic “world culture”. In line with the “English school of International relations” (Hurrell 2007), this research program benefited recently from some rewarding books in history, sociology and anthropology. Such transnational arenas for policy diffusion analysis can go beyond UN conferences (Earth summits, COP, UN-Habitat, Specialized Agencies Regional Forums, etc.) and include other international organizations events (e.g. OECD High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness), or civil society and private sector meetings such as the World Social and Economic Forums, G-20 Summits, Subnational Governments Summits (as the United Cities and Local Governments events), Olympic games (Roche 2000)ⁱⁱ or colonial and universal expositions (Baptandier & Houdart 2015) as well as specialized workshops and other meetings. These investigations do take part into a broader discussion on « mega-events » as producers of a « world culture ». They document the emergence of common norms on how confrontation and collaboration have to be managed between countries. The study of these mega-events illustrates how each of them plays the role of global attractor (ambitious actors worldwide can’t resist the imperative to travel to “the place to be”); and how a strong snowball effect is at play (i.e. world social forum in

mirror of Davos world Economic forum, or emergent worldwide sport communities trying to organize their own world contests).

The second argument for such a larger frame refers to the similarities of all these « mega-events » in terms of logistic organization. It was striking to discover in 2012 that the same Brazilian team was in charge of the organization of the Rio+20 conference on environment and development, and of the Olympic games, both to be held in Rio de Janeiro. Here, the scale is not only performative (declaring global perspective as « biggest ») or politically defined (with high-level States representatives). The UN general secretary Ban Ki-moon declared in 2012 regarding the Rio +20 conference that it was going to be « the biggest event ever organized by the UN ⁱⁱⁱ ». The scale points out the number of direct participants, the scale of the world « public » of the event through media coverage, the number of sectors and nations represented, and is defined by the scale of infrastructure, funding, planification needed.

Of course, this perspective also raises some knotty interrogations: is the wide array of UN mega-conferences still important in world politics (as Richard Stren brings to the debate about urban policies in his Chapter 10), or a thing of the past (retrospectively seen as a golden-age of the UN) ? Legitimacy of these conferences has always been far from unquestioned, and some question the usefulness of the « UN circus », as this political dramaturgy is sometimes called. Are these critics becoming today sufficiently widespread to stop the trend towards always more conferences and more participants? Is this world elite culture (see chapter 15 by Taube, Liu Tao & Giulia C. Romano in this Handbook) - and their policy preferences – currently losing his legitimacy and becoming subject to growing refusal from peoples? These are important questions for diffusion scholars to be tackled in the next few years, but they are beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, the current geopolitical mood does not until yet affect the central place taken by mega-events in world politics, and these mega-conferences remain a promising - yet under-investigated - spot for research.

One place – one moment: the need for methodological innovation

In an early analysis of the Rio 92 conference, considered as a major step for the setting of a global political arena, Little (1995) presents a pioneering interpretation of what are the promises and pitfalls for social scientists choosing UN Conferences as their object of study.

The diagnosis, a quarter century before

- « *The ethnographic delimiting of a mega-event is also problematic due to its complexity and fragmentary nature. (...) The Rio Conference appears as a discrete event because it united diverse actors in a **specific time and place** within the confines of a pre-established agenda. In Rio, the global became local, and hence 'approachable' in traditional ethnographic terms. Yet the **fragmentation** produced by so many actors doing so many things all at once **calls into question the very unity of the event**. Can so many different projects, interests and*

*interactions be encased in the notion of one event? Can this multiple, fragmented conjuncture of people be represented in a coherent way without violating its **complexity**? These questions lead to an even deeper one concerning the possibility of attaining a minimally **'holistic' point of view** ». (Little 1995, p.281)*

At first sight, UN conferences should be interpreted as the perfect unit in line with « classic ethnography »: a well-defined unit of time, space and action. For instance, we identified for the COP21 on climate change in 2015 a space - Le Bourget (a convention center in the north of Paris), and a period - the two-week period in December of the conference. It seems as if all actors will congregate and if relations will be observable like in a laboratory. But, as quoted above by Little, apparent simplicity hides a high level of complexity for the social scientists. Any scholar arriving in such mega-event without previous experience has shared the same impression: disorientation and perplexity.

First of all, conferences have only temporary localization: they are rather a social arena. « *Like a travelling circus, the climate COP has to be rebuilt from scratch as it moves from one venue to the next.* » (Aykut, Foyer & Morena 2017, p.2), that means that this place is just one in a long chain of conferences in other places. This arena has been built by shared language, norms and understandings (i.e. a kind of global climate culture) and this socialization process cannot be ignored by the observer. Then, conferences are always like the end of a long negotiation cycle that is then largely black-boxed but is actually a main determinant of final outputs and conserves some traces within the interactions during the conference.

Additionally, mega-events are so big, such a fuzzy object, that they represent therefore a methodological challenge. The first step is to accept that “holistic point of view” is not given. The collaborative work begins with a task for each scholar: to *'find the field'* (Markowitz 2001) or perhaps more adequately *to build his field* (Vered 2000, Hardy & Steve Maguire 2010).

Little highlights the complexity and fragmentation of what is supposed to be only a high-level diplomatic negotiation. This is far from the reality, as they bring tens of thousands of people together, scattered in various hundreds of meetings all over the city, including official negotiations, working groups, chair groups, side events, media sessions, demonstrations, poster sessions, and public information expos. « *From large public gatherings to invitation-only and fairly low-key corporate events, Paris was, to borrow the name of a media hub created for the conference, the “place to be” for anyone interested – even marginally – in the climate issue.* » (Aykut, Foyer & Morena 2017, p.1)

One must draw a cartography of the whole archipelago of meetings and describe the process of issue « structuration » at stake. I have demonstrated, in another paper (Dumoulin Kervran 2015), that these mega-conferences are a complex mix of different “formats of meetings”. Each format must be described as a “norm”, an international stabilized and legitimized form of social interaction in this kind of global stage. Each format of meeting is a piece of this world political culture. Moreover, the challenge is to go beyond what is directly observable and to understand how (and by whom) are connected meetings, spaces, and sectorial policy coalitions.

Finally, direct observation “on the spot” is the opportunity to document not just

the formal interactions (written in meeting minutes or final documents), but more informal aspects that actors have interest to hush up. Observing negotiation “in the making” gives unprecedented insight on the practical ways consensus is produced and then black-boxed. This gives researchers a more critical position when facing the discourse of “entrepreneur” telling their success story « ... *by revealing the scientific and political arguments that were invoked during negotiations but are masked in the final language.* » (Campbell Hagerman & Gray *et al.* 2014, 42).

A place for the observation of policy diffusion

Collaborative Event Ethnography has not always been used to understand specifically policy diffusion, but it perfectly fulfills this goal. This approach will particularly be useful for scholars interested in cognitive and symbolic aspect of policy-diffusion, but also in the link between global governance mechanisms and transnational policy coalition.

First of all, “being there” –which constitutes the basis of ethnographic engagement – gives an unique opportunity to observe the very performance of the diffusion process in all his complexity and details. As Büsher writes:

*« the emphasis is on **who** is able to do what type of **translation** between what type of knowledges, variables, metrics, or norms; and **who** performs or “enacts” what type of role or behavior. This, in turn, leads to interesting and important research findings that stress “the importance of understanding meetings as social devices subject to **orchestration through which institutional and organizational ends can be achieved, legitimized, and contested** » (Campbell, Corson, *et al.* 2014, p. 7). »*

We follow here the work of Diane Stone, showing how diffusion takes place with limited coercion, when realized through this kind of transnational networks (Stone 2004). But ethnography is a good position to also document excluding and disciplining practices, as these conferences could be regarded as global mechanisms for « orchestrating consent » (think for instance on the process to redact a document like the Millennium Development Goals for 2015 and then the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030). That helps us to consider these mega-events as a hub for diffusion of policy models and instruments, resulting from strategies of organizers and dominants actors, able to build the event’s agenda; and also from strategies of a multitude of individuals (as policy ambassadors, Porto de Oliveira, 2019) and of collective agents as instruments constituencies (see Chapter 12 signed by Howlett and Saguin in this Handbook) ; all of them, trying to push forward their own issue through formal as well as informal means. In such a “natural habitat” of transnational public policymaking, “policy entrepreneurs” and their “policy coalitions” could be observed in action.

This is not to say that all diffusion processes pass through the prism of these mega-conferences, but they are anyway a place where the most transnational policy coalition could be detected. Pal & Ireland argue in their analysis of the OECD and the diffusion of New Public Management policies that such « *policies aimed at the reform of state-level administrations, but network’s*

composition and policy agendas are global in scope » (Pal & Ireland 2009). Sometimes, it is the opportunity to observe the first step of a policy enterprise, when a group approaches the UN to gain the first funding, establish preliminary contacts, or even just receive some symbolic gratifications to be there. Other times, we observe some much more advanced initiative when diffusion process is accepted by a majority of States, a step of norm diffusion called by K. Sikkink (2011) the « tipping point ».

After the presentation of the intellectual origin of CEE and of the challenges of the methodology itself in the next parts, we will come back to how it could best contribute to policy diffusion studies, mainly documenting the performance of global political order as structure for policy diffusion, and analyzing mechanisms of upstream translation process.

- II – The foundations of Collaborative event ethnography (CEE).

It's time to expose the origins of this approach: its roots are in the studies of global governance, diffusion studies and global ethnography; and the main research project that has experimented it.

A short genealogy of CEE: main bibliographic fields of inspiration

In this part, I offer a short overview of the main roots of the CEE approach in the political sociology and anthropology of global agency. This is no exhaustive review of literature, but some cues to pinpoint how policy diffusion studies, global studies and new orientation in ethnography had fruitful encounters in the last two decades.

« **Collaborative ethnography** ». First of all, one may insist on the collective way of doing investigation, which on one hand has been historically part of the tradition in sociology but has been largely forsaken today, and on the other hand is in contradiction with the dominant individualism in ethnographic methodologies (Clifford 1997). Today, we are witnessing a blooming comeback - yet still minority - of teams looking for collaborative work in social science projects, especially when using ethnographic perspective to “studying-up” (Nader 1972) the elite worlds and the fragmented sites of global governance^{iv}. This produced some reference books in France (Abélès 2011, Siméant *et al.* 2015, Aykut Foyer Morena, 2017, Laferté *et al.* 2018), as in the US with the work of Burrawoy *et al.* (2000), Clifford^v, or Rabinov^{vi}. This, of course, leads to some innovation in how to share data and build common object, in a tradition where the person of the ethnographer is the main research tool. We will see in the next section how collaborative among researchers is this collective research^{vii}, and what is the relation between the scale of the event and the size of the investigation team. This trend toward collective projects must be highlighted if we are willing to deal with large diffusion - or circulation - processes, asking for internationally multi-sited observation and fine-grained knowledge on diverse groups and issues.

Ethnography of (global) policy process. No doubt that one of the main innovative input for the study of policy process, has been the strong

appropriation during the 2000's of ethnographic approaches in political science in various countries (See the specific program of "transnational political ethnography" developed by Porto de Oliveira 2017, and the synthesis provided in Schatz 2009, Dubois 2009, Pacheco-Vega or Cappellaro). International Relations scholars had their own discussion on the right use of ethnography, beyond considering it more than just as a method for data collection or as a writing style (Vrasti 2008). Meanwhile, anthropologists made major contributions analyzing with an unprecedented subtlety transnational network (Riles 2000), transfer and translation (Shore & Wright 2011), or the emergence of a global "culture of meeting" (Van Vree 1999).

Ethnography of international organization. A blooming field is dedicated to the study of the social worlds of IGO (Intergovernmental Organization) and of Cooperation & development programs through organizational ethnography. Interesting enough, this kind of organization sociology has experimented a progressive colonization by anthropologists using ethnography. They indeed show how the study of the daily life of these "monster organizations" gives us understanding of how a dense socializing process of elites around issues and instruments (common languages, references, norms etc.) and a strong depoliticized hegemony, can coexist with a weak capacity to govern societies all over the world (ie. Mosse 2005, Goldman 2005; Müller 2013, Riles 2000).

Transnationalization of collective action. Another inspiring field of organization is the one of internationalization of collective action, especially because a large array of research has been connected the study of experts from the professional worlds of NGO's, IGO's and even from the States (i.e. since Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Regarding diffusion, these publications offer a detailed understanding of how "repertoires of action" are circulating at a global scale (since Chabot & Willemduyvendak), how the internal structure of transnational networks (socialization and inequality) influence their political outcome (Rodrigues Moog 2004, Merry 2006, for alteractivism (Pleyers 2010), or on North-south inequality facing a "sociology of the plane ticket", (Siméant et al 2011), and how transnational policy coalitions became a key mechanism of the diffusion of policy instruments and models (i.e for south-south policy network, see Milhorance 2018), including through mega-conferences (i.e. see Porto de Oliveira 2017, Pleyers 2010). Secondary, the study of international mobilizations in context of global meeting has opened a space for a new wave of methodological experimentation, especially through a mix of quantitative (i.e. questionnaire survey, see the use of INSURA methodology Individual Survey in Rallies, in Fillieule & Blanchard 2010, J. Siméant et al. 20015, Goldman 2005) and qualitative (manly ethnographic, i.e. Juris & Kashnabish 2013) approaches.

A particular thriving field: International environmental politics. The last important inspiration stems from what has been called « Global Environmental Governance (GEG) », an especially rich component of global studies developed mainly by IR-political, geographers and sociology scholars in dialogue with some experimental sciences colleagues. This numerous group has published a rich analytic description of the multi-scalar and multi-actors composition of this fast growing field, considered for forty years as a laboratory

for global governance. Having been strongly encouraged by big international conferences organized by the UN, UICN, UNESCO (etc.), the field has already produced a rich panel of studies using different methods: survey and sampling techniques, longitudinal research, archival research, combinations of multiple methods, multi-sited ethnographies... and last but not least, Collaborative Event Ethnography. Policy diffusion has been a constant preoccupation, since the national implementation of international convention, and until the transnational circulation of policy model (Peck & Theodore 2012), or policy instruments (Hrabanski 2015).

CEE research projects: North-American inspiration and French experimentation

If we come to speak more precisely of “Collaborative Event Ethnography”, we must pay a tribute to the first team who experimented it and crafted the term. In a second moment I will briefly present our own experiences, both on environmental negotiations. The presentation of both team research projects are not to be ignored, in order to contextualize the methodological descriptions that will be presented further.

The funders of this approach have progressively built a team of committed North-American anthropologists and critical geographers (with influence of STS, political ecology either). They are dedicated to the study of biodiversity conservation policies implemented in different regions of the world, and with interest in understanding them in the frame of global policy making. Having taken as a serious object of study the big conservation conferences, their collaboration labor lead them to progressively forge and formalize this methodological ad-hoc proposition. The team was built through four research projects, each one dedicated to the observation of one of these mega-events^{viii} (for event in 2008: Brosius & Campbell 2010, MacDonald 2010; in 2010, see Campbell Corson & Gray MacDonald Brosius. 2014, in 2012, and for 2014 and an updated vision on their program and findings: Corson Campbell Wilshusen Gray 2019). The team had a core and a changing second circle, with 38 researchers in total (max 20 per event and including students), only 15 participated in more than one CEE, 28 publications (from 1 to 9 authors) and more than 8 theses/dissertations, they have been able to document how CEE is much more productive for ideas than just for “more eyes” (Noella Gray, Paris, in Paris, 06/07/15)^{ix}.

The second experience in 2010 allowed team leaders to think about formalization of a method and they developed a matrix for division of labor and conceptual integration which has been refined since then. This collective research trajectory documented by high level publication had positioned them as a reference for all scholars who want to study transnational mega-events with elaborate and reflexive approaches. Their main focus has been to describe the push for market-friendly conservation tools and progressive alignment of the global conservation community on this kind of approach. Their methodology allowed them to show how mega-events are an important place to trace the diffusion of a new master frame for the « economization » of conservation.

Our own experience takes place later but is similar to the former and with direct connection^x, in the sense that this was the gathering of researchers with a common interest for environmental issues and from different backgrounds: sociology, anthropology, political science IR, geography, economy. They converged first in 2012 for the following of a typical mega-event : the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development or “Earth-Summit”, and then improved their matrix of collaboration for the study of a second mega-event in December 2015, the COP 21, the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Both were mega-events of exceptional magnitude by the range of expectations raised and the number of participants (near 200 States and a multitude of other actors), but the COP 21 had an even bigger importance because the conference was expected as the “last chance” to save multilateral environmental negotiations after the “failure” of Copenhagen COP 15 conference in 2009. The Rio + 20 research project (Foyer 2015) gathered 16 researchers (Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology, Geography) for 4 to 20 days (but actually 2 years including preparation and writing process!). The COP 21 mobilized, with better upstream organization and in-site collaboration, a reshaped team of 20 researchers during 3 weeks (actually near to 3 years of extensive work).

Regarding diffusion, the first experience aims at a better understanding of this kind of global governance performance but focuses on the way the event has been used to launch a new “green economy” agenda in different sectors. The second one tries to observe the restructuration of the global policy agenda: how a lot of issue have been “climatized” to find a place within the climate change regime, and how climate debates have been framed in order to be considered as THE arena where a broad range of issues (development, biodiversity, agriculture, transfer of technology, etc.) have to be tackled.

I will now describe and evaluate the protocols used by these different teams. The design of collaborative ethnography sheds light on the socializing dimension of these global summits for a very large array of agents.

- III - *Main components to our CEE methodology: a (reflexive) evaluation*

In this section, I will present briefly the different components of the CEE methodology in order to give the readers a better understanding of what it is really about and help them in the design of their own methodological protocol. Given that CEE has a rather weak formalization and is still under development, I will mainly analyze the research practices we had in the CLIMAOP project and borrow when convenient some insights from other projects^{xi}.

Upstream of the summit: inescapable preliminary stages

In a collaborative project, the first and essential step is of course the constitution of the team! The previous experiences of CEE have been built mainly on previous research collaboration and on availability at the moment of the event, on common interest in environmental policy making and on possible

experience of studying UN institutions and negotiation processes. Secondly, we approached some new members for their previous experience in specific issues, with the idea to have expertise on the array of issues to be tackled during the event. It is worth noting that the projects are interdisciplinary in essence and are then less sophisticated than mono-disciplinary ones: disciplinary backgrounds are diverse, which explain that each research process is torn between the common protocol and specific competences of each social scientists. We were mainly a team of French researchers completed by some Europeans and that facilitated some intellectual convergence, but other projects insist on the importance of building transnational team for more plurality in interpretations. They suggest particularly to add a group of researchers or students from the host country in order to vary the languages of interaction and to be able to understand local challenges of the event (Siméant & al. 2015).

UN conferences are usually divided in 4 generic social spaces: international negotiation arena – business – civil society – media, in addition to a multiplicity of issue and selectivity fragmentation. The scholar team has to divide in sub-teams in order to be able to have prior research background in the sector, to follow what happens when studying actors inside and outside the negotiating halls, and to understand the political process observed.

Monthly project meetings, webinars and regular research seminars played an important team-building role for this heterogeneous gathering of researchers (status, age, discipline, issue expertise). They were also fundamental for the production of a common framework which could guide the elaboration of methodological materials.

The second essential step is funding. Even if this kind of project is more demanding in time and commitment than in money, it must not be ignored that, to be implemented efficiently, CEE needs to be planned and specific collective funding is necessary. Traveling abroad, living in a foreign capital and organizing research meetings for sound collaboration are not terribly expensive. Access to funding, however, may become a source of discord or a stimulation for a fruitful collaboration, according to how it is managed throughout the collaboration process.

Achieving accreditation to the conference proved to be a thorny issue. This is not mandatory to have access to the more official space of negotiation (often called “the blue zone”), but it turns out to be difficult to understand some important processes without direct access to these “high-level negotiation” arenas, with their string of informal meetings and side-events. Moreover, it gives to each researcher more legitimacy in front of participants of the conference (as well in their relationship with peer reviewers!). To obtain a personal accreditation is then a fundamental dimension of access to the fieldwork, and a kind of ‘obstacles race’ for social scientists who do not have intimate access to national delegations, NGO’s (in the sectors defined as “major groups” by the UN) or to media spheres. The social capital of each researcher and their open sharing proved to be a crucial point here. We, for instance, obtained accreditation not from the academic world or the French delegation, but from national delegations of southern countries, NGOs or via ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation)! Accreditation is an endless

quest for access and legitimacy in the sense that there is a wide colour gradation of badges that correspond to different access rights. Nevertheless, we were surprised to discover how the accreditation can give unexpected access to negotiation when using it with tact and sense of opportunity.

To understand the “mega-event”, it is paramount to know the history of global negotiation and the genealogy of global policy making and institutions in this specific sector, but also to scrutinize the furious preparation that seizes the actors just when the conference appears on the agenda. Each sector tries to elaborate - and then to position - its “solutions” and framing, and to shape the global agenda. Through this acceleration of previous events, researchers witnessed a cumulative energy that gradually produced a level of expectations worthy of a “mega-event”. In the case of COP21 in December, some researcher had to follow – among others smaller meetings - the Business and Climate Summit in April, the Intermediary negotiations in June (in Bonn), Scientific conference « Our Common Future Under Climate Change » in July (UNESCO), or Indigenous Peoples conference on climate change in November (in Paris)... Organizers themselves (i.e. COP secretariat) tried to *orchestrate* this fragmented process upstream and to “enroll” a maximum of « participant » categories.

In order to be able to cross observations and gain multi-positioned understanding of the circulating trends during the summit, the constitution of a shared « database » is then a priority (a finely organized cloud is a baseline). Before the event, we identified the necessity to elaborate a cumulative *who's who*, presenting the main figures of negotiators, experts, and leaders of civil society, and to build a common chronology and bibliography as well as a library of papers on UNFCCC and global governance. Then, we created a web site for external visibility and above all, we set up an emergency communication system used for logistical information during the event (constant program change, cancelation, informal meeting, etc.) which was very useful because just-in-time reactivity is in that case a key for a productive fieldwork.

During the event, this shared digital space experienced a new growth step, with the integration of the ethnographic material collected by each researcher. This was done through the solemn obligation to fill out a collaboratively drawn up « event form », that allowed to gain direct description of a meeting that you could not attend and, more important, to be able to compare this complex cluster of events (N= 180 completed with quantitative and qualitative data like “format” of the meeting and of “speech acts”, number and status of participants, etc.).

Additionally, we completed these standardized forms with the corresponding photos and audio files, had a pictures bank with *hashtag* and of course collected a wide array of internal documents and business cards.

The ‘standing seminar’ effect

The basic idea here is that collaborative event ethnography is more eyes AND more ideas (Büscher 2014, Mazie & Woods 2003). We were struck by the productivity of a kind of “permanent seminar” that we set up during the full duration of the conference: a lot of new hypotheses emerged from this kind of long and intense brainstorming on the spot. In order to facilitate the logistics of

our meetings, we decided to use part of the research project funding to rent a flat next to the conference places. This original initiative was paramount to intensifying exchanges and helped us to follow the unusual speed of the conference's process. It allowed daily breakfasts and dinners which were key for gaining in informality, trust and finally fruitfulness in our discussions.

This intense deliberation and debriefing produced a nuanced collective understanding of the mega-event. *"As we challenge each other's observations and interpretations, we renegotiate our own understandings"* (Campbell, Corson et al. 2014, p. 12). This was not just a way to reduce the bias of fragmentation that plagued the personal vision of the conference by each researcher, but also to transform our gaze and research questions embedded in a specific disciplinary background. This daily collective reporting led to the co-production of new narratives and hypothesis that could inform the observation of the next events the same day. The deliberation and the logistic organization ran hand in hand, because task division for each day of the conference and the sharing of logistical/schedule issues were crucial. Each member's skills benefit the team and save precious time of each researcher. Some had long experience and understanding of UN events, and each one could share his social capital in order to gain access to a maximum of - sometimes exclusive - meetings and interviews or share his language skills or his technical knowledge about the specific issue negotiated.

One of the unusual methodological principle was the shared observation work (generally duo) that contrasts with the individualist practice of traditional ethnography. Here, crisscrossing observations of a meeting and discussions during the very process of observation itself, on the spot, had unexpected added value.

Last but not least, collaborative writing constitutes another building block of the collaborative process. We share with similar researcher experiences (J. Siméant & al. 2015, Campbell & al. 2014) the findings that the final step is as important as difficult, because the mobilization of the team is very knotty after the hot moment of the conference, when each researcher tend to fall back in his own research path. Intensive writing seminars in the countryside proved to be very productive for the re-elaboration of our common framework and fueled the enthusiastic spirit of the team. As most chapters were written by a pair but discussed by the whole team, we reproduced this two-level collaborative process initiated during the observation moment. Of course, this phase of collaboration was extended by a monthly seminar – webinars, complementary fieldworks, writing of "side papers" and first presentations of our results in academic arenas.

Weaknesses and pitfalls of CEE (Collaborative Event Ethnography)

How to shape the best CEE protocol for your own research and avoid bugs? Most advices and warnings had been given above, but let us add some more general statements.

Perhaps the more important is to keep in mind that CEE is not limited to observation or ethnography during the conference. I would even say that such reduction in the research process would in most cases leave only a superficial and descriptive analysis, because the issues at stake have such a technical and social densities that its turns tricky to « separate signal from noise ». All

similar projects have indeed used mixed research strategies, adding to pure observation other ways to collect data.

Most projects rely on previous research projects on specific issues or organizations (a bureaucracy and/or transnational network). A vast array of strategies is used to strengthen the work of contextualizing and problematizing data collected during the observation process. Members of the team have most of the time a fine-grained understanding of a specific “social world” – its historicity and its internal structure of conflict/collaboration relations – among all that aggregate during this kind of mega-event. That means that CEE is often complemented by “multi-sited ethnography” to be fulfilled before or after the conference in order to follow the meeting dynamics of a specific transnational network. Going beyond the space-time unit of the conference is necessary to capture the reconfiguration of the field, its very impact. Interviews and meeting files that allow to build comparisons and eventually lead to quantitative data, are very commonly used. Some projects cross observation methodology with massive corpus constitution and quantitative processing: external press corpus, internal bulletin like « Earth Negotiations Bulletin », or large survey by questionnaire (J. Siméant & al 2015).

CEE must not be considered as only a logistical/quantitative challenge of gathering a regiment of researchers able to face “the scale” of mega-events. CEE’s added value is better understood in terms of building a stronger capacity to share diverse skills, knowledge, questions and conceptual frameworks. The quality of shared observation and of deliberation is the key. As collaboration is time-consuming at each step the main resources to raise are then the time and commitment that each scholar accepts to give to the project (see also Gray et al. 2019). There will always be a tension between individual and collective research interest, regarding property on data collected, specific hypothesis *versus* common framework, not to mention publishing strategies. Long term commitment is not easy to reach, beyond the excitement of being part of an “*historic* high-level conference”, as two years is a minimum for this kind of project (one for preparation, one other for processing and writing). That means that this is risky to give important roles in the project to students and other scholars with very weak positions.

Logistical problems are to be tackled very seriously. Not only because the follow-up of international processes requires significant funding, but also because preparation, logistic organization and fine division of work are important determinants of the quality of final research output. At the end of the day, one must accept that it is impossible to embrace « the whole thing ». Mega-event are such “monsters” that there will always still be some blind spots left (i.e. places, categories of actors, issues, translation processes...) and collective reflexive analysis on them will contribute therefore to the quality of the final analysis.

- IV - Mega-events: which kind of diffusion?

Mega-events are strategic hubs to be studied by diffusion scholars because they give insider gaze to global governance in the making, offer visibility to the manufacturing of transnational social configurations, inform us on « the productivity » of these events. Mega-events, and UN conferences specifically,

are analyzed here as places where, upstream, the structural conditions of policy transfer are negotiated and legitimized.

Observing the performance of political order, as infrastructure for diffusion

The first diffusion process that we are able to observe is re-enactment, one conference after the other, of this idea that global governance is necessary and is superior to other scales of governance because it is supposed to encompass them. This faith in the importance of global solutions is firstly performed by the existence of this « global community » who gathers during this succession of meetings. These are places for the creation and reproduction of a « world class » of legitimate brokers, which turn main actors of transnational policy transfer economy. During the COP for instance, we identified a small world of sort of 'COP-junkies', a social world of global climate change experts. We labeled them this way because they share strong professional *illusio* (Bourdieu 1997) on the importance of the global negotiation process and because they made their own career through the participation in the successive COP. They made COP and COP made them.

Then, mega-events (for us climate COP) are stages where scholars can observe with exceptional proximity, in formal as well as in informal encounters, how hierarchies between actors, global leadership, are produced, contested and legitimized. Powerful actors and outsiders are all very conscious of this secondary dimension of the event: they know that the success of ideas will depend of how they are marketed but moreover of how their advocates are presented in the official agenda. Each sub-event is more or less exclusive, more or less publicized, and in the program, speakers receive more or less dignity. Legitimacy to speak, accumulated during the global conferences, will be used by leaders outside the realm, afterwards, to gain audience for their ideas.

Each negotiation session, each side-event in the blue zone (access with accreditation) or each civil-society event, is an opportunity to observe how disciplines work at this global scale. Languages and translation practices, status of speakers and allocation of speaking time, as well as informal networking and access to information, are some very practical details where the politics of inclusion/exclusion are enacted during the conference (see chapter 4 in this book about translation and translators by Hassenteufel for an example of how this kind of mechanisms are producing « a clear bias toward OECD expertise »). A lot of actors are excluded from some meetings through the accreditation process (depending of the colors of their badge) or through selective access to information.

Diffusion is largely orchestrated, backstage, when choosing keynote speakers, when selecting a prestigious panel to launch a new initiative or release an important report. A famous paper analyzes for example how the launching of a report on « The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) » in 2008 during a COP of Biodiversity was actually the beginning of a new eponym high-level institutional process, boosted by a large political coalition (MacDonald, & Corson. 2012). Different coalitions and translations are clearly identifiable, as

is the rapid step up of an anti-green economy coalition during the conference. That means that UN conferences are places to observe how global agenda is set up and how is performed the celebration of some ideas, framing (Ilcan & Phillips 2003), models and tools, becoming this way better candidates for international policy transfer.

« *It also demands attention to the ways in which bureaucratic norms shape who can speak and how, as well as the ways in which multiple political, social, and cultural phenomena converge, conditioning which ideas, narratives, and practices subsequently become institutionalized.*

» Corson et al. 2014, p.21

Being in a place where we can observe interactions between States, multilateral organizations, private organizations, transnational professional or political networks (etc.), conferences are pictures revealing to some extent the ongoing global political process. Their program and material organization, the format of meetings and the draft proposed, shaped the political output of the summit, and are embodiment and actualization of this dominant order. However, UN conferences are also moments where new coalitions coagulate, where observers may witness these strategies for challenging existing positions and dominant ideas, strategies for enrolling new allies and building coalitions. These conferences are space-time where policy entrepreneurs invest a lot of resources for « orchestrating consent » (Flechter 2014). They are good spots to understand who are the dominant players (and emerging outsiders) in best position to build global “policy coalition” and diffuse their ideas in the following years.

Analyzing translation in the making

What is actually *circulating* in this kind of conferences? Very different elements that build policy programs are unveiled and appropriated: from the more micro level (buzz-worlds, names, numbers, schemas or pictures) to the larger ones (master frame for public action, new global principles, etc.). Mega-events can be considered as international fairs for launching new ideas and instruments - or vigorously preserving the *status quo*! An immense array of actors comes from all over the world thrown in the fray for showcasing their solutions, from the more technical and specialized ones to the more political and universal ones. The hope of universal diffusion can be smelled everywhere in the air, but the practices observed are more stalled negotiations or unexpected translations proliferation.

Therefore, UN conferences must be seen as a valuable observatory on initial steps of the transnational diffusion/translation process^{xii}. The understanding of the structure of positions mentioned above gives one strong lines of interpretation of how large diffusion can succeed and which kind of translation supported by this policy coalition, or that one, is in a better position to impose its version. Of course, little data would be collected here on how each country will implement and translate new international conventions, but UN conferences are the moment of the first adaptation and appropriation dynamics.

Firstly, because it takes place at the inter-governmental level, norm entrepreneurs have to negotiate hard in order have their norms adopted in the

final text of a convention. Various options of translation are explicitly defended and opposed by coalitions of States spokespersons. Here, discussion on language translation and conflict on one small word could reveal a deep opposition on the master policy frame to be implemented (i.e. for a climate/agriculture discussion on the weight of one world, see B. Muller & Loiseau 2015). Secondly, more decentralized processes of translation flourish in the archipelago of meetings that constitutes a mega-event. Political representatives, cosmopolitan activists, international experts or representatives of businesses are, during the whole duration of the conference, defending their own agenda, often transformed in norm entrepreneurs. Each meeting of the archipelago could be considered as an event pushing for one of the options currently being negotiated (i.e. in favor of the limitation of temperatures increase at 1.5 degree C.), or for a policy option that translates a broader political frame (i.e. promotion of lower-carbon energetic mix), or for a specific technological tool that is another sharper translation of the same principles (i.e. new solar technology), or even defending an alternative radical interpretation of the master frame (i.e. “Keep oil in the soil” meeting).

There is another complex diffusion process that is only beginning to be studied in detail by social sciences, focusing on the marketing of the conference itself (see Morena 2016). This kind of analysis shows how the Paris conference for climate (COP 21, 2015) has been produced since various years as to be “THE momentum” for saving climate negotiations. This analysis succeeds in exploring how a large coalition of philanthropic foundations and global NGO worked hard to enroll an ever larger policy coalition, coagulated by convergent vocabulary and narratives (the “Paris spirit”), and above all by a common expectative and conviction that this conference will be the last political opportunity to do something for climate. This kind of diffusion process suggests that diffusion scholars will have a great task in the years to come analyzing this kind of fickle political work, taking place only on a transnational scale.

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| Two different diffusion initiatives in Global Environmental Conferences |
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| <p>❖ Diffusion of market-based approaches in conservation has been analyzed by various scholars of the US team of CEE present in part 2. Based on the ethnography of World Conservation Congress (WCC) and COP10 of CDB in 2010 (McDonald 2010, McDonald & Corson 2012), they describe in detail the expansion of « market environmentalism » and the concept of « natural capital ». The diffusion is described as stemming from the « performativity » of the conferences, where powerful actors speak in favor of what they called « paradigm shift » or « the most important change in conservation », before presenting it as « common sense », affirming that this is already consensus. These authority speak in favor of direct market-based mechanisms for conservation, use the argument of scaling-up conservation through more « global » instruments and regulation (i.e. with climate change linkage). This dominant policy-coalition is described as « setting the stage » for this new approach, orchestrating a kind of spectacle for the audience of the conferences, delaying or disciplining dissenting voices.</p> |
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Analyzing this TEEB initiative in favor of market-based instruments : « *The WCC, CBD, and Rio+20 were all critical sites for TEEB's institutionalization; they offered platforms for keynote speeches and press briefings, incorporated its tenets into policy documents and project financing, and brought together and aligned influential actors from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors.* » (...) with such a collective pression that « *“side event titles changed, corridor conversations shifted, and high-level politicians struggled to reformulate their speeches in the language of ecosystem services and more specifically TEEB.”* (...). And they observed diffusion throughout the Rio+20 conference, before that « *Team members observed how it spread to other nodes in the “distended network” of GEG, reshaping conservation discourse in sites distant from the CBD.* » (Corson, Campbell MacDonald 2014, 31). « *Through multiple studies across events, team members traced how global meetings help to create the conditions for the emergence of markets for ecosystem services, and in doing so, reconfigure the field of global conservation governance.* » (ibid, p.32)

❖ ***Climatization?*** As seen above, diffusion can be identified as an “alignment” process, when actors of different status or from different sectors position themselves behind the banner of a common policy framing. In the case of the *climatizing* process studied in our book (Aykut, Foyer, Morena, 2017), the shaping of a common language, common principles, common agenda has been a two-way process. New actors entering the climate arena have to produce what has been called by social movement analysts a “frame bridging” between two existing frames: they translate some logics and practices of the climate regime in their construction of their own claims. For instance, rural development micro-projects are requalified as strategies of adaptation. The diffusion of the global change master-frame towards other sectors of international cooperation represents a massive translation process, but selective too, as some issues are excluded (i.e. aviation sector). The other way around, climate regime has been also transformed by its absorption of new issues like adaptation, poverty, avoiding deforestation or traditional knowledge. The book documents these various cases of issues “climatization” (including development, energy, security or migration) that differ by their forms, strategic struggle or their intensity, as some processes are incomplete or partial, or even appear easily reversible.

This does not mean that it is easy to evaluate how this socialization moment will impact the power of action of each member “back home”, as some policy transfer scholars ask me. One thing is to demonstrate the constitution and way of behavior of these worlds of transnational governance mainly organized by issue network, another is to study how the experts observed during the conference are able to influence the bureaucracies and members of other sectors at the national and local level. To answer rightly the question, we would need actually another research program, but the CEE approach sheds light on a partly contradictory phenomenon. On one hand, we witness the social life of small worlds organized around specific issues and they seem sometimes to

constitute a sort of happy few “global club” with an autonomous activity, able to reproduce itself, far from the rest of the population. On the other, we observe a fast-growing trend of internationalization in every policy issue and level of administration: beyond the diplomatic negotiation, more and more issue networks emerge to foster exchange of ideas and global coordination. Finally, the impact that these cosmopolite brokers can have “back home” is difficult to assess because national arenas (supposed “home”) are more transnationalized and these brokers are in a constant circulation.

Conclusion

This approach could be very useful for scholars interested in mechanisms of transnational policy diffusion, especially for the ones choosing to focus on meetings (without restriction to mega-events described here), and who are interested in the sociology of translators, their strategies in context, and the strategic policy learning process (Hassenteufel, chapter 4, this book).

Lastly I propose two final remarks pointing out reflexivity on CEE approach, albeit in different ways.

Collaborative event ethnography is not a toolbox but an approach shaped by “iterative refinement” (Corson, 2019). It is an attempt to bridge micro and macro politics, as well as sociology of global governance and diffusion studies. It should be considered as a sort of ethnography of how « structure » is performed and shape the way diffusion is happening. Conversely, these diffusion practices are reshaping the way « structure » is (re)produced or contested.

As demonstrated, it must be highlighted that ethnography of event itself is a very fruitful method but is hardly ever sufficient to build a strong interpretation. Contextualization and generalization stemming from the material collected that way require other methodologies (interviews, literature reviews, quantitative surveys, etc.) and the exploration of other time-space units (for instance various mega-events). Furthermore, scholars having experimented this approach also count on their knowledge of some studies of the national and local arena. It is the whereabouts inside and outside the arena of mega-event that help them building robust interpretations, not just on negotiation, but on more structural processes (see also Corson et al. 2014).

Secondly, the quality of the collaborative ethnography results stems from the quality of deliberation for in-depth discussion of draft papers and reworking of the common conceptual framework. In our team, we considered that the essential ingredient for successful collaboration is conviviality. « *This ingredient does not appear in methodological guides nor obey scientific rules. While one cannot decree conviviality, it does not suddenly appear either; it must be nurtured.* » (Aykut et al. 2017, 14). Moreover, we pondered that giving time for collaborative work and conviviality was a kind of resistance within our own professional field, in a time of managerialization of scientific research and scholarly life : « *Strong collaborative approaches to fieldwork, like CEE, can cultivate slow scholarship and innovative knowledge production* » (Gray et al. 2019, see also Siméant, 2011, 20). Politics also stand in our way of working and producing knowledge.

ⁱ This paper would not have been possible without the intense discussion where all members of the team contributed, and I am grateful to all of them.

ⁱⁱ See among numerous publications, Roche (2000), for his fruitful reflection on world diffusion of a new public culture : « ... as mega-events ('large scale cultural [including commercial and sporting] events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance' » (p. 1), « ... analysis of 'the biggest and probably the most important cultural international non-governmental organisation (...) outside of world religions and scientific associations' » (p. 196).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Le Monde*, June 20th 2012 page Planète, dans Rio+20, and see official website.

^{iv} If political science's first contributions to the study of global politics were through macro-analysis on « regimes » and « Governance without government », new inputs from sociologists and anthropologists during the 1990's offer a more detailed view on world politics as policy processes. See here the paramount contribution of Marcus, G. (1995), and of Hannerz, U. (2003).

^v Center for Ethnography at University of California, Irvine (see <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog/>), and see Marcus G. E., 2000.

^{vi} The ARC (The Anthropology of the Contemporary Research Collaboratory; see <http://www.anthropos-lab.net/>), based at the University of California, Berkeley.

^{vii} It must be clarified that the term "collaborative ethnography" refers here to the collaboration *within* a team of researcher, and *not* between researchers and peoples they are investigating (i.e. "community members"), because this last meaning became dominant in anthropology since the publication of the book of Lassiter in 2005.

^{viii} 2008 : UICN 10th World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, 2010 : Nagoya Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2012 : the 3rd earth summit , Rio+20 Summit^{viii}, and 2014 : 6th IUCN world congress. Actually, they had a fifth experiment in 2016 with an other World Conservation Congress.

^{ix} She is an active member of the team. We organized an « International Methodological seminar on Mega-events » in Paris in July 2015 in order to prepare our observation of the COP21, 6 months later.

^x During the Rio+20 conferences, both teams experienced some interactions and they had face to face encounter during the international methodological seminar on mega-events that our team organized in Paris in 5-6 of July 2015.

^{xi} Reflexive analysis on their practices point, in oral discussion and publications, to similar challenges and pitfalls.

^{xii} Translation, scale, and performance were the 3 main dimensions of CEE experience by the US team in 2010 (Corson & al, 2014).

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