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Convergence or Divergence of Ideas, Norms, and Principles in the Atlantic? The Case of Transnational Environmental Networks

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ABSTRACT

This paper is part of a wider investigation into the emergence (or not) of an Atlantic 'space'. In other words whether the idea of a 'pan-Atlantic area' is a viable political, social, and cultural concept. More specifically, it explores whether or not the Atlantic space can be characterized as an area of normative convergence. To do so the paper employs insights from the literatures on policy convergence and policy transfer and in particular the 'soft' transfer of policy inputs through transnational networks. Rather than attempt to map the intangible transfer of ideas, norms, and principles across the Atlantic space, the approach taken here is to map the structures through which soft transfer can potentially take place. An analysis of online survey data from 150 environmental NGOs based in Europe, Africa and the Americas reveals a concentration of transnational networks within the Atlantic space, which could potentially contribute to the convergence of ideas, norms, and principles in the area. In this way, the paper argues that the pattern of transnational networks observed provides some supporting evidence of the emergence of an Atlantic space.

The first draft of this Scientific Paper was presented at the ATLANTIC FUTURE Workshop, University of Pretoria (South Africa), June 2014

ATLANTIC FUTURE – Towards an Atlantic area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas, is a project financed by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme, European Commission Project Number: 320091.



ATLANTIC FUTURE SCIENTIFIC PAPER

10

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. How do Convergence or Divergence Apply to an Atlantic Space?.....	5
2.1. The global movement of norms and ideas	5
2.2. Shared norms and the Atlantic space	5
3. Transnational Networks and the 'Soft' Transfer of Norms, Principles and Ideas	7
3.1. Policy Convergence and Policy Transfer	7
3.2. Transnational Networks.....	8
3.3. Summary of Analytical Approach.....	9
4. Transnational Networks in the Atlantic Space	10
4.1. Methods	10
4.2. An Overview of Transnational Environmental Networks in the Atlantic Space	11
5. Conclusions	15
6. Notes	18
7. References.....	19

1. Introduction

The predominance of the North Atlantic in the last century has been reflected in the overwhelming focus on the transatlantic link between North America and Europe. In comparison, relatively little attention has been focused on the South-South transatlantic links or between Europe and Latin America or North America and Africa, for example. However, recent shifts in geopolitical power towards the global South and away from traditional powers such as the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) have underlined how relations around and within the 'Atlantic space' are rebalancing. At the same time, there has also been a diffusion of power away from the state to a variety of non-state actors (Nye 2011) leading to the growing importance of less territorially based power systems (Held et al. 1999). Globalization and the ongoing revolution in information technology contribute to this transformation connecting like-minded individuals and groups around the world in pursuit of common objectives. This proliferation of networks, which transcend national boundaries, opens up new routes and levels of engagement in the Atlantic space and further challenges the traditional approach of the US and the EU towards their southern neighbours. It also bears the seeds of new opportunities for cooperation and mutual benefits.

Such cooperation may foster a convergence of ideas, norms, and principles. At the same time, a common background on crucial issues such as human rights, democratization and environmental protection may be a precondition to sustainable cooperation. Without shared norms that shape collective behaviour, compulsion may be necessary to ensure compliance and convergence (Stone 2004). This generates a dynamic relationship, which has the potential to increase cooperation but also risks fuelling divergence. The North Atlantic actors cannot assume that predominance of democratic governance in Africa and South America will necessarily result in inter-regional convergence in this regard and even less in automatic alliances on global issues. While there was a global convergence around certain Western norms after World War II such as rule-based institutions of collaboration, open non-discriminatory trading rules, the 'democratic peace' and the 'Washington consensus' on development, this has given way to a broader and more complex global competition of ideas (Grevi and Youngs 2011). The increasing enthusiasm for South – South cooperation is already creating many more voices demanding to be heard: "Rising states will naturally seek to challenge the status quo and to revise the dominant norms of the system in order to reflect their own interests and values" (Hurrell and Sengupta 2013).

This paper is part of a wider investigation into the emergence (or not) of an Atlantic 'space'. In other words whether the idea of a 'pan-Atlantic area' is a viable political, social, and cultural concept. More specifically, the paper explores whether or not the Atlantic space can be characterized as an area of normative convergence. It does so by addressing the following research questions: *Is the Atlantic becoming a 'region' in which key ideas, norms, and principles converge or diverge? What are the most relevant processes through which ideas, norms, and principles are transferred, contested, and reconceptualized within the Atlantic area? What sub-regions or countries play a leading role in this regard?*

To answer these questions this paper employs insights from the literatures on policy convergence and the related concept of policy transfer (e.g. Holzinger and Knill 2005; Heichel et al 2005; Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). Although not entirely analogous concepts, the empirical studies that apply them have a common interest in the subject of increasing policy similarity (or dissimilarity) between policy processes. While the concept of convergence is more directly concerned with this effect as an observable phenomenon, policy transfer describes the process that can lead to policy similarity, thus constituting pathways towards convergence (Heichel et al 2005; Elkins and

Simmons 2005). Up to recently the literature in these areas has primarily focused on the spread of 'hard' policy instruments or institutions between state actors (e.g. Dolowitz, 2003; Jones and Newburn, 2006; Bennett 1991; Heichel, Pape and Sommerer 2005). However, an important emerging focus in the study of policy transfer is the 'soft transfer' of the inputs of policy such as ideas, norms, and principles (Benson and Jordan 2011). In particular transnational networks of state and non-state actors providing complex communication channels across state boundaries have been highlighted as an important mechanism through which such soft transfer can take place (Stone 2004; 2010; 2012). The approach taken in this paper is rather an attempt to map the intangible transfer of ideas, norms, and principles, across the Atlantic space, to instead map the structures through which this kind of soft transfer takes place. This paper argues that the pattern of these transnational networks can ultimately provide important clues to the emergence (or not) of the Atlantic space.

The focus of the empirical analysis is on transnational networks of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in one important policy area, namely, environmental policy. Over the last century, the ideas and values of global environmentalism have slowly but steadily moved from the margins towards the centre of the international agenda (Falkner and Lee 2013). The field of environmental governance has therefore become an important locus of confrontation (i.e. of ideas, norms, and principles), which attracts much of the attention in the international relations literature previously attributed to multilateral trade and financial policies. At the same time there has been a growing interest in the literature on global environmental governance on the *transnational* as a distinct and researchable sphere of politics (Bulkeley and Jordan 2012). In brief, scholars concerned with the transnational arena seek to understand the ways in which institutions, forms of cooperation, and new political spaces are emerging which cut across traditional jurisdictional boundaries set by national borders (ibid). Finally, transnational environmental networks are likely to have wider relevance in the Atlantic space because the extent to which environmental groups interact across nations may provide an indication of how other public interest groups (such as women's groups and human rights groups) also organize themselves. Environmental groups are at the forefront of such developments because, since many issues such as global warming and wildlife preservation encourage international policy action, environmental NGOs have an incentive to look for allies elsewhere and build a transnational network if it is feasible (Rohrschneider and Dalton 2002, p. 530).

The next section of this paper discusses the links in the literature between increasing globalization, regionalism, interregionalism and the convergence of norms, ideas and principles. Following that section, a brief overview of the literatures on convergence and transfer introduces the concept of 'transnational networks.' The next section then provides empirical analysis of transnational environmental networks of non-state actors across the Atlantic space and discusses the capacity of these networks to promote convergence (or divergence) of norms, values, and principles in the field of environmental protection. The final section draws out some implications of the pattern of transnational networks for the convergence and divergence of ideas, norms, and principles in the Atlantic space as well as the wider dynamics of interregionalism in the area.

2. How do Convergence or Divergence Apply to an Atlantic Space?

2.1. The global movement of norms and ideas

In this paper we use Jentleson's definition of norms which he states as being 'about what is right and just' and so are more about values than material things (Jentleson 2011, p. 102). However, norms do have a tangible impact: Norms form the bases for judgments about legitimacy and so create 'permissive conditions for action' (Finnemore 1996). In this way the convergence of norms, ideas and principles can play an important role in facilitating international cooperation (including at a regional and inter-regional level) as this can act as a prelude to the convergence of institutions, policies and other components of governance (Drezner 2001).

The movement of norms and ideas around the world has occurred throughout mankind's history, for example with the spread of world religions or the diffusion of scientific knowledge. This flow of norms and ideas has often followed armies and economic trade patterns and in doing so transformed societies and markets (Keohane and Nye 2000). At times these movements led to increasing social and cultural similarity (convergence) but at other times they led to divergence as alternative view points and norms took root and spread. Keohane and Nye (2000; 1999) argue that over time the fortunes of individual states have become increasingly tied together in a form of 'complex interdependence' characterized by multiple networks (with multiple actors) through which the influences of capital and goods, information, ideas, and people flow. Globalization – driven in part by the information revolution - has been conceived as the process of increasing 'thickness' of these relationships (Keohane and Nye 1999, p. 6) making the flow of ideas and norms around the world both easier and more ubiquitous (Drezner 2001).

'Regionalisms', understood as projects to form a region, and interregionalisms, understood as the interaction between two regions, can also be conceived as important vehicles for convergence, as they are set out to construct and reinforce common policies and norms across national divides. Distinct regional organisations develop specific cultures and ways of cooperation based on behavioural logics and on perceptions of shared belonging amongst members (Acharya 2001). For example, a vast amount of literature in the field of EU studies has been devoted to exploring 'Europeanization' which describes the process by which European countries adapt and change domestic institutions, policies, and norms in response to the EU (Börzel and Risse 2007; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; (Börzel and Risse 2012). At the same time, regionalisms and interregionalisms can also backfire and produce regional divergences (Söderbaum et al. 2005). Once a group of countries is required to deal more intensively with each other, latent disaccords can be intensified.¹ The result can be an entrenchment that reconfigures the region. Therefore while regionalism and interregionalism can promote the convergence of ideas and norms, a shared background of ideas and norms can also help facilitate further cooperation at a regional and interregional level in a virtuous circle of positive feedback.

2.2. Shared norms and the Atlantic space

In relation to the Atlantic space, shared norms are thought to be 'a big reason why the fundamentals of the [North] Atlantic Community are still sound' (Jentleson 2011, p. 102). While there are societal, cultural and political differences in areas such as

religiosity, gun control, the death penalty, approaches to the war on terrorism, and some aspects of the appropriate role of the state reveals that there are core commonalities. These commonalities, not differences, are thought to prevail: The US and the EU are liberal democracies with a shared philosophical heritage and political values and intertwined economies. The societies are also interlinked in many ways, both in formal institutions and more informal networks based on common culture and heritage (Jentleson 2011). Furthermore, both the US and EU are 'norm exporters'. The US has many resources that potentially provide 'soft power' (Nye 2004): Not only is America the world's largest economy, it attracts the largest inflow of foreign immigrants and is by far the largest global exporter of films and TV programmes (Nye 2004). However, soft power does not accrue to the US in all areas of life, nor is the US the only country to possess it (Keohane and Nye 1999). Similarly, the EU is sometimes described as a 'normative power' that attempts to project a set of universal norms, such as the respect for human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development, around the world (Manners 2002).

Until recently the North America – Europe transatlantic link was overwhelmingly predominant in the area. North – South relations between the US and Latin America and Europe and Africa suffered from a profound asymmetry. However, as geopolitical shifts towards the Global South continue to rebalance relations around the Atlantic space, it cannot be assumed that US and EU norms will continue to set a model for countries more widely, especially in the South. Slowly the space is opening up and multiple levels of engagement are developing across the Atlantic space including a proliferation of South-South links. For example, various regional groupings such as BASIC (India, Brazil, South Africa and China) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) promote new regional poles which are already providing alternative sources of political and economic influence (Vieira and Alden 2011; Alden and Schoeman 2013). In the eyes of these countries, traditional powers such as the US and the EU are sources of concern rather than leadership (Fioramonti and Poletti 2008; Fioramonti 2014). With countries such as Brazil and South Africa increasingly willing to act on a global stage, and the growing importance of West Africa as an energy provider (Lesser 2010), the South Atlantic can be expected to play a larger role in redefining what is considered normal in international relations in future.

One area in which voices in the Southern Atlantic are beginning to take a more central position is in the field of environmental governance and in particular climate change governance. Since the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, international climate policy has risen in importance like no other environmental policy issue. At first the locus of international climate change action was in industrialized countries in the North. The EU in particular took a leadership role, especially in the absence (until very recently) of political support from the US. Countries in the South typically argued that they had little moral obligation to take immediate action since developed countries have historically been responsible for the problem of climate change (Held et al 2013). However, the situation is changing as many developing countries are now becoming major contributors to climate change and much more assertive in international climate negotiations. For example, Brazil and South Africa were part of the BASIC group, which committed to act jointly at the Copenhagen Climate Summit – including a possible walk out if necessary. In the end, along with the US and led by China, this group brokered the final Copenhagen Accord. These developments, however, do not mean that there are not still important divergences in the climate change priorities of Atlantic countries. For example, South Africa is still a vocal defender of the interests of developing countries as a prominent member of the Africa group as well as the G77 (Masters 2013) and, while voluntarily committed to significant emission reductions (on a business as usual scenario) by 2020, the emphasis in its own climate change policies remains firmly on addressing

economic growth and development priorities. Some authors argue that these more immediate interests rather than post-materialist 'green values' are still the greatest motivation for leaders in developing countries (Tjernstöm and Tietenberg 2008).

In order to better understand one of the processes by which actors in the South Atlantic may be able to help shape shared norms in the area in future, the next section of this paper now turns to the literature of transnational networks.

3. Transnational Networks and the 'Soft' Transfer of Norms, Principles and Ideas

3.1. Policy Convergence and Policy Transfer

There is a broad consensus – which we adhere to in this paper - on the definition of policy convergence as the 'tendency [...] to develop similarities in structures, processes and performances' (Kerr 1983, p.3). Since the 1960s there has been a strong interest in the study of cross-national policy convergence (for reviews see: Holzinger and Knill 2005; Drezner 2001; Bennett 1991). However, it is often pointed out that convergence is closely related (though not necessarily equivalent) to a number of other similar concepts such as policy transfer, policy diffusion, isomorphism, and policy learning (e.g. Knill 2005; Holzinger and Knill 2005; Stone 2012). Knill (2005) argues that this becomes most apparent when focusing on the concept of policy transfer. In this paper we adopt the definition of policy transfer set out by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 5) as 'processes by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system'. The analytical focus of policy transfer research is, therefore, more on the *process* of transfer rather than the *results* in terms of concrete policy outcomes and outputs. Moreover, this process might, but need not, lead to cross-national policy convergence (Knill 2005; Holzinger and Knill 2005; Drezner 2001).²

Convergence studies received a significant boost in the 1990s when policy convergence was associated with an increasing research interest in the domestic impact of European integration and globalization (Holzinger and Knill 2005). A number of theories or approaches are given in the literature to connect globalization and convergence. These are enumerated in many different ways but typically 'diverge on whether the structural driving force is economic or ideational, and whether states retain agency in the face of globalization or are dominated by structural determinants' (Drezner 2001, p. 55). Holzinger and Knill (2005, p. 779) argue that causal factors for convergence are not only found in studies explicitly concerned with policy convergence, but also in the related literatures on policy transfer 'since the factors triggering these processes can be interpreted as potential causes of convergence'. While convergence studies tend to seek structural explanations for observed increasing similarity between countries, policy transfer studies tend to look for the role of agency in the transfer process (Stone 2012).

At first, policy transfer studies focused on state actors as agents of transfer in 'peer to peer' transfer between government officials (Benson and Jordan 2011). However, the focus of research later broadened to include a wide array of non-state actors, including international organizations (Stone 2004), epistemic communities (Dunlop 2009), philanthropic institutions (Stone 2010), and pressure groups (Stone 2004). These

different transfer agents were thought to be involved in different types of transfer: For example, Simon Bulmer *et al.* (2007, p. 15) developed a continuum of different transfer types including 'semi-coercive', 'conditionality' and 'obligated transfer'. Diane Stone (2010) associated these coercive activities with powerful states and/or international organizations, such as the World Bank, when they seek to impose their policies on other actors, especially those in the developing world (see also Evans 2009). Yet for non-state actors, persuasion and voluntary transfers appear to be the main modes of operation (Stone 2010). At the same time there has been a shift in focus in the studies of policy transfer from the 'hard' transfer of policy instruments, institutions and programmes (mainly by state actors) to the 'softer' transfer of ideas, ideologies and concepts. These are elements of policy that are thought to circulate freely among non-state actors in particular under conditions of greater globalisation (Benson and Jordan 2011).

3.2. Transnational Networks

Transnational networks of state and non-state actors are argued to provide an important mechanism through which such soft transfer of ideas, norms and principles can take place (Stone 2004, 2010; 2012). In this paper we adopt Kickert *et al.*'s (1997, 1.3) definition of policy networks 'as (more or less) stable patterns of social relations between interdependent actors which take shape around policy problems and/or policy programmes'. Transnational networks differ from 'normal' policy networks in that they are not confined to any one national policy area (Betsill and Bulkeley 2004, p. 479). The informal and largely horizontal structure of these networks provide a multi-lateral forum for 'regular and purposive' relations between actors which is said to create patterns of shared expectations and trust (Slaughter 2004). This helps build a functional interdependence among actors who share resources to problem solve and reach agreement on matters of mutual interest.

The exact composition of the members of the network, and the balance between state and non-state members, depends of the type transnational network in question. For example, 'regulatory networks' are made up of government officials, which come together with their counter parts from other parts of the world to strive towards policy convergence in their respective policy domains (Verdier 2009, p. 120). On the other hand, 'transnational advocacy coalitions' are comprised almost exclusively of non-state actors from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups, which lobby governments and international organizations and ultimately aim to set the policy agenda (Keck and Sikkink 1998). This recognition of the role of non-state and international organizations "complicates [our] understanding of policy transfer processes beyond that of simple bilateral relationships between importing and exporting jurisdictions [or converging and diverging states] to a more complex multi-lateral environment" (Stone 2004, p. 550). It draws attention to the transnationalization of policy via three sets of actors: states, international organizations, and non-state actors (Orenstein 2003).

Although these networks can stand alone, they can also complement the efforts of traditional international institutions by facilitating convergence through improving 'the quality and depth of cooperation across nations' (Slaughter 2003, p. 169). Crucially for this paper, transnational networks are said to lead to an 'international policy culture' of commonly accepted norms and values (Stone 2004, p. 548). Powell (1990, p. 325) claims that because they are 'based on complex communication channels' networks are able not only to communicate information but also generate new meaning and interpretations of the information transmitted. From this (constructivist) perspective, state and non-state actors loosely organized in informal transnational networks can

inter-subjectively help shape the norms and a sense of what their interests are with respect to particular global problem (Betsill and Bulkeley 2004, p. 473 - 5). Rather than apolitical information exchange forums as they are sometimes portrayed, transnational networks therefore act as platforms where actors struggle to have ‘their’ definition of a problem, and therefore what counts as legitimate knowledge, accepted (Betsill and Bulkeley 2004, p. 475). Non-state actors are argued to be better at this kind of soft transfer of ideas and norms, especially via transnational advocacy coalitions (Keck and Sikkink 1998), which can act as ‘norm brokers’ by influencing public opinion and policy agendas (Acharya 2004).

Finally, transnational networks often act under the wire of national control operating as they do away from the traditional authority of the state. However, they are not necessarily ‘void of hegemonic traits’ and frequently reflect the dominance of certain interests and actors (Lavenex and Wichmann 2008, p. 97). Such asymmetric power relations in networks are in part due to the constellations of interdependence, where the interests of powerful states (or quasi-states) such as the US and the EU are not matched by those of other ‘partner’ countries (Lavenex and Wichmann 2008, p. 97). This creates opportunities for powerful actors to secure their preferred outcomes and ultimately ‘enjoy a disproportionate share of the benefits’ of these networks (Vernier 2009, p. 163).

3.3. Summary of Analytical Approach

Transnational networks matter, therefore, to our investigations into the convergence and divergence of ideas, norms, and principles in the Atlantic space have the capacity to facilitate and shape the transfer of these soft policy elements (Evans 2009). Furthermore, according to Stone (2004, p. 561) a focus on ‘soft’ transfer through networks is one approach to reconciling agent-centred policy transfer approaches with the structurally oriented convergence studies (Stone 2004, p. 561): Networks can be viewed as agents of transfer but also as structures. Thus from the point of view of convergence studies, networks that transcend national boundaries and state actors under conditions of greater globalization (or in this case greater interregionalization) become one of the possible causal mechanisms for convergence. However, while there is a great deal of literature on policy networks in general, transnational networks are an under-investigated mechanism for soft policy transfer and little is known about how they operate in practice (Benson and Jordan 2011). This is especially true for transnational networks in the global South. Up to now the convergence and transfer literature has primarily focused on the spread of ‘hard’ policy instruments or institutions between countries in the industrialized North, often within EU or OECD member states (e.g. Dolowitz, 2003; Jones and Newburn, 2006; Bennett 1991; Heichel, Pape and Sommerer 2005). Relatively little is known about the soft transfer of ideas, norms and principles through transnational networks in the global South. Even less is known about the extent to which these networks contribute to the development of new and emerging regional and inter-regional relationships.

In the next part of this paper, we empirically map out the interactions of NGOs operating in the Atlantic space in order to determine, first, the pattern of any transnational networks present. From the above literature review we argue that networks can lead to the convergence of ideas, norms, and principles through the process of soft policy transfer. Ultimately, we argue, that the shared background of ideas, norms and principles that these networks help to create can facilitate further cooperation at a regional and interregional level and therefore the pattern of transnational networks observed can provide important clues to the emergence (or not) of an ‘Atlantic space’. Second, we seek to determine what sub-regions or countries

play a leading role in this regard. We have seen in the literature review above that, although in principle networks are horizontal structures, asymmetric relations can mean that certain actors can potentially use networks to steer, or govern, the behaviour of other actors in the network. We might anticipate that any power asymmetries, therefore, may have important implications for North-South relations in these networks and in particular whose norms, principles and ideas are transferred.

4. Transnational Networks in the Atlantic Space

4.1. Methods

Details about the transnational networks were gathered using an online survey of environmental NGOs. The geographical scope of the survey included NGOs in Europe (specifically the EU), North America (Canada and the US), Africa (including North and Sub-Saharan Africa), and Latin America (including Central and South America). The environmental organizations were identified from various online sources including the European Parliament's lobbying register and websites of the Natural Resources Defense Council and the European Environmental Bureau. The sample population was not intended to be representative of all groups involved in environmental activities, but attempted to capture a representation of groups working together across a range of countries and continents within the Atlantic space. Based on the content of an organization's website, the criteria for inclusion in the survey was that a group needed to be an environmental NGO involved in international activities. In addition, only those groups for which email addresses could be collected were included in the survey.

The resulting database of environmental NGOs contained 686 cases. These were not evenly distributed between the four regions (Europe: $n = 266$; North America: $n = 206$; Africa: $n = 133$; and Latin America: $n = 81$). To some extent, this was an indication of the prevalence of international NGOs operating in these regions as well as the ease in which information about the groups could be found online. For example, Europe hosts a myriad of groups, which could be easily identified by, among others, their membership of the European Environmental Bureau. In contrast, environmental groups operating at an international level were far harder to identify in African and Latin American countries. In most developing countries, the information on environmental NGOs is less reliable and the environmental movement is fragmented into small and fluid groups, making the identification of active groups less precise (Rohrschneider and Dalton 2002).

The online survey was circulated (in English, Spanish and French) to the identified organizations via email in sequential batches spread over January to March 2014.³ One representative from each organization or group was invited to respond. Respondents were asked to list the organizations or groups (outside of their own country) that they were involved with most regularly and that they believed were most valuable to their organization. They were also asked to name any formal networks that they were involved in and in which country the head office or secretariat of this network was based. In addition, questions were posed assessing the type of transnational activities these groups engaged in as well as the impressions of these groups on the relevance of an 'Atlantic space'.

The survey was completed by 183 environmental NGOs. Email invitations to take part in the survey bounced back from 60 addresses in the NGO data base. Therefore a total number of 626 groups were included in the survey in practice. Consequently, the total

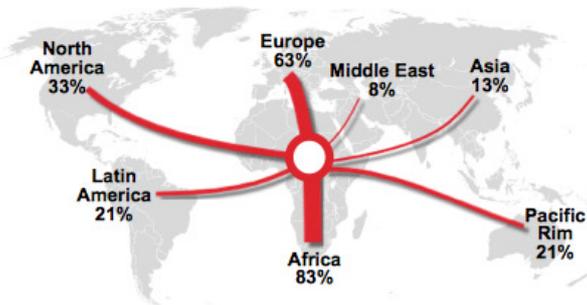
number of responses equates to a 29 percent response rate. There was a particularly high response rate from European NGOs where the contact information was the most reliable and the number of NGOs working internationally is high (given that environmental policy is dealt with mainly at the transnational – EU - level). Having said this, a broad diversity of countries are represented in the survey. Responses were received from 58 countries across the four continents. Responses were, however, excluded from the final analysis if they reported that their organization had no contact with similar organizations outside of their country, or were from the business or governmental sector etc. In the end, the survey yielded 150 usable responses: (25 from African NGOs; 25 from Latin America; 26 from North America; 74 from Europe).

4.2. An Overview of Transnational Environmental Networks in the Atlantic Space

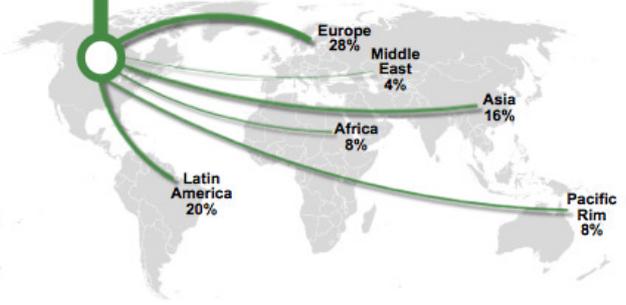
The respondents were asked how often their organization had contact with similar environmental groups from different regions of the world. These regions included but went beyond the regions in the Atlantic space (i.e. North America, Europe, Latin America and Africa) to encompass the Middle East, Asia (including India, China and Japan) and the Pacific Rim (including Australia and New Zealand). The responses showed that the NGOs had their most regular contact with other organizations within their own region (see Figure 1).⁴ However, beyond this (unsurprising) finding, the majority of respondents also reported to “regularly” have contact with their counterparts outside of their region. This pattern suggests that there is not only an international dimension to the contacts of the NGO groups within the Atlantic space but also an interregional one. Moreover the NGOs reported to have their most regular interregional contact with groups based in other regions *within* the Atlantic space. For example, African NGOs reported to have strong links with their European counterparts: 63 percent of African NGOs had regular contact with similar organizations in Europe. African NGOs also reported to have regular links with North American NGOs – 33 percent of African NGOs had regular contact with similar groups in North America. The strongest transnational links between Latin American NGOs and their counterparts outside of their own region were with European and North American groups. Interestingly - considering the geographical distance – Latin American NGOs said that they had more regular contact with European groups than with North American ones – 44 percent of NGOs in Latin America had regular contact with their counterparts in Europe and 40 percent had regular contact with North American groups. North American NGOs reported to have their most frequent contact with similar groups in Europe and Latin America – 28 percent of North American NGOs had regular contact with groups from Europe and 20 percent with groups from Latin America. European NGOs reported to have regular contact with African and North American NGOs – 26 percent of European NGOs had regular contact with African groups and 19 percent had regular contact with their North American counterparts.

FIGURE 1. The Geographical Scope of General NGO Contacts

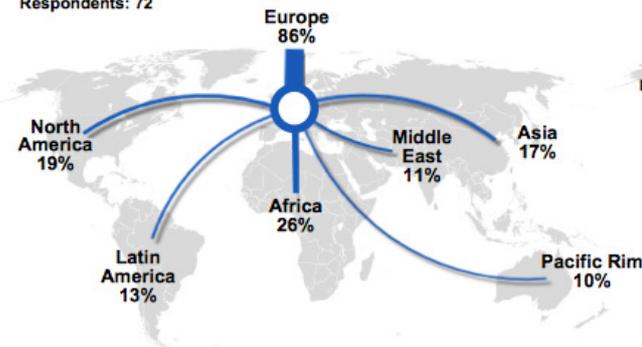
Origin: **AFRICA**
Respondents: 24



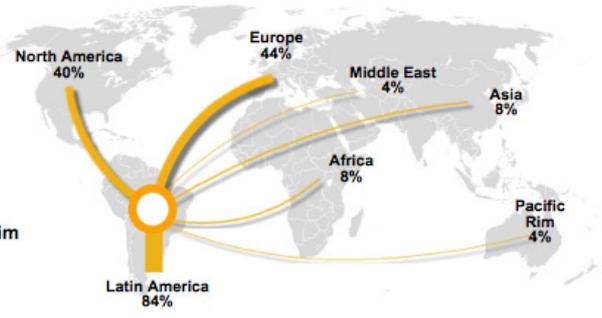
Origin: **NORTH AMERICA**
Respondents: 25



Origin: **EUROPE**
Respondents: 72



Origin: **LATIN AMERICA**
Respondents: 25



Entries are percentages of NGO that have "regular" contact with similar organizations in the rest of the world Respondents were allowed multiple responses.

This is not to say that all the important transnational links between NGOs were contained within the Atlantic space: for all four regions included in the survey, the third and fourth most significant relationships – in terms of regular contact - included groups from outside the Atlantic space: For example, 21 percent of African NGOs reported to have regular contact with similar groups in Latin America *and* the Pacific Rim; Similarly, 17 percent of European NGOs reported regular contact with Asian groups and 8 percent of Latin American NGOs reported to have regular contact with both African *and* Asian groups; 16 percent of North American NGOs reported to have regular contact with their counter parts from Asia and 12 percent reported to have regular contact with groups in the Pacific Rim. A chi-squared test was performed to determine whether the NGOs in each region inside the Atlantic space had equally regular contact with groups in other regions inside the Atlantic space as with those groups outside of this area. It was found that the frequency of contact between groups was not equally distributed ($p < .01$). In other words NGOs inside the Atlantic space had significantly more interaction with other NGOs inside of this area than outside.

Respondents were also asked the name and location of three specific organizations or groups that they had regular and/or valuable contact with (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Geographical Scope of Specific NGO Contacts

"Name up to three similar organizations/groups outside of your country with which you have the most frequent and/or valuable contact. In which countries are these organizations/groups based?"*									
Region of origin	Region of specific NGO partner								No. of specific partners; (No. of respondents)
	Global	Europe	North America	Latin America	Africa	Middle East	Asia	Pacific Rim	
Africa	5	52	12	0	24	2	3	2	58 (21)
Europe	8	70	7	2	6	2	3	2	173 (62)
Latin America	6	25	13	52	3	0	2	0	64 (22)
North America	11	19	44	3	6	6	8	3	36 (16)

*(Entries are percentages of specific partners reported by NGOs)

This again revealed that NGOs in certain regions within the Atlantic space were relatively less well linked through transnational networks than others. In particular, South - South links between African and Latin American NGOs appear weak: No African NGO cited a specific group or partner in Latin America while only 3 percent of the specific groups named by NGOs in Latin America were based in Africa. From this perspective, the links between these two regions appear even weaker than perceived more generally by the groups themselves (see above). The South-North links in the Atlantic space also appear stronger than the converse North-South links: 52 percent and 12 percent of the specific environmental groups named by NGOs in Africa were based in Europe and North America respectively. Similarly, 25 percent and 13 percent of specific groups mentioned by NGOs in Latin America were based in Europe and North America. Conversely, specific groups in Africa or Latin America were rarely mentioned by NGOs based in Europe or North America (see Table 1). Interestingly, North-North links (i.e. between North America and Europe) also appear to be asymmetric, with the links from North America to Europe being stronger than the links from Europe to North America 19 percent of the specific groups named by NGOs in North America were based in Europe (see Table 1). This compared with the 7 percent of the specific groups named by NGOs in Europe which were based in North America (see Table 1). A similar pattern can be seen in general NGO contacts in Figure 1.

Another question asked respondents to name up to three formal (i.e. named) environmental networks (such as Climate Action Network or Friends of the Earth International) that they were involved in. The responses revealed that the NGOs in the different regions of the Atlantic space participate in these formal networks to varying extents. In particular, North American NGOs, and to a lesser extent African NGOs, were isolated in this regard: Only 33 percent of North American NGOs and 52 percent of African NGOs named at least one network that they participated in. This compares to 72 percent of both European and Latin American NGOs. Furthermore, of the relatively few networks (n11) that were mentioned by North American NGOs all were reported to have their headquarters or secretariats within the North American region (see Table 2). Both African and Latin American NGOs were members of more formal networks that had headquarters outside of their own region – and almost entirely in Europe or North America.

Table 2. The Geographical Scope of Formal NGO Networks

"Where are relevant headquarters of the networks of which you are member based?"*									
	Location of network headquarters								
Region of origin	Global	Europe	North America	Latin America	Middle East	Africa	Asia	Pacific Rim	No. of networks (No. of respondents)
Africa	0	43.3	16.7	0	0	36.7	0	3.3	30 (13)
Europe	3.5	85.8	5.3	1.8	0.9	0	0.9	1.8	113 (52)
Latin America	4.8	28.6	11.9	54.7	0	0	0	0	42 (18)
North America	0	0	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	11 (6)

*(Entries are percentages of formal networks which have headquarters in each region)

Respondents were asked how often their organization or group performed certain activities with similar environmental organizations or groups from outside of their region in the last two years. The responses reveal that the NGOs in all four regions in the Atlantic space are active in the exchange of information, coordinating their activities and events as well as meeting at international conferences (see Table 3). For example, 57 percent of Latin American NGOs reported to have "frequently" exchanged information with similar groups in the last two years while 33 percent of African NGOs reported to have frequently coordinated activities and events. North American NGOs reported engage in shared activities the least: Only 12 percent of North American NGOs reported to frequently exchange information with similar organizations or groups and only 6 percent coordinated their activities or events with groups from outside of their region. In terms of the receipt of funding and technical assistance, the NGOs in the South (i.e. Africa and Latin America) report more activity than their counterparts in the North (i.e. Europe and North America): 28 percent of African NGOs and 19 percent of Latin American NGOs reported to frequently receive funding and technical assistance from similar groups outside of their region. This compares to no European NGOs and only 6 percent of North American NGOs which reported to receive funds from similar organizations outside of their region.

Table 3. Frequency of Inter-regional Activities

“During the last two years how often has your organization/group performed the following activities with similar environmental organizations/groups from outside of your REGION of the world (e.g. Europe or North America)?” *				
Activity	Region of Origin			
	Africa	Europe	Latin America	North America
Exchanged information	67	38	57	12
Coordinated activities and events	33	14	24	6
Met at international conferences	28	31	38	6
Received funding from them	28	0	19	6
Received technical resources from them (e.g. training)	22	2	14	6
Provided funding to them	6	3	5	6
Provided technical resources to them	11	5	10	12
No. of respondents	18	64	21	17

*(Entries are percentages of responding groups that engaged in an activity “frequently”)

Finally, the NGOs were asked how likely they thought that a new ‘Atlantic region’ was forming (Table 4). 12.4 percent of all the responding NGOs thought that an Atlantic region already existed while a further 18.2 percent thought that it was likely to form in the near future.

Table 4. Perceptions of the Atlantic space

‘Do you think that a new ‘Atlantic region’ is forming through economic, social and environmental links between organizations in Europe, Africa and the Americas?’	
<i>NGO responses (percent of respondents)</i>	
I think an Atlantic region already exists	12.4
I think an Atlantic region is likely to form in the near future	18.2
I think an Atlantic region is unlikely to form as other areas of the world are more relevant	7.4
Not sure	62.0
(No. of respondents)	121

5. Conclusions

This research contributes to our understanding of transnational networks as well as the emerging geopolitical dynamics of the Atlantic space by providing evidence of the

patterns of interaction between environmental NGOs within this area. These environmental groups report a relatively dense network of international and interregional links. Sharing information, coordinating events and campaigns as well as discussing common problems at international and conferences are all common activities connecting the groups with similar ones from outside of their region. Many, if not the majority, of the links between environmental groups revealed in the survey are informal but there is also evidence that these groups participate in a diverse array of more formal networks. These data appear to substantiate claims of emerging transnational social movements as well as the relevance of a transnational focus in the study of environmental governance (e.g. see Rohrschneider and Dalton 2002; Bulkeley and Jordan 2012). Furthermore, the exact pattern of inter-regional links reveals a denser network of links between groups within the Atlantic space than between these groups and similar groups outside of this space.

The transfer of ideas, norms, and principles is difficult to map out at a macro level but, according to Stone (2012, p. 486), 'is intuitively known'. In this paper we have not attempted to chart the movement of specific ideas, norms, and principles but instead map the transnational networks of environment NGOs operating in the Atlantic space through which an 'intangible' or 'soft' form of policy transfer of ideas and norms can help create a 'new common sense' (Newburn 2010). The presence of transnational networks concentrated in the Atlantic space offers one possible causal mechanism for the soft transfer (and ultimately the convergence) of ideas, norms, and principles. While other causal mechanisms of convergence may also be in operation,⁵ we argue that transnational networks are important for interregionalization as the convergence of ideas, norms and principles that they facilitate may lead to even greater and more 'tangible', convergence and cooperation in future. Soft policy transfer can complement efforts of state actors to transfer other (harder) elements of policy because cultural similarities play an important role in facilitating further cross-national policy transfer (Marsh and Sharman 2009). In other words it may be an important precursor and enabler of further cooperation and interregionalism.

Although networks are often portrayed as horizontal rather than hierarchical structures, this research demonstrates the marked asymmetries that can arise in practice. In general, Northern NGOs were dominate with European NGOs forming a hub for transnational networks in the Atlantic space. In addition, NGOs in the South more often reported to frequently receive funding from outside of their region. These findings are similar to those of Bulkeley et al (2012) who found that while global transnational networks in the area of climate change protection involved actors from the South, they were dominated by actors from the North. This asymmetry may have important implications for whose norms are transferred through these networks. It is possible that Northern/European NGOs have different ideological and normative goals that are not necessarily shared by the environmental NGOs in the global South. Rohrschneider and Dalton (2002, p. 529) found that environmental groups from member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were more likely than groups from developing nations to advocate 'a challenging ecologist orientation' and that they placed less priority on environmental quality issues such as air and water pollution. Environmental NGOs in the South also may be more tolerant of economic development projects that Northern NGOs oppose because the Southern groups see these projects as providing resources to improve the quality of life in their nations (ibid). Acknowledging these asymmetries, Gardner (1995) argued that, since Northern NGOs provide resources to similar groups in the South, they may frame environmental campaigns in ways that address their own objectives rather than those of the local groups.

The structure of the networks, therefore, indicate that European NGOs are likely to have considerable weight in framing and shaping internationally accepted environmental norms circulating within transnational networks in the Atlantic space. However, further research would be needed to better understand the nature of the transfer process through which the ideas, norms, and principles are selected, shaped and ultimately legitimized. Which ideas, norms, and principles selected for transfer in these networks? How do the repeated interactions between the groups serve to shape these ideas, norms, and principles? How are conflicts of interests among the groups resolved? To what extent does the difference in capacity and resources affect whose ideas, norms, and principles are eventually accepted and legitimized? How do these networks interact with more hierarchical forms of steering both domestically and internationally (e.g. legally binding climate policy and Multilateral Environmental Agreements) as well as other types of networks containing other types of actors (e.g. from the business and government sectors)? To what extent do the norms shaped by these networks influence actual policy decisions at a national level and under what conditions? These types of questions are best explored not by the large N quantitative methodology employed in this paper – which tells us little about the *process* of transfer occurring (i.e. which actors in the network got what and why). Instead a more traditional public policy approach would need to be adopted which focuses on a small N study of the detailed interactions between network actors in a specific policy area (i.e. more focus on agency). By going on to combine both quantitative and qualitative research approaches we would be following the advice of authors such as Marsh and Sharman (2009, p. 270) who argue that ‘we need to recognize that the relationship between structure and agency is dialectical, that is interactive and iterative’.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, this research is part of a wider investigation into the emergence, or not, of an Atlantic space. In other words whether the idea of a ‘pan-Atlantic area’ is a viable political, social, and cultural concept. The paper reveals one possible causal mechanism (i.e. transnational networks) for the convergence of ideas, norms, and principles in the area. In this sense the paper adds a small amount of additional evidence to support the argument that the traditional Northern Trans-Atlantic relationship could now be conceived of as a wider phenomenon to include the South Atlantic regions of Africa and Latin America. However, despite the perceived shift of power towards the emerging powers in the South as a defining feature of contemporary international relations, this paper illustrates that, in the case of transnational environmental networks at least, traditional Northern powers still retain a considerable presence. While the apparent proliferation of South–South and North–South links may in some cases be redrawing the political map in the Atlantic space, in other cases important South–South interdependencies (e.g. links between environmental NGOs) are still in their infancy. This may have significant implications for if, how, and in whose image, the Atlantic space develops in future.

6. Notes

¹Cf. the debate about the implications of the European Partnership Agreements (EPA) on regional integration in Africa. In addition, we would like to thank Frank Mattheis (GovInn) for his input to this paragraph.

² For example, if negative lessons are drawn from elsewhere and lead to divergence.

³ The email invitation to take part in the survey was sent to each organization up to three times – depending on if and when a response was received. The second email was also followed up, where possible, with a short phone call from a researcher who introduced the objectives and the format of the research and checked if the email had been received. If it had not a new email address was requested.

⁴ This illustrative figure was kindly provided by Oriol Farrés (CIDOB).

⁵ For example, imposition, international harmonization, regulatory competition (Holzinger and Knill 2005).

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