

Inside a transnational Parliament in Action

Alejandro Esguerra, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ & Free University Berlin

A.esguerra@fu-berlin.de

Paper proposal for the STS Conference Graz 2014 “Critical Issues in Science and Technology Studies” May 05-06, 2014 GRAZ, AUSTRIA

Special Session 8: Inside the Parliament

Abstract

The paper investigates the process of establishing the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in the early 1990s before the FSC became operational as an instance of governance innovation by transnational actors in world politics. The FSC became the first private transnational certification organization in the realm of sustainable forestry with a heterogeneous, antagonistic stakeholder body. Founding members had to build the organization from scratch without relying on pre-established rules and models that could simply be mimicked; they operated in an “institutional void” (Hajer 2009). The paper opens up the black box of transnational negotiations in action by examining audio-files that document the FSC’s Founding Assembly in 1993. It argues that the meetings can be viewed as a “quasi-parliament” in which actors invent and follow quasi-parliamentarian rules, create different factions, and come up with ways to manufacture consensus. They mimic a parliament to govern transnationally.

The paper makes two central arguments: It first elaborates on the importance of communicative devices such as microphones and invented rules of procedures. It shows how these devices are objects that govern the assembly. Second, it contends that the process of creating consensus can be explained as a communicative practice of translation (Callon 1986). In order to reach a consensus, actors translate their positions on an issue from one context to and another. This entails movement from written to verbal, from monologue to dialogue, or from a plenary talk to a group discussion. Thus, to move an object from one context into another is to displace it and, then, to recontextualize it and to make it resonate with a new context. The important premise is that a new context co-constructs the object and allows for a different kind of communicative and political work.