

# *The Transnationalisation of Political Conflict: Beyond Rationalism and Constructivism*



## INTRODUCTION

THE LOCUS OF POLITICAL CONFLICT IS SHIFTING AWAY FROM THE MODERN STATE; CONTEMPORARY POLITICS IS DEFINED BY PRONOUNCED PROCESSES OF DISLOCATION. Since the dawn of the modern era it has been the state that has confined conflicts among various political forces within a political space delimited by the boundaries of the respective political community. Accordingly, the firm division between domestic and international affairs has been institutionalised as the “natural” boundary of modern politics. The field of the state came to be perceived as the natural locus of political conflicts among numerous agencies over a variety of social and policy goals. At the same time, the state became the dominant actor in international politics. In this respect, the state played a double role in modern politics. It provided the internal (domestic) political forces with a “natural” space within which they could interact, but it also became the most important actor in external (international) affairs. The state functioned as a container of conflict in relation to the internal space and as an actor in relation to the external space.

Recently, the division between internal and external affairs has been seriously questioned at the level of both theory (for an

early statement, see Ashley 1987) and political practice. Particularly, due to the rise of non-state actors in international political arenas the very distinction between internal and external politics has been vehemently challenged (Walker 1994; Josselin and Wallace 2001). Although the field of the state remains essential, it has been incorporated into the multilevel structure of contemporary global politics (Rosenau 1998). As a result, both international and domestic politics have been perceptibly transnationalised. Following these developments, the attention paid to transnationally operating political agencies has lately increased substantially. Moreover, the disciplinary distinction between those working on international politics and those engaging in comparative politics is being progressively blurred.

Inspired by the so-called globalisation debate (see, for example, Castells 1996; Hirst and Thompson 1996; Strange 1996; Held *et al.* 1999) the field of transnational relations, *i.e.* the field studying the ‘regular interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or an intergovernmental organization’ (Risse-Kappen 1995a: 3), has witnessed a boom. Although originally introduced in the 1970s (Nye and

Keohane 1970), the field of transnational relations has now assumed apparently greater importance due to the revolutionary developments of information technologies, globalisation of economic activity, the end of the Cold War, and the ultimate dislocation of politics (Castells 1996). The recent debates in the discipline of International Relations have brought to the fore of scholarly attention a surprisingly motley bundle of issues. Hence, besides the traditionally strong research interest in multinational corporations and the changing patterns of their organisation (Reich 1991; Ruggie 1994), recent research has for example focused on transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998a; 1998b; Evans 2000; Florini 2000), transnational social movements (Tarrow 1998; 2001; Guidry *et al.* 2000; O'Brien *et al.* 2000; Warkentin and Mingst 2000) and international foundations and aid agencies (Quigley 2000; McMahon 2001).

This article seeks to understand how transnationally acting non-governmental organisations' influence and are influenced by domestic politics. Therefore, the article is firmly positioned in the field of transnational relations. However, in order to address some shortcomings of the prevalent approaches in the field the article draws on notions such as "opportunity structure", "discursive framing" and "discursive field" developed mainly in the literature on social movements.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the move towards transnationalisation has taken place not only in the field of international relations but also in the burgeoning social movements literature (Smith *et al.* 1997; Tarrow 1998:176-95; Della Porta *et al.* 1999; Guidry *et al.* 2000; Imig and Tarrow 2000; 2001; Rucht 2001). Scholars traditionally interested in non-governmental, contentious, and movement-like actors within the borders of nation-states have transgressed the confines of the state.

Ultimately, the two camps have reached a productive symbiosis that inspired this article.

Further, the article attempts to discuss the main considerations behind the actions of political actors. While the rationalist explanation prevalent today underscores actors' self-interest, the competing explanations draw on sociological approaches and conceive the processes of social learning and socialisation as the key mechanisms that influence a particular action. The field of inter/transnational relations is torn between two camps — the rationalists and the constructivists — that haggle over the exact meaning of social action. There have been attempts to bridge this theoretical gap. Yet, these attempts have mostly focused either on the definition of the exact scope conditions of the two theories (Checkel 1999; 2001) or offered an integrative approach (Keck and Sikkink 1998a; Risse and Sikkink 1999). While in the first case the two theories are kept apart and used according to the character of a particular case, in the second case an amalgam of both is proposed as a universal panacea to the demonstrated inadequacy of each of them. In the following paragraphs this article discusses the latter strategy and outlines an alternative theoretical tool kit to the integrative approaches in the field of transnational relations.

The article starts with a critical reading of recent contributions to the field of transnational relations. The first section focuses on the notion of domestic structure and identifies its main deficiency. In the second section the article turns to internal developments in the field of transnational relations and reformulates the available theoretical tools in order to make them suitable for conceptualising political action in the context of the multilevel structure of contemporary global politics. The third and fourth sections

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develop an empirical case on the basis of which they reveal the inadequacy of the theoretical tools available. The article concludes with a tentative proposition for an alternative tool kit.

## THE REVIVAL OF TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS

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THE RENEWED ATTENTION TO THE *PROBLÉMATIQUE* OF TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE 1990S WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY A VOLUME EDITED BY RISSE-KAPPEN (1995B). It introduced domestic structures, along with the levels of international institutionalisation, as important determinants of the influence transnational actors exercise in the domestic polity. Risse-Kappen claimed in the introduction to this volume that the book's main proposition is that 'under similar international conditions, differences in domestic structure determine the variation in the policy impact of transnational actors' (1995a:25). It is the variation in domestic structures that is held responsible for the variation in the policy responses to the pressures of transnational actors. Moreover, Risse-Kappen defined the mechanism which makes it possible for transnational actors to influence policy-making within a polity. First, transnational actors 'have to gain access to the political system of their "target state"' and, second, 'they must generate and/or contribute to "winning" policy coalitions in order to change decisions in the desired direction' (*ibid.*).

The contributors to the aforementioned volume directed scholarly attention to the effects produced by domestic conditions and focused on how these conditions affect transnational actors. However, the notion of domestic structure was fashioned as a static one, and thus failed to appreciate the dynamic elements of political interactions. According to Risse-

Kappen (1995a:23), the domestic structure comprises three sub-structures — state structure, societal structure, and policy networks — each of which could assume two different values thus constituting a classificatory grid that categorises the country cases described in the volume. As a result, the country cases are distributed among the different slots of the table according to the values of the relevant variables observed at a particular point of time. Therefore, the typology constructed in this way provides a snapshot of the countries in question.

Although the approach makes it possible to model the configuration of the domestic structure at several points of time, and thus to identify the trend of development of the domestic structure in time, it does not allow one to explain the particular dynamics underlying the changes in domestic structure. The outcome would be a static map of several snapshots; the dynamics of change would remain to be accounted for. This results from the volume's primary focus on the description of transnational influence and the effectiveness of this influence within a given polity characterised in a structure-like manner. Hence, although the authors supposedly presented an interactive approach that allegedly took into account both external and internal factors in fact they focused on the interactions of selected transnational actors with domestic structures understood as static. However, as Keck and Sikkink (1998a:202) suggest, 'understanding dynamic elements in domestic politics is at least as important to success [of the transnational actor] as understanding domestic structures.'

The dynamic, *i.e.* the temporal, aspect of political interactions cannot properly be grasped if the domestic dimension of interactions is reduced to a discrete value of a structural variable. When the level of domestic politics is defined in terms of the

structure-like properties, the model becomes surprisingly parsimonious but, at the same time, also surprisingly motionless. The understanding of possible developments in time is left out in such a model. Only when we introduce an actor-centred approach can the picture regain a temporal dimension which conveys the interactions of transnationally operating actors with their domestic counterparts and which accounts for how these interactions develop in time depending on the strategic responses of mutually interacting domestic and transnational actors. As the relevant actors' interactions form a wider social context that in turn shapes the field of these actors' possible strategies, one needs a method capable of interpreting political actors' interactions in a way that takes into account the development of both their strategies and the social contexts that make them possible.

As demonstrated by recent developments in the discipline of International Relations, in order to grasp the development of both political interactions and social contexts in time the theoretical framework must necessarily take into account the social construction of these interactions. The process of social construction of political action takes place at several different levels, where action acquires its meaning in relation to both potential supporters of the action and its audiences. A shift to the symbolic properties of political interactions in the field of international relations has brought about what has come to be called the constructivist turn which seems to have accompanied the increased attention paid to symbolic politics in the comparative politics' literature. This is a particularly notable development if we are to conceptualise the interactions between national and transnational political actors.

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL TURN AND BEYOND

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE ON INTER/TRANS-NATIONAL RELATIONS CAN BE DIVIDED INTO TWO CAMPS. The two rival groups are based on two different sets of theoretical assumptions regarding the conceptualisation of social action.<sup>3</sup> The rationalist camp draws on the logic of consequentialism and stresses the instrumental rationality of social actors who calculate the costs and benefits of their actions and act strategically. The second camp, consisting of constructivist approaches, draws on the logic of appropriateness and emphasises rule-guided behaviour instead of strategic calculation. In this perspective, social agents do not act instrumentally. Rather, they enact a particular rule (Jepperson *et al.* 1996). For example, Checkel's intention is to propose tools for the conceptualisation of those situations that do not display a pattern of strategic interaction (Checkel 1999).

However, any study of political action that wants to understand the interactions of real-world actors must take these two concepts as ideal types. They are tools that help us understand social action. It does not follow that there are real-world situations that can be described only by applying one of them. Although constructivists often tend to present themselves as students of non-strategic types of action, they are usually forced either to define precise scope conditions under which non-strategic action is likely (for example, the presence of social learning in interaction) or to employ an integrative approach that merges aspects of both constructivist and rationalist perspectives. The third possible strategy is to devise a concept that lies beyond both consequentialism and appropriateness. For example, Risse (2000) opts for the latter tactics and presents a notion of social action inspired by the Habermasian concept of communica-

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tive action. Although such an effort is innovative, it does not provide a persuasive solution to the problems faced by constructivists, namely their inability to formulate a full-fledged account of social action. In fact, Risse only adds a new concept to the list, making it necessary to further specify exact scope conditions under which this concept can be used.

Therefore, the most usual strategy employed in research of transnational relations is to combine constructivism with rationalism and to present an integrative approach drawing on both traditions (the label integrative is adopted from Börzel 2000). In their seminal work on transnational advocacy networks, Keck and Sikkink (1998a) stress the importance not only of norms and socialisation, but also of instrumental action and the powerful actors mobilised by the network's campaign in order to push through the advocacy goal of the network. However, such models focus mostly on the limit cases of states that violate human rights and environmental norms and are, according to the standard constructivist story, persuaded to get socialised into the Western discourse advanced by the transnational advocacy network and the Western powers. Constructivists argue that persuasion, facilitated by power-mobilisation and international coalition-building, is the mechanism through which the norm-violating state is made to comply with an international norm. Although this is not fully spelled out by constructivist scholars themselves, in these cases it is the transnational Western-based actor and its allies who possess the monopoly over the definition of the situation (Risse and Sikkink 1999).

Such a normatively loaded approach loses its explanatory appeal once the research focuses on the impact of transnationally active agents on policy-making in countries that do not violate

any basic human rights and environmental norms. Therefore, instead of relying on the standard conceptual tools used by researchers who investigate transnational relations, I employ an alternative notion of field. The political field is a relatively independent social space regulated by a common set of rules and defined by a uniform pattern of interactions among political actors (Bourdieu 1993; Spillman 1995; Steinberg 1998; 1999).

For those countries which do not violate any basic human rights and environmental norms, the claim embodied in the transnational actor must enter into interaction with the norms of the local political field. Accordingly, the mechanism through which the transnational actor may achieve a policy change is not one of persuasion of a disproportionately dis-empowered "pariah" state by the transnational network and the states that are its allies. Rather, it is one of searching for a common definition of the situation or, in other words, a common framing of the problem. Only when a common definition of the problem is found can the contention move from a direct conflict over the definition of the policy-problem to a problem-solving phase in which the transnationally organised actor may penetrate the relevant political field and directly influence the policy-making process.

As the transnational organisation must obtain institutional points of access to the local political field (typically, the political field of a particular state), it must present its issue in a way that enables it to acquire either wide public support or a considerable endorsement by powerful actors, or both. The most secure strategy is seeking institutional points of access while at the same time framing the issue so it can either be overtaken by the media or influence important decision-makers and opinion leaders. However, if there is a substantial misfit between the transnational organisation's agenda and the prevalent conditions

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(there is a contention over the definition of the issue), the transnational actor will try to employ a set of identifiable strategies to ensure the necessary access to the field. The transnational actor will try to achieve its goals by introducing the issue into other political fields in order to maximise its leverage over the target of its action.

Transnationally acting non-governmental organisations differ from organisations that operate only within the boundaries of nation-states. While the nationally operating agencies act within a single, namely national, field, transnationally acting organisations typically operate in several different fields. Thus, such organisations enter into interactions with other governments within the fields of other nation-states, with international organisations within the intergovernmental fields, with other transnational non-governmental agencies within the fields of transnational politics, and with other types of political agents (Smith *et al.* 1997:66-70). Hence, political conflict takes place within a field consisting of several levels of decision-making, where it is possible for the transnationally organised actor to enter into interactions with various types of decision-makers and try to change the decision-making process.

Therefore, the situation differs significantly from the standard imagery of transnational relations' theorists. According to the latter, there is some interaction between only two levels — the transnational and the national, that is, respectively, the level of internationally recognised norm promoted by a transnational norm entrepreneur and the level of national politics. In fact, interactions take place within a number of various fields, in which the game is played.

Moreover, the rules of the game may differ in different fields. While it might be appropriate in one field to use contentious strategies to challenge the power-holders,

that might be completely impossible in another field where lobbying may turn out to be the most effective tactics. For example, in order to interrupt the building up of the second Czech nuclear power station Temelín, the Rainbow Movement (RM) — the Czech member of the global environmental organisation Friends of the Earth International — used contention within the Czech national political field, but at the same time engaged in sophisticated lobby strategies within the political field of the United States (US). In a globalised world there is no single playground; there are numerous playgrounds that differ substantially as regards the concrete conditions that shape the rules of the games played within them. In order to illustrate this *problématique*, the following paragraphs focus on some aspects of a complex case of transnationalisation of an originally local problem — the second Czech nuclear-power station Temelín. This case is an issue area that displays the involvement of transnationally acting political actors. However, the subsequent sections do not present an exhaustive analysis of the anti-Temelín campaign. Rather, the goal of this case study is to demonstrate the deficiencies of the dominant approaches and to prepare the grounds for spelling out an alternative theoretical tool kit that could enable the researcher to grasp the complexity of political action in the world of contemporary global politics.

### **THE STORY OF A MULTILEVEL POLITICAL ACTION: TEMPORAL DIMENSION**

THE LEADING ORGANISATION IN THE ANTI-TEMELÍN CAMPAIGN IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC (CR) WAS THE RM. The case of the RM, established in 1989 and which since 1993 has been a member of Friends of the Earth International (Wapner 1996:121-

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51), is a particularly suitable example of a political actor that managed to engage in various types of political interactions at various levels of policy-making in order to stop the construction of Temelín. Its campaign was not ultimately successful if we regard the suspension of construction as the final success. However, the RM managed to keep the issue on the agenda of public discussion within the country. Moreover, it helped introduce the problem into several other political arenas and co-operated with a number of foreign partners. The RM's activities in non-domestic political fields will be discussed later in the article. Before that, however, I focus now on the temporal development of the RM's strategies in the domestic political field in the 1990s.

The RM got involved with Temelín in 1992, when a new government was coming to power in the CR and it was clear that a decision would have to be made concerning the future of the power station. Although the problem of Temelín became dominant in the environmental sector at that time, the RM was only gradually stepping into it. The issue became dominant for the RM only in 1993 when the government decided to finish Temelín and the environmental movement that was gaining momentum in 1992 ceased to exist, as it appeared to be clear that there was no longer an opportunity to stop the power station being built. According to a co-founder of the movement, co-ordinator of the energy campaign and later head of the RM:

*Greenpeace and Children of the Earth<sup>4</sup> gave up on the issue, but we thought that there were so many unclear things in it that it was worthwhile investing our energy into it and continuing the effort to uphold the problem as our issue and as an issue in the public discourse (Beránek 2001).*

In 1993 the RM started organising regular camps close to the construction site of

Temelín. The reason for these camps was, according to the movement, to address local inhabitants and gain support in the region surrounding the power station. The RM planned to establish co-operative relationships with local interest groups and help them in their campaigning against the power station. This strategy explicitly emulated comparable campaigns in the US and Western Europe and it was believed that co-operation with locals would lead to ultimate success. The first camp in 1993 lasted for one month and, according to data provided by the organisation itself, more than 150 people took part. The camp's participants provided information to the local population and to the local self-governments, and organised a petition against the power station. At the same time, apart from these conventional strategies, the RM engaged in a contentious action by organising two blockades of the construction site during the camp in 1993.

Thereafter, the movement regularly engaged in the contentious strategy of blockade, during which a substantial number of people blocked the gates to Temelín's construction site in such a way that they could not easily be removed by the police. Moreover, this was an event that shaped the media picture of the movement in the CR, as it was a unique employment of such a protest repertoire in post-communist CR. As already mentioned, the first blockade was organised in 1993 and the last one took place in 1997. According to data provided by the movement, the number of participants in blockades was constantly increasing and the event was generally perceived as successful. Therefore, there is a question that should be answered. Namely, why did the movement give up on the blockade in 1998 and why has there since then not been any contentious action of this type organised by the movement.<sup>5</sup>

The answer is to be found in the broader change in the Czech political field in

1997-98. The domestic political field underwent a major reconfiguration of political forces that suddenly made intrainstitutional pressure an available strategy, more attractive than the previously used extrainstitutional contention. In 1997, the government of Václav Klaus collapsed due to problems within the ruling coalition. Subsequently, a new transitory government under the leadership of the then governor of the National Bank, Tošovský, was appointed. Under this government, the post of minister of the environment was occupied by Martin Bursík who was very close to the environmental movement. When searching for reasons for the transformation of the RM's strategy in 1998, these changes provide a necessary background. According to the explanation given by the co-ordinator of the energy campaign, in 1998 'there was the government of Tošovský and we therefore changed our strategy. It would be too offensive to organise a blockade under this government, so the camp was continuing but without the blockade' (Beránek 2001). In addition, already in 1997 there was an internal dispute within the movement over whether this type of action should continue. The conflict was between the radicals — anarchists — and the moderates.

In 1998, we can observe a perceptible shift in the movement's strategy. To somewhat overstate it, there was a shift from open confrontation with the authorities to a more moderate political exchange which approximated the strategy of a standard lobby organisation. According to Jakub Patočka (1999:20), co-founder and leader of the movement in the 1990s, in 1998 the 'confrontation phase' of the movement's development gave way to the 'phase of politics.' This became clear in 1999 when the government again debated the project and its future was for the last time seemingly uncertain. There was a substantial campaign within the country

against the power station. According to Patočka, in 1999 when the government was again considering the possibility of stopping the construction of Temelín, the 'RM was negotiating with ministers; in some cases, probably, influenced their way of thinking and it was accepted as a serious political force also by the media and by its opponents' from the Czech energy company (Patočka 1999:23). However, the government's decision was predictably in favour of the power station. Since then, local opposition to the power station has been gradually fading away.<sup>6</sup>

In sum, the strategy of the movement underwent an important development during the 1990s as conditions in the domestic political field were changing. Therefore, it would not be possible to describe the domestic field with the help of a discrete value of a structural variable (*e.g.*, open/closed domestic structure). The point is that the domestic political field has undergone a major reconfiguration of political forces, that is to say it has changed. This demonstrates the dynamic character of political interactions and challenges theoretical approaches based on a static notion of domestic structure.

### **THE STORY OF A MULTILEVEL POLITICAL ACTION: SPATIAL DIMENSION**

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS TYPICALLY ENGAGE IN POLITICAL ACTION IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT FIELDS AT THE SAME TIME. The selected case study reveals that transnational political actors act in various political contexts and develop their political strategies in response to the character of the contexts they operate in. Therefore, if we want to know why they act as they do, it is necessary to understand how their strategies derive from broader political fields. This is underscored by the follow-

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ing analysis of the spatial organisation of the RM's anti-Temelín campaign.

In order to conceptualise the action of transnationally acting organisations, I refer to the concept of political field. The political field, as noted above, is a relatively autonomous universe defined by a certain uniformity of patterns of interaction among political actors (Bourdieu 1993; Spillman 1995; Steinberg 1998; 1999). I claim that it is the configuration of a particular field that is decisive in determining the political strategy of an actor: the actions of political agencies comply with the general organisation of relations that defines a certain field. More specifically, when devising a strategy an organisation responds to its own interpretation of the configuration of the forces within its field of action. As a result, the organisation engages in a multitude of different strategies, depending on the fields this organisation operates in. In what follows I describe the strategies aiming at interrupting the construction of the power station that the RM used in the course of the 1990s, mainly in non-domestic political fields.

According to the co-ordinator of the energy campaign, it is the particular configuration of forces in the political field at a given point of time that is decisive in the process of strategy development. In the co-ordinator's words:

*we always employ many methods and combine them — the repertoire is much wider than only blockading Temelín or lobbying in the parliament; we try to use as many strategies as possible. We are very flexible — under the Klaus governments the possibilities were circumscribed, so we were mostly using direct actions that could help publicise the issue in the media. When there was an opportunity in the US Congress for lobbying, we lobbied there. From 1992-93 to 1996, there was a clear emphasis on maintaining the issue as a public problem;*

*after the fall of the Klaus government we emphasised lobbying in order to influence ministers, though media was still important. All in all, strategies are changing — we look at the problem pragmatically and go for these strategies that at the moment have a chance to be successful. Strategy depends on the existing conditions and the context at a given time (Beránek 2001).*

The point to be stressed here is the movement's readiness to change its strategies on the basis of an interpretation of the situation so that it could maximise its leverage over its opponents. Naturally, one way to achieve that goal was through the international co-ordination of its campaign. The most interesting example of such international co-operation was the participation of the RM in the lobbying of US Congressmen in 1994 in Washington. This case also illustrates the multiplicity of the movement's strategies and its flexibility in changing contexts. In other words, the movement was able to play in different fields according to different rules of the game.

Since the beginning, the problem of Temelín has had an international dimension. According to the co-ordinator of the campaign, since the start:

*there has been an international co-ordination, as the problem itself had international roots. We were co-operating with Austria — this we inherited from the original anti-Temelín coalition and we started the first active massive international co-ordination in the US in the spring of 1994, when the US Congress was to decide whether Ex-Im bank would be allowed to provide the guarantee of the [Citibank] loan for Westinghouse's input to Temelín. At that time it made sense to focus on US politics, where an important decision was to be made. We were approximately for three weeks in the Congress, where we co-*

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*operated with some Washington-based lobby-organisations such as Nuclear Information and Resource Services, Greenpeace, Environmental Defence Fund, Natural Resources Defence Council and others* (Beránek 2001).

In January 1994, Ex-Im bank approved its participation in the Temelín project. The bank decided to guarantee 85 percent of the loan provided by Citibank for financing the supply of the technology part of the power station by the American company Westinghouse. As Ex-Im bank is a government-held corporation which facilitates US trade relations with other economies, its operations are subject to Congress supervision. Therefore, after the bank's decision in January 1994, there was a period within which Congressmen could voice their objections to the bank's involvement in the project. Accordingly, those who criticised the project used this period to lobby in Congress in order to subvert the bank's decision. Apart from the delegation of the Austrian government, two representatives of the RM arrived in Washington. Their trip was organised by Friends of the Earth. The opponents of the power station managed to raise doubts about the credibility of the information that served as the basis of the bank's decision and to motivate many Congressmen to start questioning it; however, the bank re-confirmed its decision in March 1994.

As described above, the RM has always used several different methods and strategies in order to gain access to policy-making processes. By doing this, the RM aimed to establish points of access to the political systems of several countries, while it also tried to shape public opinion in the relevant political fields. The RM was closely co-operating with Friends of the Earth Europe which facilitated the movement's communication with European institutions. In

addition, there were several meetings in the German Ministry of Industry related to exports of electricity from the CR.

As far as state agencies are concerned, it is justified to say that the movement does not have any stable institutional partner. Rather, the RM established some personal contacts that are used by the movement in order to access the relevant political arenas. For example, within the CR, the RM has co-operated with some Members of Parliament and some ministers, although the degree of co-operation has always heavily depended on who the minister of the environment was. Indeed, some ministers were particularly reluctant to take into account the demands of the environmentalists. In fact, the RM believed some ministers sided with its main enemy — the state-owned energy company — and counted them among its main opponents.

However, the RM's anti-Temelín campaign was ultimately silenced not by its main opponents but by another transnational political action launched in 2000 by some of the RM's former partners — the Austrian opponents to the power station. Since September, 2000 there has been a visible dissociation of the movement from the then starting anti-Temelín campaign organised by some Austrian activists which resulted in recurrent blockades of the southern border of the CR. Although the RM always co-operated with Austrian activists, according to the co-ordinator of the energy campaign the RM never closely co-operated with those organisations that organised the blockades of the Czech border in the autumn of 2000. The main Austrian partner of the RM was Global 2000 — the Austrian member of Friends of the Earth International — and to a limited extent also Greenpeace. According to the same account, the RM co-operated at some level with the Upper-Austrian Platform against Nuclear Danger that co-organised

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the blockades in 2000. The blockades seemed to be the reason why the RM parted from them.<sup>7</sup> Since 2000 it has not been feasible for the RM to voice its opposition to the power station as that would only mean risking its credibility by engaging in a conflict that had become increasingly framed in nationalistic terms.

In the second half of 2000, due to the recurrent blockades of the Czech border, the problem made its way into the highest echelons of power and became the hottest issue in the intergovernmental relations between the CR and Austria. Indeed, several meetings of the highest Czech and Austrian politicians were needed to find a compromise. A workable compromise seemed to have been crafted at the end of 2001 in Brussels, where the prime ministers of the CR and Austria signed a final document. However, this did not prevent the issue being used as a tool for political struggles within the Austrian political field. According to some Austrian political forces, the issue of Temelín should have been linked to the EU (European Union) accession negotiations of the CR (Veto 2002).

In conclusion, I underscore the following points. In order to persuasively conceptualise the set of the RM's political strategies, it was necessary to distinguish analytically between different fields of action and, accordingly, between different sets of the game that shaped the actions of the movement. This spatial differentiation of several distinctive political fields characterised by distinctive political strategies was accompanied by an analysis of the temporal development in the movement's strategy. While the spatial differentiation showed that the organisation acted at several different levels of policy-making and it would therefore be impossible to grasp the logic of its action by focusing solely on the interaction between the level of international and domestic politics, the

temporal dimension of analysis stressed the dynamic character of political interactions and thus questioned the validity of theoretical approaches based on a static notion of a domestic structure. It is the changing configuration of forces within a given field, rather than a motionless domestic structure, that determines the scope of access to the policy-making process. Indeed, it took only several weeks in 1998 to open the hitherto closed institutional structure of the Czech political system to the claims of environmentalists. The change in the set of involved actors transformed the general rules of the game played in the Czech political field. Change was also observed when a new set of actors employing new strategies entered the game in 2000.

The evidence demonstrates that it was the transformations of particular fields of interaction that shaped the relevant actors' responses to each others' action in the game that evolved around the power-station issue. In the next section, the notion of field is explicitly connected to its intellectual origins — the social theory of Marc Steinberg and the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. However, this article does not intend to develop a new grand theory. I offer tentative answers to some of the problems of the research on transnational relations that do not constitute a full-fledged theory, but only a tool kit informed by several intellectual sources. Therefore, I do not develop all the dimensions of Bourdieu's complex social theory; I pick up on one concept devised by him and utilise it for purposes different from the concept's original usage. Nevertheless, I claim that the notion of field is not only a suitable tool for spatial and temporal conceptualisation of political action, but is also well-suited for overcoming the constructivist/rationalist dichotomy in research on transnational relations.

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## ON THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL ACTION

ON THE BASIS OF THE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION I INTEND TO PROPOSE A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK THAT FITS THE COMPLEXITIES OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICS BETTER THAN THE CONVENTIONAL CONCEPTUAL SET USED BY SCHOLARS WORKING ON TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS. This framework grasps the interactions of political actors within the multilevel structure of global politics in a way that can explain both the actors' strategies and the changing contexts of their interactions. The influences of the broader social and political context on political actors' strategies are captured by the notion of political opportunity structure coined by authors working within the policy process approach to social movements (Kriesi *et al.* 1995; Tarrow 1998). According to this approach, it is the shifts and changes in the broader environment of a polity that account for the level of social movements' mobilisation and their ultimate political success: when 'institutional access opens, rifts appear within elites, allies become available, and state capacity for repression declines, challengers find opportunities to advance their claims' (Tarrow 1998:71). However, as subsequently recognised, the approach needed to open itself up to the dynamic dimension of the interactions between power-holders and their challengers; a dimension that was largely overlooked in the original statements of the theory. Therefore, the last attempt to reformulate the approach (McAdam *et al.* 2001) places strong emphasis on the dynamics of political interactions and the inclusion of a social constructivist perspective in the framework. McAdam *et al.* (2001:46) see political actors 'as simultaneously responding to change processes and to each other's actions as they seek to make sense of their situations and to fash-

ion lines of action based on their interpretations of reality.'

There have always been efforts to understand the interpretative and symbolic dimension of contention in the social movements literature. Hence, it has been reiterated that although political actors always interact in a given institutional context that provides them with a definite, though constantly changing, set of opportunities, these opportunities must be perceived, properly framed and creatively appropriated in order to guide the movement's activity. In other words, their meaning must be properly socially constructed in a particular context. In view of that, depending on the concrete conditions of a given struggle the interactions can acquire different meanings for different actors at different moments. It is characteristic of transnational contention that the processes of social construction take place in several different political fields. Apart from the local political field of the target state, there are the fields of other nation-states, the fields developed around intergovernmental organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (O'Brien *et al.* 2000; Císař 2001), the field of the EU (Marks and McAdam 1999; Imig and Tarrow 2000; 2001) and the field of the transnational public sphere formed by various nongovernmental organisations that organise beyond borders (Smith *et al.* 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1998a; 1998b; Evans 2000; Florini 2000; Rucht 2001; Smith 2001).

I propose to conceptualise the action of transnationally acting organisations with the help of the concept of political field. This concept draws on the notion of discursive field defined by Steinberg (1998: 856-8; 1999:748-55) involving the idea to overcome the incommensurability of rationalist and constructivist understandings of action in studies of social movements. The notion of field makes it possi-

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ble to achieve two separate goals — to grasp the logic of political action taking place simultaneously in several independent social contexts, and to formulate an exhaustive account of social action that goes beyond the presently recognised rationalist/constructivist dichotomy. Neither the rationalist model of action based on the notion of strategic action nor the constructivist model of persuasion and social learning fully captures the nature of social and political action. It appears to be more productive to think of social action as taking place within what Steinberg dubs a discursive field.

By invoking Bourdieu's concept of the field (Bourdieu 1991; 1993; 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) in the notion of discursive field, Steinberg presents a persuasive analytical device for conceptualising political interactions that takes into account both the strategic and social (contextual) dimensions of political struggles. Such an understanding preserves Bourdieu's concept of strategy and strategic action that embeds the originally rationalistic notion into a dense texture of social resources and constraints. As Bourdieu (1993:163) himself put it, the field is:

*an independent social universe with its own laws of functioning, its specific relations of force, its dominants and its dominated, and so forth. Put another way, to speak of "field" is to recall that [products of field] are produced in a particular social universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws.*

However, in Steinberg's reading, Bourdieu's rather structural notion undergoes an important reformulation. The structural bias in the original version of the notion of field is replaced by a stress on the results of actors' interaction (Steinberg 1999:748-9; also Spillman 1995:140-1). Political interaction takes place in the conditions charac-

teristic of a particular field, under the logic of discursive fields that is 'fuzzy and transposable, and does not define complex sets of interconnections between specific meanings and values' (Spillman 1995:141). It is the task of interacting actors to (re-)construct different values and meanings into concrete meaningful patterns that determine the strategies of particular actors in a given field. As a result, the social action of a particular agent is not universally driven by self-interest, as rationalism would have it, or determined by a particular norm, as constructivism would have it, but is an innovative or routine response to the character of a particular field of action. Hence, one and the same actor can engage in completely different actions in different fields and it is not *a priori* possible to decide what the action will look like. It is the changing circumstances of the situation that are decisive for the actor's considerations regarding the course of action.

## IN LIEU OF CONCLUSIONS

IN THIS ARTICLE I HAVE SET OUT A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP ON TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS. I have identified several problems in the prevalent approaches in the discipline. The approach based on the notion of domestic structure fails to account for the dynamics of political interactions between local and transnational political actors. It might seem that this shortcoming was remedied by the constructivist turn in the international relations literature. Constructivism has brought to the fore of scholarly attention inherently dynamic processes such as social learning and socialisation. However, the rise of constructivism also brought about a theoretical split between rationalists and constructivists that resulted in an idle debate over the exact meaning of social action. More-

over, constructivists generally underestimated the importance of the strategic behaviour of political actors. My case study demonstrates that political actors typically engage in different types of strategies in order to accomplish their goals. If we want to understand their action, it is futile to determine in advance its mode; rather, it is necessary to understand their particular strategies as they are derived from broader social contexts. Therefore, instead of relying on the standard conceptual tools, I employed the alternative notion of field.

As demonstrated by the case study, it is often insufficient to focus only on two levels of politics — the domestic and the international — as researchers of transnational relations tend to do. There may be many interactions in numerous different fields incorporated in one political campaign; therefore, it is vital to have a concept that helps recognise the oft-complicated spatial organisation of a particular political game. Although the notion of multilevel governance is long established in international relations, it substantially differs from the multilevel structure of fields proposed in this article. Unlike the former, the latter is able to grasp political conflicts that are taking place at different levels of global politics. As a result, it is well-suited for understanding the power asymmetries and the changing configurations of power that determine the success of particular political agents. All in all, by attaching great importance to the changes in power relations among relevant actors, the notion of field can capture the temporal development of their interactions in addition to explaining the ultimate results.

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## NOTES:

ONDŘEJ ČISAŘ is International Policy Fellow at the Open Society Institute, Budapest.

ADDRESS: Ondřej Čisár, Open Society Institute, Nádor u. 11, 1051 Budapest, Hungary [E-mail: cisar@policy.hu].

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1 The article's approach intends to grasp the logic of action of organisations that act transnationally and thus applies not only to transnational actors such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International, but to originally "local" actors that became connected to a transnational network.

2 In research on social movements, these notions were used and ultimately interlinked in order to achieve a goal that is essentially similar to the goal of this article, namely to understand the dynamics of political action in different social contexts. See Steinberg (1998; 1999) and McAdam *et al.* (2001).

3 For reviews of the recent approaches and contributions, see Adler (1997), Checkel (1998), Ruggie (1998), Finnemore and Sikkink (2001).

4 Children of the Earth is a Czech environmental non-governmental organisation established in 1989.

5 A small-scale blockade was organised in the spring of 2001; however, this does not change anything as regards the trend of development of the movement's strategies.

6 In 2000, a campaign for a referendum on Temelín was organised by a coalition of non-governmental organisations, including the RM. Although this was the last desperate attempt to mobilise local resistance against the power station, it does not question the fact that since 1999 domestic opposition against the power station has been gradually retreating.

7 Indeed, while in 1999 grants provided by the Upper-Austrian Platform against Nuclear Danger made up 19.5 percent of the overall funding of the movement, in 2000 funds provided by this organisation covered just 3.1 percent of the movement's revenues. Hence, there

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has been a substantial relative decrease although this grew by 68.5 percent between 1999 and 2000 (Annual Report 1999; 2000).  
was partly caused by a substantial increase of the total sum of the organisation's revenues. Total revenues

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