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Negotiating sustainability
Exploring translations of the idea to account for externalities in business

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Abstract

More and more actors in the transnational arena develop approaches to translate the vague phenomenon sustainability into more economic terms in order to make it easier manageable for business. Many of these approaches are based on the traditional economic concept of externalities. But although the basic idea is the same in all of them, it is materialized in different ways. This research explores differences in the translations of eight organizations, and the factors that influenced these translation processes. In semi-structured interviews different perspectives and experiences were explored, and further backed up by documentary research. Our findings include that the translations are both dependent on the respective organizational context as well as the social context and institutional embeddedness of these organizations. Further, we suggest that herein it can be distinguished between two types of organizations - smaller disruptive and larger established organizations. Moreover, we argue that notwithstanding the differences in their translations, the organizations benefit each other by carrying the idea to account for externalities further and inducing macro level change by taking certain roles in the transnational governance system.

Keywords: translation, transnational governance, accounting, externalities, travel of ideas, legitimacy, institutional frames
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“An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.”
- Oscar Wilde

1 Introduction

The vague and blurry term of sustainability permeates the business world more and more. Recognizing that unlimited growth cannot happen within a limited system and the current economic system is about to burst the planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009), concerns increase whether we are still able to meet the needs of all members of our society and the ones of future generations. Nevertheless, when it comes to how to understand the term sustainability, the opinions diverge significantly. First having been defined in the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) on a rather broad societal basis, the phenomenon seems to become increasingly detached from any harmonized definition. A meanwhile unlimited number of actors on a transnational level engage in the discussion. Breaking with the concise statement “The business of business is business” (Friedman, 1970) that has described the purpose of business for decades, the idea that business has to take responsibility for its impacts becomes increasingly prevalent.

At the same time the prevalence of regulation as well as of monitoring and auditing activities is increasing to an extent that our society is eventually perceived as an ‘audit society’ (Power, 1997). Following the premise ‘what gets measured gets managed’, furthermore measurement gains more and more importance. So Bell and Morse (2008) state “the obvious approach is to deal with the world in manageable bits” and “allied to [this] reductionism is a common perception that scientists, policy-makers and others are obsessed with quantification” (p. 41). Herein, measurement is spreading to all parts of our society, and “efforts are made to modify measurement systems to accommodate greater complexity and sensitivity, at the same time as they are extended to new domains and objects” (Power 2004, p. 775). This emergence of measurability and accountability is also taking place in the domain of sustainability. As businesses are hold accountable for their impacts on environment and society, it becomes necessary to ‘manage’ sustainability, or further to include it in external reporting in order to
gain legitimacy. But how to translate the vague phenomenon sustainability into economic terms?

More and more actors in a transnational arena engage in developing approaches to make sustainability more manageable, more practical in business. These approaches are often based on the traditional economic concept of externalities. Van den Bergh (2010) describes the notion of externalities as “the idea that human interactions or interdependencies extend beyond formal markets characterized by prices and exchange” (p. 2048), in which the researcher adopts a system perspective on business. The concept of externalities itself is almost as old as economics and can be traced back to the work of Marshall (1890) who dealt with the difference between internal and external economies of scale in production (Baumgärtner and Quaas, 2010b). These ideas were later on translated to welfare economics (Pigou, 1912; Pigou, 1920) as well as to the context of environment and resources (e.g. Viner, 1931; Meade, 1952). This resulted in a broad amount of conceptions of externalities, ranging from a wide to a narrow focus, from origin-focused to consequence-focused perspectives (Baumgärtner and Quaas, 2010b). Recently the usage of the concept of externalities has also become more prevalent in the field of sustainability. The constant attempt of translating sustainability into economics and business has even resulted in a new research field called ‘sustainability economics’ (Baumgärtner & Quaas, 2010). Herein, externalities are often described as positive and negative impacts of business activities on environment and society. The internalization of externalities, or rather the creation of positive externalities, as van den Bergh (2010) claims, is supposed to be consistent with sustainability. Nevertheless, there is still a discourse in this field (Baumgärtner and Quaas, 2010a; Van den Bergh, 2010; Bartelmus, 2010; Baumgärtner and Quaas, 2010b).

There are more and more actors in a transnational arena – such as non-profit organizations, standard-setters, international organizations, business representatives and governments – that pick up the idea to account for externalities in business in order to translate sustainability to business. However, although all organizations commence from the idea to account for externalities in business, the idea is materialized in an unlimited number of different approaches. Apart from the academic discourse about externalities as outlined above, also in practice the idea seems not just to be diffused unchanged, but rather translated to different contexts. Dealing with how ideas travel, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) argue: “More likely than not, it is the same ideas which materialize in similar organizations around the same
Building on translation theory, they try to understand how ideas are carried forward, and how local action can turn into global practice. This concept has already been applied for sustainability related ideas in more recent studies (Stenberg, 2007; Mukhtarov, 2014; Helin & Babri, 2014). Before, also Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) adopted this work, which was initially focused on the travel of management ideas to a transnational governance context, in order to explain how governance emerges out of the interaction and institutional embeddedness of its actors. This work is of particular interest when it comes to the field of sustainability, as being mainly regulated in a transnational governance system.

Building on these theoretical repertories and adopting them for the idea of accounting for externalities in business, we are interested in the emergence of all its different translations, and the processes behind that shape, transform and reproduce the latter. We want to understand what leads to all these different translations, considering the organizations both as carriers of the idea and as actors in a transnational governance system. How has the idea of accounting for externalities in business been translated to different contexts? And how are these translations to be seen in a transnational governance system? In order to explore these research questions, we looked into different organizations within the transnational governance system that somehow engaged in the idea of accounting for externalities in business. We examined how the idea in each organization emerged, was translated and carried forward, and what factors influenced the translation process. In the next section, we review the existing literature repertoires on transnational governance and translation theory. In the third section, we outline our methodological approach as well as the process of data collection and analysis. In the fourth section we present the collected empirical data by first introducing the individual organizations and afterwards elaborating on them as actors in a transnational governance system. In the fifth section we explore the differences between the translations and try to make sense out of these differences by reflecting them towards their organizational as well as social contexts. The sixth section discusses the findings on the higher level in a transnational governance context, and explores how the idea to account for externalities is carried forward and how change is induced on a macro level. The seventh section draws a conclusion and outlines the limitations of the study.
2 Theoretical Framework

Taking the idea of accounting for externalities in business and considering its increasing prevalence in a transnational arena, the question arises how this idea has come to spread in all its different materializations and increasingly moves to the core of the sustainability discourse. The vague phenomenon sustainability is subject to transnational governance consisting of a seemingly unlimited amount of different international organizations, national and transnational standard-setters, non-profit initiatives and business associations, rather than being ruled by governmental regulation. Taking a transnational governance perspective and understanding how this system works, could therefore help to understand how an idea such as the one of accounting for externalities is carried forward within our society. In the following, first the nature of the transnational governance arena is explored, second, literature on translation theory and organizational change is reviewed, and third, these two repertories are combined in order to prepare the ground for examining how the idea of accounting for externalities is translated and carried forward within a transnational governance field.

2.1 The nature of transnational governance

2.1.1 Transnational governance and its actors

Over the last decades, regulation in our globalized world has exploded (Ayres and Braithwaite 1992). Beside rule-making, in particular monitoring and auditing activities have expanded, as supposed to create legitimacy in a society that is increasingly shaped by distrust (Power, 1997). But in this, the former prevalence of governmental regulation has more and more shifted to a complex transnational governance system in which different actors strive for attention. The role of governments in these processes cannot be considered as taken-for-granted anymore (Rose and Miller 1992; Kohler-Koch, 1996; Moran, 2002). Rather governance is emerging out of networks that mobilize with the intention to tackle arising issues (Hancher and Moran, 1989). Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) deal with the question how transnational governance is emerging and transforming, describing it as ‘in the making’ and as a constant process of reordering. Herein, rather than seeing state actors as the prevalent regulating entities, multiple and soft actors shape the transnational governance, such as non-profit organizations, international organizations, standard-setters and corporate actors. In a transnational arena, all of them are struggling for attention and power, but also
interacting in complex, dense and multidirectional processes. Emphasizing interdependence and entanglement, Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) state that these actors “converge across fluid boundaries in the way they structure themselves, connect with others and pursue their interests” (p. 4). Thus, they define the term transnational – as opposing to global – implicating blurred boundaries, where territorial grounds and regulatory boundaries diverge. In order to understand how this complex transnational governance system works, it is of great interest to understand how its multiple actors interact and “emerge, construct or transform themselves in order to play the new governance game” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 7).

### 2.1.2 Institutional embeddedness

Nevertheless, considering how these actors interact is not sufficient in order to understand how transnational governance emerges. Rather, these “flows, connections and dynamics” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 13) cannot be seen without the institutional context they are embedded in. Bringing in a dimension from institutional theories, actors, their interactions and governance processes are permeated by cultural and institutional frames (Meyer, 1996; March, 1981). But at the same time, also transnational governance continuously shapes these frames. Thus, cultural and institutional frames are in a constant mutual interplay with governance actors (Meyer et al. 1997). Beside national frames influencing transnational governance actors and processes, further, transnational pressures grow, like the increasing prevalence of multinationals, intensified competition, or the increasing number of transnational regulation, and influence national frames (Djelic and Quack, 2003).

### 2.2 Translation in organizational change

Building on the nature of transnational governance, in the following we want to go deeper into literature on organizational change in order to understand how ideas are carried forward within our society. There is an extensive literature repertoire that tries to explain organizational change with the continuous translation of ideas and their institutionalization. As proceeding from a micro actor level, this perspective can support in exploring how the idea to account for externalities in business has come to spread in all its different translations without a top down action such as governmental regulation.
2.2.1 Micro and macro worlds

In social sciences quite often the distinction between micro and macro is applied, which suggests the existence of two worlds - the micro world consisting of individuals, either persons or organizations, and the macro world consisting of actors such as states, societies or markets – both of them being in a constant loop (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996). Opposing to this, Callon and Latour (1981) argue that there is only one social world, and that no macro actors exist. Rather micro actors create networks that are perceived as macro actor once having gained a certain stability (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996, referring to Callon and Latour, 1981). Similar, Orlikowski (1996) talks about “situated micro-level changes that actors enact over time as they make sense of and act in the world” (p. 91). This also relates to the notion of transnational governance as elaborated on above: all processes happen on a micro level between micro actors, rather than on an abstract macro level. This means, changes on a macro level have to be explained through examining micro actors that form the macro world. Relating this to organizational change, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) talk about a collective apparatus of sense-making, and change as “a result of a blend of intentions, random events and institutional norms, as opposed to the idea of change as the result of strategic choice or environmental influence” (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996, p. 8, referring to Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). Thus, when it comes to exploring the idea of accounting for externalities in business and how it materialized in different ways in our society, organizations as actors in a micro world have to be considered in order to explain macro change.

2.2.2 Translation versus diffusion

But between these micro actors, how do ideas spread and are carried forward, eventually resulting in macro level change? Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) state that ideas do not flow spontaneously but are rather an “active social process of translation” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 16). Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) approach the question how similar ideas emerge in different organizations at the same time (referring to Zucker, 1977; March and Olsen, 1983; Forssell, 1989; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), and further how local action can turn into institutionalized practices on a global scale. Building on the image of “myriad of ideas floating in the translocal organizational thought-world”, they argue that “certain ideas catch and are subsequently translated into substance” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 16). This concept of an active social translation process can be found similar in the terms
of hybridization (Djelic, 1998), performative processes (Sevón, 1996), editing (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996) or creolization (Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002) (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). The term translation is based on Latour (1986) who states that "the spread in time and place of anything - claims, orders, artefacts, goods - is in the hands of people" (p. 267), emphasizing the richness of meanings related with the term translation. This concept underlines the importance of the people that carry these ideas, and how these people might influence how the idea is translated in each situation. Thus, it is the micro actors that carry ideas forward, while adapting them to their particular needs and interests. This opposes the concept of diffusion (Rogers, 1983; Djelic, 1998; March 1999), where ideas are just spread without being modified on their travel and where the travel depends on the inherent qualities of the idea as created by the initiator. Here Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) also argue that translation is a continuous process of negotiation that makes solutions fit to problems. This is also in line with the notion of continuous change in literature on organizational change, as opposed to episodic change (Weick and Quinn, 1999). It is built on the assumption “that change is a continuous process of translation” in “a setting where there is continuous adoption and editing [...] of ideas that bypass the apparatus of planned change” (Weick and Quinn 1999, p. 376).

2.2.3 Institutionalization

However, in this continuous notion of organizational change through translation and materialization of ideas, how do certain ideas eventually become institutionalized? How do ideas become established on a broader basis? Traditional institutionalist theories are criticized for perceiving stability as the norm, instead of change. In supporting a “new institutionalism” Powell and DiMaggio (1991) bring in the construction of meaning as taking place in organizations. Yet the importance of change is perceived as underestimated (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996). Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) draw to the conception of organizations as “a combination of change and stability [which] assumes paradoxicality of organizational life” (p. 5). Thus, organizational change is to be considered from a constructionist point of view. Relating back to the micro and macro worlds as outlined above, it is the micro actors that create change and form collectives in adopting similar ideas (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) conceptualize the structuration of organizational fields and talk about field consciousness where isomorphism leads to exchange between organizations in one field and to the emergence of collectives (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Further, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) contrast institutionalization with fashionability,
where both should be seen as interconnected and interdependent. While the first embodies temporality, the latter embodies stability:

“Much as fashionability and institutionalization seem to be opposites, one standing for temporality and frivolousness and the other for stability and seriousness, it seems more fruitful to see them as interconnected and interdependent […] Similarly, much as fashion seems to sabotage and threaten established institutions, it is also an institutional playfield: new practices can be tried out and disposed of - or institutionalized, thus revitalizing the existing institutional order.” (p. 25)

When individual ideas are more and more taken up and translated, it can result in collective action and cause a fashion or wave. On the one hand, this fashion could be seen as a threat to an established organization because of its vitality to change institutionalized processes and orders. On the other hand, fashion could also be seen as an institutional playfield to try out new practices and to revitalize established institutional order. This relates to the definition of Callon and Latour (1981) in which power is the stability resulting from networks, rather than being a predetermined attribute or potential of an actor. Actors form networks which are perceived as macro actors as soon as they gain stability (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996). In this way, eventually local action can be established on a global level, and turn an idea into institution - therefore, micro action can lead to macro change. Considering the large amount of approaches engaging in the idea to account for externalities to make sustainability more manageable or measureable for business, reflecting on this theory seems inherently interesting.

2.3 Ideas in a transnational governance arena

To explore this phenomenon we want to use these theoretical repertoires on transnational governance and the translation of ideas and examine how ideas are translated and carried forward within a transnational governance system. Translation theory initially aimed at explaining how ideas spread in our society and are adapted to the needs and interest of the carrieres on their way. In their concept travel of ideas Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) built on exploring how management ideas travel. Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) argue that this approach of active social translation can be as well applied for other ideas – such as those shaping governance frames and practices. They state that existing literature in this area has “contributed to our knowledge about carriers of global models and blueprints” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 14), while moving towards a world society and a partly homogenization of frames. Nevertheless, they state that “these studies […] focus mostly on
how global models and blueprints are diffused, potentially shaping localized discourse and/or structures and activities. We learn less on the construction and negotiation of global models. We also lack understanding of actual processes and mechanisms of diffusion and local reception” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 14). They argue, that this diffusion does not explain the full picture as the carriers of these models are likely to use their power to incorporate own interests into the diffusion, and thus, shape the contents towards their own interest. Exploring the space between homogenization and variation further, they draw to the micro-mechanisms that make frames and ideas travel. While on the one hand, we are moving towards a world society where frames converge towards homogenization, on the other hand these frames and ideas diverge through translation to different contexts, eventually ending up in increasing variety. This also seems applicable for the purpose of this study - to explore how the idea of accounting for externalities has been translated to different contexts and what factors influence these translation processes. Rather than being approached from a governmental perspective, the idea is carried forward by an immense number of different organizations within the transnational arena - international organizations, non-profit organizations, standard-setters, business associations or individuals. Herein, it seems not just to be diffused, but rather translated to different contexts, resulting in a humongous amount of different approaches. Commencing from the theoretical framework as built in this section, in the following we explore differences in the translations of the idea to account for externalities, we try to make sense out of the differences between these translations, and examine what the implications for a sustainability transition are.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research philosophy and theory development

Translation theory and continuous organizational change are inherently related to an interpretivist ontology, as both assume the “chaotic primacy of flux, movement, fluidity and change” (Saunders et al. 2016, p. 141). In this, the prevalent scientific paradigm of positivism is questioned, which considers reality as objective and measurable and knowledge as based on revealed causality and predictions (Saunders et al., 2016). Instead, interpretivism emphasizes the existence of multiple realities as socially constructed and in constant flux, and the importance of meanings and interpretations (Saunders et al., 2016). Eagleton argues that
“there is no such thing as truth; everything is a matter of rhetoric and power; all viewpoints are relative; [and] talk of ‘facts’ or ‘objectivity’ is merely a specious front for the promotion of specific interests” (Eagleton 1991, p. 165, referring to Cunliffe, 2011). Cunliffe (2011) describes meaning, sensemaking and knowledge as “relative to the time, place and manner in which they are constructed” (p. 656). This perspective of social constructionism builds on “partially shared meanings and realities [...] dependent on people’s interaction of the events that occur around them” (Saunders et al. 2016, p. 568), what Kuhn (1962) would call a paradigm. Assuming that there are multiple truths, meaning and sensemaking is relevant to explain the different relations and interactions. This applies especially for transnational governance which creates meaning and change in a continuously evolving manner and which can be seen as dependent on shared meaning.

Compared to positivist research, an interpretivist ontology is not limited to strict deductive approaches in theory development, but supports inductive approaches that enable theory generation and building, or modification (Saunders et al., 2016). These allow to explore phenomena and to identify patterns and themes in the process of data collection, rather than just being usable to evaluate propositions and hypotheses. These inductive approaches can be considered as supporting our research on the travel of ideas, as the process of translation is one that is continuously emerging. Still, in the following we commence from the theoretical framework as outlined above, in order to be able to root our research in the existing body of literature. Thus, we want to apply an abductive approach, moving back and forth between theory and data (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.2 Methodological choice and research strategy

Aiming at exploring how the idea of accounting for externalities in business is translated to different contexts, it is important to consider how actors within the transnational governance system make sense of what they perceive as reality. In this research we took an explorative approach. Starting with a rather broad focus and narrowing down during the research progress enables to discover the current situation of how actors think about the idea to account for externalities, and then to use coding and categorization methods throughout to detect patterns and relationships of the collected data. In a multi-method qualitative approach we pursued two research strategies. First, different organizations operating as actors within transnational governance were interviewed. In semi-structured interviews we wanted to explore the views and experiences from different actors, who engaged in the idea of
accounting for externalities, and to gain insights in how it was translated to their particular contexts. In particular in a subjectivist and interpretivist ontology, this type of interview is useful to “explore different meanings, perceptions, and interpretations of organizational members” (Cunliffe 2011, p. 659). Taking a flexible perspective and having a conversation rather than a structured interview generates qualitative data and gives the possibility to leave room to explore relevant information by going more in-depth into certain topics. Second, additional documentary research was conducted where necessary in order to widen the range of data sources. The main purpose of using these types of data was to expand the scope of information to reason, validate and enrich the findings from the conducted interviews.

3.3 Data collection and data analysis

During April and May 2018 we conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 individuals working in 12 different organizations, either face to face or via conference calls (Appendix I). Out of the 13 interviews we selected 8 as relevant cases for this research. The other five interviews were used to gain insights into the influence of macro level developments. The sampling was not limited to a certain sector or location, as it was rather our intention to obtain a portfolio of organizations that provides as rich data for our study as possible. Thus, the main criteria for the selection of the organizations was their engagement in the idea of accounting for externalities in business, either through the promotion of a particular approach or its application. Herein, we tried to cover as many different perspectives and approaches as possible, such as small and large consultancies or accountants, start-ups and multinationals. The selection of the individuals within these organizations was based on their expertise, position and related active participation in shaping and engaging in the idea. The duration of each interview was about one hour. All the interviews were recorded after having asked for permission. Both authors attended all interviews and took notes during the interviews. The recordings were transcribed in its most important parts within one week.

The conversations followed a one-page outline with open questions (Appendix II), addressing the background and motivation of the individual, their role within the organization and their participation in developing and enacting the idea of accounting for externalities. Moreover, the outline contained questions on how the idea emerged within the organization, how it developed and changed over time, how it has been passed on to other actors, as well as on external factors influencing this, such as: When did you first come in touch with the idea of accounting for externalities? What was your first image? How did it start? What is your
motivation to work with that idea? How would you describe [approach]? How does it work? How has the [approach] changed or developed over time? In your opinion, what factors influenced or shaped the development? How do you communicate [approach]? What are the challenges/opportunities to promote [approach]? In addition to these interviews, we studied complementary materials provided by the organizations such as homepages, brochures and other publications.

During and after the data collection, several discussions and brainstorm sessions helped to get a holistic point of view, to find patterns in this larger amount of data and to develop insights. This method of content analysis has in particular been used to explain developments in the sustainability business field (Buhr and Grafström, 2007; Morsing and Lager, 2007; Windell, 2006). Grafström and Windell (2011) describe this method as one where “researchers establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category” (p. 21, referring to Silverman, 2001). In order to make sense of the materials, the data gained from interviews and documentary research was reflected in its chronological development, starting from the emergence of the idea and moving through its translations process. Further, it seemed relevant to us to interpret the different views, make sense out of them, and then work out patterns that explain the construction of different realities. Thus, we were rather explorative before starting with the coding of different themes. The data was structured based on similarities and differences between the different translations, and further reflected towards factors that could explain these similarities and differences. We continuously moved back and forth between literature and the collected empirical data. This abductive approach enabled us to derive meaning from spoken and textual words (Walton & Macagno, 2010), and directly relate it to our chosen theoretical framework. Clustering the data into patterns enabled us to structure the unknown and make sense of the different narratives.
4 Empirics

In the following section the empirical data as collected in interviews with eight organizations and from additional documents is presented. First, the organizations and their approaches are introduced. Second, as all these organizations can be considered as actors within a transnational governance system, it is elaborated on how these organizations perceive themselves as embedded in and acting within this transnational arena.

4.1 Introduction to the organizations

Organization 1 – True Price

The organization True Price is a social enterprise based in Amsterdam that “aims to contribute to the creation of an economy that creates value for all [...] by helping organizations quantify, value and improve their impact on society” (True Price, 2018). True Price strives to assist multinationals, SMEs, NGOs and governmental organizations in getting “insights into their impacts and their associated risks and opportunities” (True Price, 2018). Founded in 2011, the organization has developed several concepts since it started, such as the True Price or the Integrated Profit and Loss. Michel Scholte, co-founder of the organization, is sociologist by training and describes himself as “fascinated by societal patterns [...] and social systems”. Tracing the roots of his motivation back to his childhood years, he was triggered by the book “The End of Poverty” by Jeffrey D. Sachs (2005) where he “was really caught by this concept of this pragmatic way to reduce poverty, using microeconomic models”. When he met Adrian de Groot Ruiz, also co-founder, both saw a need for a more systematic change in economics. Being engaged in a Think Tank to find possible solutions during the Rio Conference in 2011, True Price was founded. During the interview our focus was on the True Price concept which tries to define the ‘true’ price of a product, which “reflects the visible as well as the hidden costs of its production, so called externalities. It is defined as the sum of the retail price and the unpaid environmental and social costs, like water use and underpayment” (True Price, 2018). The organization saw the need to develop an integrated approach as “the concept of externalities [...] hasn’t seriously [been] worked out into methods” (Co-founder, True Price). At the time the organization started, methods concerned only environmental, but not social externalities. Neither they had a “consistent methodological foundation” (Co-founder, True Price). In the beginning, True Price was
perceived as controversial and considered as technically unfeasible - to define what a price was degraded as communism. In addition, it was not understood why things should be more expensive. But this changed over time. Being rejected in the very beginning, in the meanwhile the approach has become a “concept that is taken up by the largest institutions in the world [and] considered as the missing piece in a lot of system transformation [...] ranging across sectors” (Co-founder, True Price). Framing the approach from an opportunity perspective, is seen as a driver in the promotion of the idea and in creating awareness about possible opportunities to create additional value for business, society and environment.

Organization 2 – B Lab

B Lab is a non-profit organization that “serves a global movement of people using business as a force for good™” (B Lab, 2018). B Lab was started in the US in 2007 and became an internationally recognized certificate to verify social and environmental performance. Joey van den Brink is community builder at B Lab Europe in Amsterdam and identifies with the vision “to change the way how business operates”. As he encountered “a wide variety of concepts used in sustainability” he sees “a need for one common nominator”. The B Corp certification is based on a so called ‘Impact Assessment’ where companies have to go through to measure their impact. It is an online tool that includes a three step approach that is used by approximately 42,000 businesses. As the first step, companies can evaluate in a series of questions how to build a better business. Second, they can compare their performance or get a report with a more holistic view on their score. The final step provides practical guidelines to create an improvement plan for the individual business (B Lab, 2018). The impact assessment includes a qualitative and quantitative point system approach that covers five areas within a company: 1) governance structures, 2) human resources, 3) community engagement 4) environmental impact and 5) alignment with defined impact models. In these fields, solely the positive impacts of a business are considered. This positive framing is considered as a key factor for their approach to be picked up by business and travel on: “Focusing on the positive you create a ‘spill-over’, which results in another thing that is positive” (Community Builder, B Lab). As B Lab also tries to connect organizations, the community effect is supposed to contribute to resulting in a movement towards the organization’s mission. B Lab continuously works on improving its ‘Impact Assessment’. On the one hand, this is done in a top-down approach in collaboration with experts who monitor recent developments within the transnational governance system to ensure that their standards
are up to date with global developments. On the other hand, there is also a bottom-up dimension where “everybody who is working with the impact assessment [...] can provide feedback [...] to make sure that the questions also apply for example local context or current reality” (Community Builder, B Lab). This feedback is supposed to ensure context applicability.

Organization 3 – Original Beans

The premium chocolate company Original Beans, based in Amsterdam and founded in 2008, is operating in the cocoa sector while focusing on high-quality products. Aiming at an entirely sustainable business model, the organization managed to “protect endangered wildlife, triple farmer incomes, built one of the world’s first climate-positive supply chains, and offer certified garden-compostable packaging” (Original Beans, 2018). The founder Philipp Kauffmann was formerly working for governmental organizations and NGOs and looks upon a family tradition in nature conservation for more than 250 years. Aiming at “more inclusiveness of doing business” (Founder, Original Beans), the organization strives to create a way of doing business throughout the entire supply chain, from farmers to end customers including society and environment. When starting the business, the founder looked into more integrated approaches to account for externalities. However, having tried to calculate the fair price of a chocolate bar and promoting it as such to customers, the idea was discarded as it was not successful on the market: “We thought it would be a good idea [...] The bar was too expensive and didn’t sell.” (Founder, Original Beans). Seeking advice from experts in the practice of impact accounting, including accountancy firms, he decided not to apply a formalized concept as too complex and costly, but rather focus on the own understanding in order to internalize externalities of their business:

“True cost for me is restorative. [...] You take something out and it restores itself [...] Then you take [...] not the limit of the absolute poverty or poverty line because those are two UN defined lines. But you take what one would think would be a decent minimum wage.” (Founder, Original Beans)

Thus, the organization approaches the question of externalities from the other side - for instance, in asking how much farmer actually need in cash to have a decent living. In this way, the organization tries to internalize externalities in the fields as follows: wages, gender, soil, climate, waste and health. So the founder argues, “this is how you can built what a true
price actually should be” (Founder, Original Beans). Further, based on the experience gained in the unsuccessful attempts in the beginning, the organization focuses on the customers’ product experience and quality rather than on price conversation. Just then customers are willing to pay a fair price for the high quality.

**Organization 4 - Social Impact Ventures**

Social Impact Ventures is based in Amsterdam and founded in 2015. The organization describes itself as “hands-on impact investment partner, providing Dutch social enterprises with financial resources and active support to help to achieve their social mission” (Social Impact Ventures, 2018). Believing in the power of entrepreneurship to address societal challenges and to drive inclusive and sustainable growth, the organization supports entrepreneurs in approaching such challenges, while creating “healthy and fair investor returns” (Social Impact Ventures 2018). Laura Cramer, Investment Manager at Social Impact Ventures and part of the founding team, is in particular focusing on improving companies impact measurement. Having a background in finance and having developed an impact research project in Cameroon, she sought for “a way to combine these two worlds in [the] [...] philosophy of this fund [...]”. In her opinion, it “should be common sense [...] not focusing only on making lots of money and helping companies to grow, but helping companies grow that have a solution for societal issues”. Considering impacts as an “integral aspect of doing an investment” (Investment Manager, Social Impact Ventures), the organization tries to create key metrics in order to measure and monitor the societal impacts of an investment. Before deciding on an investment, the organization strives to evaluate the key issue a client company wants to solve and connect it to an output or outcome of the company in order to track a constant development, such as “to revenue, or products sold, or services provided and preferably even outcome (e.g. CO2 emissions avoided, increased wellbeing)” (Investment Manager, Social Impact Ventures), which is based on the logic framework of the Theory of Change. In doing so, the organization wants to avoid that clients have to put a lot of effort into tracking and measuring progress on a daily basis. Herein, the impacts are quantified where possible, in order to facilitate decision-making, but never monetized as this would imply “lots of assumptions” (Investment Manager, Social Impact Ventures).
The organization Manifesto, based in Amsterdam, focuses on business coaching as well as accounting and administration in a new approach. Erik Friedeberg founded the organization in 2016, which aims at “providing accountant services in an easy and understandable way to give entrepreneurs [and companies] tools [...] to become more modern and more sustainable” (Founder, Manifesto). After working in business coaching for 15 years he realized: “I wanted to do something else, something new”. Being passionate about supporting entrepreneurs, he talked about his two dreams: first, “to make as much entrepreneurs as possible successful” by focussing on business, societal impact and personal development, and second, “to change the financial sector, especially the accountant sector” to lead by example the way to empower entrepreneurs and SMEs for a more sustainable business where “money is not only the goal, but only a means”. Currently, the organization is about developing a tool, called ‘Scale of Meaningfulness’ to path the way “toward[s] a new kind of valuation for companies and organizations” (Founder, Manifesto). This tool is based on a questionnaire to measure “deeper values” (Founder, Manifesto) within an organization. It provides a holistic view on different levels by taking answers from entrepreneurs, employees, customers and suppliers in consideration. These insights are evaluated and reviewed to define an overall score from minus 10 to plus 10. The approach focuses on values and strongly opposes monetization, as in moving towards sustainability “money will not make it good again” (Founder, Manifesto). Herein, the organization experienced in particular resistance from the conservative financial and accounting sector, and perceived them as feeling threatened by their work. The organization is proactively seeking for market insights and feedback about the current approach during podcasts and talking to "experts in the financial sector from the old and the new economy" (Founder, Manifesto). Moreover, the organization talks about supporting collaborations, naming actors in social banking, like Triodos, traditional banking, such as the Dutch National Bank, academia, like the Technical University of Eindhoven or the University of Gent. Also, a conference is planned to bring people together and gain “more developing power” (Founder, Manifesto). Further, some difficulties in promoting the approach were described, as entrepreneurs were hesitant due to lacking experience.
The internationally operating service company KPMG describes its aim as "to build on member firms' successes thanks to [their] clear vision, maintained values, and our people" (KPMG, 2018). In 2012, the sustainability team of KPMG Nederlands developed the True Value methodology that is supposed to “[provide] a way for executives to better understand externalities and the opportunities and risks of internalization and to take more informed decisions that help build both corporate and societal value” (KPMG, 2014, p. 5). Frits Klaver, sustainability manager at KPMG Nederland, who was involved in the development of the True Value methodology, has a background in chemical engineering with a focus on sustainable energies and experienced a contradiction between technological solutions and action taken. In his opinion, the “benefits [of sustainability] don’t make sense to decision-makers, because [these] […] ‘GDP guys’ talk money” and “many companies still think that sustainability costs money. […] This perception has to change”. The True Value methodology was developed in collaboration with a client. The CEO of a multinational company was concerned about the negative impacts of his business on society and the resulting risks for financial value creation, and thus, approached the organization. As the organization had already worked with Social Cost Benefit Analysis at the time, the idea of accounting for externalities in some form was not “completely new, but what is new is that we say we look at the three areas – social, environmental and economics” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Developing the approach involved many stakeholders including from the business and academia which led to several discussions and resulted in a rather long development process. The methodology comprises three steps: assessment of ‘true’ earnings by identifying positive and negative externalities, understanding of future earnings and risk, and creation of corporate and societal value (KPMG, 2014). Furthermore, the focus is on creating value for client businesses and be solution oriented to show companies to “get out of the risk areas and think about opportunities” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Confronting potential clients with the concept of externalities has changed over the last years. In the beginning "companies are not aware of this whole methodology and this whole way of thinking about externalities" (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Therefore, the organization started to provide seminars to share knowledge in this rather new field of business. In the meanwhile, more and more businesses approach the organization, partly driven by the action of their competitors.
**Organization 7 – ING**

The Dutch ING Group is a banking corporation providing financial services. The multinational is headquartered in Amsterdam and aims at "empowering people to stay a step ahead in life and in business" (ING, 2018). The organization describes itself as a “front runner when talking about integrating sustainability into [their] business” based on their ‘Environmental and Social Risk (ESR) Framework’ (ING, 2013). The interview was conducted with Nishant Parekh, sustainability consultant at ING. His personal interest in the field emerged during the last months of his MBA studies in the Netherlands, when conducting research on materiality in sustainability reporting and exploring “what really matters” from different stakeholder perspectives. The ESR Framework “applies to all business conduct and has been developed to ensure informed decision-making that is consistent with ING’s Values and commitment to provide responsible financial services” (ING 2013, p. 4). The framework restricts activities in defined areas, such as energy, animal welfare, forestry, and screens their customer’s client and its transactions. The ING, tries to minimize environmental and social impacts through financing and evaluates where their greatest impact is. The organization has defined minimum criteria that business have to meet before they are provided with financing. The ING committed to a sustainability strategy integrated into their business model to be a front-runner in their industry. This strategy has been implemented top-down from the board level as well as bottom-up by local teams around the world.

**Organization 8 – WBCSD**

The global organization World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a community of more than 200 multinational businesses from all sectors and major economies, collaborating towards a more sustainable world (WBCSD, 2018). The organization aims at supporting its multinational member companies to become “more successful and sustainable by focusing on the maximum positive impact for shareholder, the environment and societies” (WBCSD, 2018). Matthew Watkins, trained in medicine but later on having shifted to environmental science, is associate at WBCSD and working in the development of the organization’s ‘Redefining Value’ programme. ‘Redefining Value’ aims to “help companies measure and manage risk, gain competitive advantage and seize new opportunities by understanding Environmental, Social and Governance [...] information, and then using it to
inform decision-making and improve corporate reporting” (WBCSD, 2018). To support businesses in measuring their impacts, the organization helped developing the Natural Capital Protocol (NCP) - on behalf of the Natural Capital Coalition and Social and Human Capital Protocol (SCP), which constitute high-level guidances based on business best practices to measure and value the impact and dependency of business on environment and society. The methodology behind the protocols is completely open and dependent on the particular context of the company, talking “about measurements and valuation in terms of qualitative value, or quantitative value, or monetary value, […] there is not a right way to do it or a wrong way to do it” (Associate, WBCSD). Rather different types of valuation are suitable for different kinds of stakeholders. Emphasizing, that many businesses have already developed own sophisticated methodologies and approaches, the focus of the organization is rather on facilitating comparability between different companies in order to support investor decision-making.

4.2 Organizations as actors in transnational governance

The interviewed organizations as introduced above can be considered as actors within a transnational governance system. They do not exist in isolation but rather describe themselves as shaped through constant interaction with other actors. In the following we present data gained from the interviews, on how the eight organizations perceive themselves as acting within this transnational governance system. Herein, we consider the interaction and interrelation with actors and developments in four areas: similar organizations, political and regulatory actors and developments, economic actors and development, as well as civil society actors and developments.

4.2.1 Interaction with similar organizations

All organizations were encountered to seek for interaction and collaborations in different levels, sectors and scope. Both in earlier and later stages, organizations tend to seek for advice on different levels in a broad web of actors, often mentioning their openness: “A lot of people want to help […] People are just joining and just thinking with us.” (Founder, Manifesto). It was considered as a “privilege to work with big organizations from the start” (Co-founder, True Price), emphasizing the importance of continuous collaborations, such as with ISO, NCP, European or UN authorities, in order to “creating some sort of standard” (Co-founder, True Price). Also communities and networks driven by a shared purpose were considered to enable a larger scale and scope of action, pointed out in the metaphor to
"collect all flames which can turn into a big fire" (Community Builder, B Lab). Here it was also pointed out in the statement that different actors “share our dream, but that means, they are also very passionate about talking about this dream, and that helps in encouraging others to join” (Community Builder, B Lab). As a starting point of the translation process, some organizations looked into “more integrated approaches” (Founder, Original Beans), reaching out to larger business consultancies and also to other actors in the multinational business sector that already had experiences in that field. Further on, almost all organizations talked about some kind of continuous feedback process. Some organizations set up a test run, or did pilots with companies that showed interest and “just wanted to do it” (Co-founder, True Price) and apply the approach in practice. Further these organizations also exposed the approaches to critical actors to “have a critical view on the idea” (Co-founder, True Price).

4.2.2 Interaction with political and regulatory arena

As found during the interview, there seems more or less to be a close interrelationship and interdependence between political and regulatory actors and developments and the work of the organizations. First, political and regulatory actors and developments shape the work of the organizations. We found that organizations take up national and transnational regulations and norms in order to gain legitimacy. For instance, they observe developments in international regulations, conventions and standard-setting in order to adapt them as bottom-lines for their own approaches. In particular, when it comes to defining externalities, some organizations referred to international conventions or other institutions, mostly out of the intention to gain legitimacy. Here, for instance, experts were consulted to monitor current developments within transnational governance in order to keep the own standards up to date:

“What we do to make sure that it [the impact assessment] stays up to date, but also that it is credible – that we are not just assessing people based on our own standards, that there is actually something as a certain legitimacy for, or credibility in the market - is we monitor what also happens with other standards of certification parties.” (Community Builder, B Lab)

Also problematizing that the definition of soft terms such as harm could be subject to “endless philosophical discussions”, it was referred to international conventions as “anchor point” (Co-founder, True Price). Opposing to this, others also stated that governmental regulations are often too weak, and thus, sticking rather to own values. But also, the influence of political climate or developments was perceived as determining the success of their
approach. So considered one organization the political climate as a main influencer on the spreading of their approach. Also the role of political action to raise public awareness was emphasizes - as the latter is needed to move the conversation away from a pure business angel. “Any country or market we are in and there is no political support we are just lobbying, right?” (Community Builder, B Lab). But supporting political climate was also seen as strongly dependent on the particular countries and the parties that form the government, which also changes every couple of years. “And sometimes you also need to have a luck [...] that someone gets in to the right position in the right time.” (Community Builder, B Lab). Further, also this was related to the matter of legitimacy. As soon as governments were supporting and spreading an idea, the discussion would be transferred from a business perspective to a more public perspective, and thus, would be more likely to be accepted in society. Further political drivers mentioned, were the regulatory influence of governments in financial markets or developments in public procurement, while considering this development as one that “trickles down to local governments” and also spreading “well beyond the EU” to China or the US (Co-founder, True Price). Also the increasing regulatory action, such as the EU legislation on non-financial reporting or on carbon emission, was perceived as driver, as there is an increasing demand for approaches to manage these. Beside the national political climate and international regulations, also other regulatory drivers within the transnational governance were mentioned. So was stated that “international conventions are key” (Co-founder, True Price), such as the developments in the field of human rights with the OECD guideline. Beside this, above all the SDGs were mentioned as having “set the boundaries” and perceiving them as a “massive driver for the business agenda” (Co-founder, True Price). Here, more and more business are encouraged to engage in the sustainability conversation, which would increase the need for approaches that support business to handle their externalities in practice. It was pointed out that “there is definitely interest for companies to work towards the SDGs” (Community Builder, B Lab), nevertheless emphasizing that this is difficult for businesses as the goals are developed on a macro level, and thus seeing the demand for approaches that translate the goals to metrics.

At the same time the organizations also strive to shape and influence the political and regulatory frames they are operating in. Often it is exactly political developments or events, that act as triggers for the organizations to react and take action. This is not to undermine existing frames or question their role - but rather to prepare the ground for change, as most organizations perceive the nature of governments as rather reactive and inert. Similar as
others, one organization stated: “The government is very reactive, always five years behind”. (Founder, Original Beans). Also, most of them see the data or technical possibilities to measure or assess impacts not as a constraint anymore, but rather deem an implementation on a broader basis to be a “matter of political will” (Co-founder, True Price). Instead, most of the organizations see businesses or NGOs as the frontrunner. In order for a government to change, it was the perception that first enough people or organizations have to demand this change. As the founder of the new accountancy stated:

“I think the government will come at the latest [...] The government will only change if there are enough people that tell them that they have to change.” (Founder, Manifesto)

As soon as the ground is prepared, “suddenly it becomes possible for governments to say: ‘Now we are doing it.’” (Founder, Original Beans). Thus, we found that with their approaches in a way all the organizations strive to path this way for governments and enable change at a broader basis.

4.2.3 Interaction with economic arena

Further, as found in the interviews there seems to be a close relationship between the work of the organizations and economic actors and developments in the transnational arena. First, it was emphasized how economic actors and developments shape the organizations work. Some organizations considered business as the leading force and as the “front-runner” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Especially, SMEs were considered as a driving force behind change: “The smaller [businesses] provide all the trendsetting [...] They push the boundaries.” (Founder, Original Beans). Nevertheless, even though compared to them multinationals were considered to have the larger impact, they were perceived as restricted in their room for manoeuvre as having to take into consideration multiple stakeholders. Among them, in particular the interest of shareholders can collide with sustainable action. So argued different organizations:

“And what is a main limitation for multinationals is that [...] they have to have the discussions with their investors or shareholders [...] that shareholder optimization is no longer the way of moving forward” (Community Builder, B Lab)

“Fundamentally [...] as long as companies have this shareholder value they need to stick to [...] it is very tough for companies to seriously engage in sustainability”. (Co-founder, True Price)
“When it comes down to business, it's only about money, about nothing else. Everything else is irrelevant, ultimately boiled down to a P&L and a balance sheet […] But I think when you would approach the whole discussion from a more true-pricy mindset it come up with totally different conversation [...] Companies [are] often locked in margins and conflicting perceptions from stakeholders.” (Founder, Original Beans)

Also organizations described the challenge that “most companies would like to do the right thing but everybody has shareholders and is responsible for providing value to their shareholders” (Associate, WBCSD). Although having the largest possible impact on both environment and society, it is perceived as questionable if multinationals will take up the idea of a broader value concept in business. Therefore, given this dominance of this current economic frame all interviewed organizations mentioned the importance of business and markets in a sustainability transition, and emphasized the need to approach this transition from a business perspective. Resulting from this, the need for a business language is emphasized in order to implement the idea of accounting for externalities on a broader basis, which is reflected in all the different approaches. Thus, the predominant influence of the economic frame on the translations of the approaches is quite obvious and similar for all the organizations: approaches need to contribute to better decision-making and provide more transparency, accountability and legitimacy. But still, as obvious above, this need for a business language is translated in many different approaches by different organizations. As monitoring and auditing gain more and more importance in order to create legitimacy, accountability and trust (Power, 1997), so does the opinion that “measurability is important” (Sustainability Consultant, ING). As many companies still consider sustainability as additional costs and emphasizing the necessity to have the discussion on a monetary basis: “Benefits does not make sense to decision-makers because those guys talk money” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Nevertheless, in particular, the financial crisis was seen as a driver for this, “because it caused a lack of trust in the old capitalistic structure” and “accelerated the sustainability transformation of businesses” (Community Builder, B Lab) and thus the demand for approaches to manage it. Also here continuous advice is sought, such as through talking to experts in the financial sector and asking for their feedback on the approach.

Second, at the same time the organizations strive to influence these economic actors and development with their work. For instance, it was talked about a “new business rationale”
(Community Builder, B Lab). The organization strive to induce change in the current economic system by motivation more and more business to include sustainability into their businesses and financial considerations. Also the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) was mentioned, as one organization saw its terminology ‘true pricing’ being adopted by the index as one indicator. Developments like these would spread it further, which can eventually result in an increasing demand for concepts and “on getting some sort of standards to achieve an embraced convention for accounting for externalities” (Co-founder, True Price). Even in the more conventional financial markets, shift are observed. So mentioned two organizations the importance of the statement that the CEO of Blackrock made, claiming that in the future the investment fund would focus not only on financial returns but also on a broader societal purpose. Thus, it was argued:

“It shows there is an appetite from an investors perspective in a longer-term [...] But we are still too much focused on the short term” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG)

Also the current state was describes as a “tipping point from that point of view, where sustainability is now also cost-effective” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Soon governmental subsidies would not be needed anymore as companies would have to incentive to gain competitive advantage from acting sustainably.

Seeing obstacles in a development towards sustainable business, it was argued that the current "system is too robust" (Founder, Original Beans). “Ultimately, from outside or from inside we have to break something. Or something is going to break. Something will break, it needs to break. In the past, it was revolutions [...] sometimes it is catastrophes”. (Founder, Original Beans)

4.2.4 Interaction with civil society

Another group of actors within the transnational governance system that were perceived as influencer on the work of the organizations were actors and developments from civil society. An important topic pointed out in this field, was the increasing public awareness about social and environmental issues, such as the limits of our planet and climate change as a driver, as threatening society: “Climate problems are one of the biggest problems facing everybody today” (Associate, WBCSD). And when shifting to a new business rationale “you also need this shift of public perception” (Community Builder, B Lab). Herein, during the past decades,
technological advancements have helped to create awareness about social and environmental concerns. In this context, one interviewee pointed out that one important force is the “extrapolation of information and technology is exponentially growing” (Co-founder, True Price). Technologies enable “cheap” access to data and provide society with global information which supports transparency. Considering the obvious increasing social and environmental “damage done”, this data would ensure that increasingly the “expectations of stakeholders [...] are brought in-sync with the outcomes of markets”. As business is perceived as “the largest contributor” to environmental and social issues, the public creates increasingly pressure on business to act more sustainably, and thus, plays a major role in a sustainability transition in business. But on the other hand, some organizations perceived this public awareness not yet as strong enough. While the technology to develop approaches would be there and thus not the constraint. it is rather perceived as a matter of political will to induce a shift. Further, in order for the idea to work, the awareness of this shift needs to move from business to also the consumers:

“Word of mouth is definitely strong, but since we are a business network, word of mouth is very often mouth of a business to another business mouth. So, it means that the public perception isn’t very much aware of it. And what we want, in terms of also a bigger systemic change is, [that] responsible business is also awarded as a sustainable business. That consumers also prefer your products over non-sustainable counterparts.” (Community Builder, B Lab).

Thus, the necessity for businesses to change the way it operates arises, and increases the demand for approaches to manage this transition:

“There is a need for a system or philosophy which can shape how business is done in the future in such a way that is also contributes to the larger idea we have how we should cope with the resources we have on our planet.” (Community Builder, B Lab)

In this context, customers were mentioned as an important actor within civil society that influences approaches. So does creating awareness about fair prices not necessarily succeed, as it was emphasized: “We consumers are very irrational about prices [...] [talking about prices] is a pretty expert conversation. [...] As a consumer, I do not have a sense of price” (Founder, Original Beans). It is a matter of approaching the behaviour: “different motivations are important but ultimately it comes down to a perception quality”. In this regard, a change over time was described: “‘Less is more’ is an important reality. More consumption does not make you happier. [...] Consumer culture needs a shift.” (Founder, Original Beans).
When it comes to translations of an idea, these societal frames shape the translations of the organizations. However, they are also likely to change these frames and taken-for-granted social norms.

5 Analysis

The idea of accounting for externalities in business seems to be materialized in more and more organizations within the transnational governance system. Nevertheless, reflecting on the approaches as introduced beforehand, this idea is materialized in many different ways. Reflecting these empirical results towards the theoretical framework on translation and transnational governance as built above, in the following we strive to understand and make sense of the different translations of the idea and the processes behind, how they are shaped, stabilized and transformed between homogenization and variation. Considering the organizations as actors and carriers in a transnational governance system, the micro mechanisms of these translations and its processes are to be explored, reflecting on the contexts these organizations are operating in. In the following, first, we explore differences between the translations of the organizations. Second, we strive to explain these differences between the translations and translation processes by reflecting them towards both the organizational contexts and own interests of the organizations, as well as towards their social context and institutional embeddedness. Third, we argue that based on their different conduct in negotiation the organizations assume different roles in a translation governance system when it comes to carrying the idea forward.

5.1 Exploring differences in translations

As already outlined in the introduction, starting from an economic concept existing for decades and immensely broad in its scope, externalities in business can be understood quite differently. So does the materialization in particular approaches. Rather than being diffused between actors in the transnational governance system (Rogers, 1983; Djelic, 1998; March, 1999), we encountered the idea of accounting for externalities in business as having been translated to different contexts (Latour, 1986; Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). Thus, in the following, the differences and similarities between the approaches are analyzed, dealing with the elements as follows: terminology, framing, methodology, and purpose.
5.1.1 Terminology

First of all, the most salient difference between the approaches is the different terminology used in the field. Taking the approaches as a whole the organizations talked about it as “concept”, “framework”, “methodology”, “movement”, “protocols” or “tools”. Here, while “tools” and “methodologies” rather seem to emphasize the practical or technical notion of the procedure how to conduct valuation and measurement, “movement” seems to accentuate a more holistic approach which questions existing systems. Compared to that, the wording “protocol” seems to aim on guiding organizations in their business operations on a more general level. Considering the terminology regarding the interrelation of business with society and environment, it was talked about positive or negative “externalities”, positive or negative “impacts”, “social value”, “societal value” and “deeper values”. Nevertheless, all of them were encountered to describe how business activities cause either positive or negative effects on society and environment. Further, due to this quite broad formulation, it leaves much room for interpretation. When it comes to the procedure to consider these externalities, it was talked about “measurement” and “impact assessment”, which could be related to the increasing demands for accountability and management through measurement in our society. This was also often related to “quantification” or “monetization”. Compared to that the term “valuation” often seemed to be broader in its assumptions, comprising also softer values. Beside this, the vocabulary used by the organizations was often found to be quite ideology driven. Several times organizations talked about “new” economy or “new” business in contrast to an “old” traditional way of doing business. Also, it was for instance talked about a “true” value or price - which touches upon ethical questions, thus triggering to question current assumptions about what is true and what is not.

5.1.2 Framing

Also the differences in framing the approach were interesting. As organizations operate within a business context to some extent the business case was always given. Thus, a main theme occurring in the interviews was the need to “frame it from an opportunity perspective” (Co-founder, True Price). This was reasoned by the need to support businesses in recognizing the additional value of more sustainable behaviour, such as to “manage risk, gain competitive advantage and seize new opportunities” (WBCSD, 2018) or “enabling growth, better decision-making, enhancing stakeholder relationship” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Still, while some approaches considered both positive and negative externalities of business,
some focused only on the positive side. Here it was argued, that businesses should not be punished but rather rewarded for positive impacts, as a negative narrative would restrict actors in what they do, whereas with a positive narrative "you can create spillovers and create another thing that is positive" (Community Builder, B Lab). Contrary, organizations that also considered negative externalities also aimed at reducing negative impacts of business on society and environment.

5.1.3 Methodology

As the terminology and framing differs, so do the methodologies behind the approaches. Thus, in the following the different approaches are explored from a more technical perspective. This comprises both the identification of externalities as well as how these identified externalities are captured afterwards. When comparing the different organizations, the procedures of identifying externalities are still rather consistent. What differs are mainly the categorizations that are used as a basis. Most interviewees relate their approach to the triple bottom line with the three dimensions: economic, environmental and social. A similar categorization in three dimensions, but in different terms was: organization, societal and sustainable. Another categorization considered financial and social returns, whereby the latter comprised both environmental and people impact. One organization described own categorizations in five dimensions: governance, workers, community, environment and impact model. Another organization talked about internalizing externalities in six dimension: wages, gender, soil, climate, waste and health.

However, the more significant discourse lies in the question of how the identified externalities are processed. The approaches of the interviewees can basically be structured in qualitative, quantitative and monetary. Organizations that support the monetary approach mostly argue with the intention to create a common language understood in business to easier incorporate these considerations into a financial context. In that context was argued that only when prices reflect externalities and on this basis incentives are created, “you have the power of the market” (Co-founder, True Price). Also the difficulty of handling business externalities in different scales was problematized:

“When you want to compare a tonne of greenhouse gas emissions, a cubic meter of water, a hectare of land [...] that doesn’t make sense for the people who have the power within the company, which are mainly the financial people. And therefore we try to translate the data to costs.” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG)
Further these approaches were supported emphasizing the importance of not only measuring but using the data and taking action. Here it was argued, “[the monetization] also helps to get things going within organizations, to help them to make aware of how they can really change” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Related to this, it was also problematized that other approaches lacking a business perspective have difficulties “translating themselves to business [...] as they have never really understood, what they are actually asking” (Founder, Original Beans). Similar as monetary approaches, also quantitative approaches argue with creating a common language and comparability. Here, interviewees argued that creating standards is inherently related to measurability. Also accountability and transparency are key arguments. On the other side, strongly opposing a monetary or quantitative approach are approaches that try to measure externalities on a qualitative basis. Here the main argument are that certain issues cannot be monetized out of ethical reasons, that a monetization would rise the impression that negative impacts in one field could be paid for, or outweighed with positive impacts in another field, arguing with a metaphor which was also used for the counter-argument: “They are apples and pears, they are not combing”, further arguing, “if you pollute the environment and it costs the society 5 million and you put 5 million onto the table, then the pollution is not away” (Founder, Manifesto). On this side, it is argued that values cannot be translated to figures or even monetized, but rather they have to be expressed in themselves.

While most organizations are quite strong in their opinion in this discourse, another was completely open in their methodology. Outlining both advantages and disadvantages of all methodologies, here it was argued that it depends on the particular context which of them suits best. Thus, an organization needs to consider the particular issues which are to be measured, the purpose of this measurement and the affected stakeholder, in order to decide which methodological approach to apply. As it was emphasized: “We don’t say there is either a right way to do it or a wrong way to do it. It is our opinion that different types of valuation are different to the different kind of stakeholders” (Associate, WBCSD). Still in contrast to the above outlined methodological approaches, organizations do not always perceive it as necessary to have a formalized methodology. When developing an approach solely for the own business activities, rather than trying to promote it for consultancy purposes, organizations might not perceive it as necessary to have more worked out methodologies. Depending on the demands, size and the circumstances in the organization, it
could be too complex or costly for them, and other approaches much more suitable. As one organization stated: “And we are not engaged on that really, because for us it would be too difficult [...] We engage and try to measure as far as we can, but only to a degree that is still very simple and primary.” (Founder, Original Beans). Thus, engaging in the idea of accounting for externalities and translating it to a particular organizational context, does not necessarily need to happen in a formalized, and technically complex manner.

5.1.4 Purpose

Also the purposes of the approaches were encountered to be different. The main purposes of developing an approach were encountered in better decision-making, risk management, opportunities and identifying potential competitive advantages, as well as in external reporting.

5.2 Explaining differences in translations

Commencing from these differences in the translation of the idea to account for externalities - how can these be explained? In the following we want to make sense out of the different translations as they occur between different actors within the transnational governance by reflecting them towards the contexts they have been translated to. First, we see the need to reflect these translations and its processes towards the particular organizational context. Second, as these micro actors interact with other actors within the field in a continuous mutual exchange, the particular translations and its processes also need to be reflected towards their social context and institutional embeddedness.

5.2.1 Organizational context

Although all organizations covered in this study engage in the idea of accounting for externalities, this idea is not diffused unchanged but is rather translated to the contexts of the particular organizations which results in very different approaches as translations of the idea. How the idea of accounting for externalities is translated into concrete approaches by an organization was first of all encountered to be dependent on organizational context itself, that is, the background and purpose of the particular organization. As Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) argue, “carriers are active in structuring flows and patterns of diffusion but they are also translating the ideas they mediate, reflecting in the process their own projects and interests.” (p. 17, referring to Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). Considering the very different organizations in this study leads to the assumption that the translation of the idea is
most likely approached from different perspectives. Different stakeholder within the organization define the purpose and the goals of the organization. Thus, the translation processes within the organization will likely be conducted in line with this purpose.

Given the nature of the topic, both business perspective and ideological driver were found in all organizations. Nevertheless, in particular in smaller or newer organizations the intrinsic motivation of the founders was quite noticeable throughout the whole organization, shaping its mission and vision, and therefore setting a strategic purpose for the organization. The more ideologically driven an actor was, the stronger was this mission embedded in the organizational context. This experience and own identity had an impact on the organization’s purpose of existence as well as the translation of the approach. Literature confirms that independent people searching for meaning tend to take action and enact objects that produce change over time (Weick et al., 2005). Further, these organizations, also seemed to be more flexible regarding their approaches and able to take immediate action: “being able to make those decisions is an advantage of being a small, independent company” (Founder, Original Beans). Further, although these strong ideologically driven organizations often deemed the creation of financial value in business only as a mean, the business perspective was prevalent. This resulted in approaches framed from an opportunity perspective to make the approach being easier adopted by other actors and spread on a broader level. Thus, the interest of these organizations of both bringing their vision forward and making the approach applicable for business resulted in according translations of the idea to account for externalities.

Compared to this, larger organizations had their roots most often in more traditional business rationales and were well-established. Further, as being larger and established these organizations were stronger shaped by the involvement of many different stakeholders, making them in their actions rather slow or inert. Nevertheless, being large and established at the same time enabled them to have a larger scope of impact on a broad range of clients or member organizations. This was further supported by the fact that the focus on financial value creation in a more traditional conception of business value was more prevalent, which resulted in translations that emphasized in particular the added value for the businesses itself, such as to "[enable] growth, better decision-making, enhancing stakeholder relationship" while “helping companies to understand the value that they create and reduce in society” (Sustainability Manager, KPMG). Thus, these translations tended to serve the needs of its target group such as member companies or business clients.
5.2.2 Social context and institutional embeddedness

As already presented in the empirical data above, organizations cannot be considered as isolated but rather as embedded in a transnational governance system. Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) emphasize the importance of understanding the interaction between actors and the “flows, connections and dynamics” (p. 13) in between them. But even further, these flows, connections and dynamics have themselves to be considered as shaped by cultural and institutional frames, they are “permeated by culture, norms and institutions” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 14). Drawing from economic sociology literature, all economic activities have to be considered as being “embedded within larger institutional frames” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 15; referring to Weber, 1978; Polanyi, 1944). Considering the organizations as actors in a transnational governance system, these need to be considered as being in constant interaction and interrelation with other actors. At the same time the organizations are also embedded in both national as well as transnational institutional frames, and acting in between their mutual interplay. Thus, in their activities they are likely to be shaped by these frames, but also likely to actively shape these frames and norms.

As described above, all organizations studied in this research can be considered as actors within a transnational governance system. This means that they are to be seen in constant and vivid interaction with other actors but also as embedded into institutional frames. But also here, differences can be encountered in how organizations behave in these interrelationships. Herein, directly related to their organizational context, smaller and ideological driven organizations seem to rather question taken-for-granted assumptions, and stronger oppose the institutional frames they are embedded in. These organizations seem to be more disruptive in their mindset and to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of our society - which also resulted in translations that diverged more from a current understanding of business and economics. At the same time these organizations were extensively engaged in network building. On the one hand, this was due to seeking knowledge and expertise. So did smaller organizations that tend to search for support in a broad range of actors. Further, in doing so and in additional feedback mechanisms, the approaches were supposed to be adapted best to the intended context. This goes in line with Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) as they describe translation as a negotiation process that makes solutions fit to problems. Weick (1995) points out that organizations are in a continuous feedback loop moving back and forth of defining
“generic subjectivity” and “intersubjectivity of mutually reinforcing interpretations” (p. 170). Approaches that are shaped by micro level actors have to make sense to other micro level actors in order to be picked up. As Smircich (1983) mentions “the glue of organizational culture is usually portrayed as ‘shared meanings’” (Weick, 1995, p. 188) which is created by micro-actors. But on the other hand, in particular these smaller or newer organizations built networks also to gain power or stability, that is, in order to build support for an approach and support its spreading. As these organizations do sometimes not yet have the impact on a larger scale due to their size, but also due to their disruptive ideas, they tend to seek for collaboration within a broader range of actors in order to gain power to spread the idea further in society. This is what Callon and Latour (1981) describe as the association of micro actors in networks. As with increasing size of micro actor networks stability is gained, these networks are perceived as powerful macro actors, able to induce change on a macro level. This is also closely related to the topic of legitimacy. The more taken-for-granted assumptions are questioned, the more difficult it gets to gain legitimacy. Nevertheless, as the small disruptive organization question more of these taken-for-granted assumptions, it seems often more difficult to gain legitimacy. This also explains their more extensive engagement in collaborations and interactions with other actors.

In contrast to this, larger organizations rather tend to stick to taken-for-granted assumptions instead of challenging the status quo. They seem to be more comfortable with being embedded into their institutional frames. Further, this type of organization has often already created their legitimacy over decades. Also here can be found what Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) describe as translation in a collective negotiation process that makes solutions fit to problems. But this negotiation took mostly place within their own sector, such as with clients or member companies to co-developed their approach. This makes sense, as due to their size and established position these organizations already have more power and potential impact and do not need as much support as smaller, disruptive organizations.

Summarizing, we found two types of organizations when it comes to explaining how translation and translation processes are influenced by organizational and social contexts: smaller disruptive and larger established organizations (Table 1).
To conclude, while smaller disruptive organizations are characterized as having a strong ideological drive, while being fast, dynamic and flexible. Still, due to their size these have often a smaller potential outreach. At the same time they tend to question taken-for-granted assumptions, thus for them it is more difficult to gain legitimacy, what results in a strong tendency to network formation. Compared to this, larger established organizations rather have a more conservative mindset, while being rather slow, static and inert. These organizations have due to their size a larger potential impact. Further they stick to taken-for-granted assumptions and have also mostly built up legitimacy for decades. Hence, seeking for collaborations and networks is not as prevalent.

### 5.3 Translators in different roles

Having made sense out of the differences in the translations and translation processes of the idea to account for externalities and considering the findings, the question arises: Who of these actors is successful in the end? The main argument of translation theory is that the success of an idea does not depend on the inherent properties of an idea, neither on the abilities of the originator to spread an idea, but rather on the impetus of its carriers, on the people that adopt the idea (Sevón, 1996). Further, as already discussed above, the success of an idea is rather dependent on an effective collective negotiation, on making the idea fit to its
purpose (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). The process of translation can be considered as a continuous negotiation where “ideas are turned around and about” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 25) and the properties of an idea are developed collectively. Eventually “most ideas can be proven to fit most problems, assuming good will, creativity and a tendency to consensus” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p.25). Exactly this is, what we also encountered within this study. Rather than being stable, fix and determined, all the approaches that constitute translations of the idea to account for externalities in business, are in constant flux, and transform in continuous interactions and feedback processes with other actors within transnational governance. And rather than being successful due to particular properties, the approaches are co-developed with other actors in order to be best applicable for all involved stakeholders. Here, also Strang and Meyer (1993) argue that actors operating in a transnational field tend to generalize their ideas in order to make “them abstract and universally applicable” (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, p. 17). This successful negotiation is key for an approach to be carried further.

But as it becomes clear from the considerations above, our organizations created this collective translation process of negotiation in very different ways. Both types of organizations support the idea towards more sustainability in business, but they behaved differently when it came to negotiation with other actors or institutional frames. Here, their organizational purpose and context shines through their translations and translation processes - the personal interests of the carriers as Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) would claim. The organizations we considered as smaller and more disruptive tended to extensive collaborations with many different kinds of actors in the negotiation process, while at the same time questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and norms and experiencing resistance from other actors. They seemed in particular to push their ideology further with their approaches. Smaller disruptive organizations wanted to drive change in the way the world works and question the current status quo. Herein, they do not first of all adopt to other needs and demands when creating their approaches, but rather stick to their purpose and induce change. Contrary, the larger and more established organizations seemed to rather stick to these societal assumptions and norms, but did see less need for interaction with a broad range of actors. Rather they negotiated internally, with members, or clients. Herein, they also support the idea towards more sustainable business, but they rather argue from a business perspective. But this makes it also easier for them to spread their approach on a broader basis, as they do not deviate too far from the well-known. They seem to take a small step approach
as they relate their approaches to account for externalities to more familiar business concepts and terminology, and thus make it easier accessible for traditional businesses.

Therefore, it seems like organizations as actors in a transnational governance system take different roles in spreading an idea. The small seem to trigger, to induce change within taken-for-granted assumptions. They diverge more from the given norms, they are so to speak braver in opposing the institutional frames they are embedded in. The interest of this type of carrier leads to approaches that are rather challenging and planting the seed for change. This is possible for them as they are smaller, flexible and dynamic, and most often just started out of the drive to change the world. Herein lies their inherent purpose. They do not have to make compromises. Just their potential outreach is sometimes not large enough, thus they are creating networks to gain stability and create macro change which is in line with the definition of power as Callon and Latour (1981) state it. Compared to this, larger organizations already exist a long time and are well-established in their institutional context. Their inherent purpose is rooted in a traditional business conception. Moreover, here a lot of stakeholders are involved, compromises have to be made, which makes them rather slow and inert. They cannot diverge too much from established norms, they cannot be too disruptive. But on the other hand, in all their establishment and their legitimacy, they have a large potential for outreach. They also induce change, but in a small step approach. This type of carrier creates approaches to serve a certain outreach and scope in their field of action.

6 Discussion

More and more actors engage in the idea of accounting for externalities. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) talk about a mechanism similar to fashion, that makes different actors materialize the same idea at the same time in different settings. But as seen in the previous section, this materialization of one idea, such as to account for externalities, resulted in very different approaches, with different terminologies, different methodologies, different purposes. The idea has been translated to different contexts and settings. The divergent variety meanwhile became a characteristic of the field. This is in line with Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006), arguing for a partly homogenization of frames and ideas in a world society, but also pointing to variation through translation. As encountered above, there is an inherent discourse in the field, between all these different translations, or as Djelic and
Sahlin-Andersson (2006) would state: “all these ideas travel and negotiate or struggle with each other” (p. 16). They are “more like crawling ants than free floating spirits” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 25). But what does that mean for the idea to be carried forward? Proceeding from the elaborations in the previous section: How are the roles outlined above to be perceived? Some researchers refer to key carriers that influence the transnational governance system (Boli and Thomas, 1999; Finnemore, 1996). But who are key carriers? Who has eventually the power to define what sustainability is? Here next to fashion another mechanism becomes interesting: institutionalization. As outlined further above, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) see these two as inherently connected and fashion as a playfield for institutionalization, where new practices can be tried out. Institutionalization begins when collectives are arising as different organizations adopt similar practices at the same time (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). This relates to what Callon and Latour (1981) define as power when they describe networks of micro actors that gain stability and are eventually perceived as macro actors. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) conceptualize the emergence of collectives in their structuration of organizational fields where different forms of isomorphism lead to exchange between organizations in one field and to the emergence of collectives. Nevertheless, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) argue that it is rather repetitive selection of a certain idea that leads to its institutionalization. They argue that “fashions bring in a variety of ideas; organizations within a field try them out, creating fashion by following it, but also creating institutions by persevering in certain practices, by refusing to reject previous fashions, or by hailing a new fashion as the final solution” (p. 38).

Looking into our organizations, which all adopted similar practices, one can definitely argue that this can be seen as a collective arising. But we want to go further than just considering these approaches as being in a battlefield and struggling for attention, where in the end the most repeated approach becomes institutionalized. We argue that notwithstanding the differences in their translations, the organizations much more benefit each other in carrying the idea to account for externalities further and inducing macro level change by taking certain roles in the transnational governance system, as they are all moving into the same direction. They all deviate, to a larger or lesser extent, from taken-for-granted assumptions with carrying the idea, such as the purpose of business and their responsibility towards society. They all try to influence the institutional frames they are operating in, such as in the political and regulatory, economic or civil society arena, as found in this research. Nevertheless, before an idea succeeds it has to be negotiated to proof to be legitimate (Czarniawska and
Legitimacy seemed to be a very crucial theme arising from our interviews, precisely because all the organizations with their approaches are to some extent questioning taken-for-granted norms of our society. Deviating from taken-for-granted assumptions produces resistance and counter-forces, such as the reaction of more conservative actors as described by the interviewed organizations. Ideas are not always easily flowing. And it was especially counter-forces within these fields, that were deemed to be hindrances in spreading the idea further, and not the emergence of more and more competitive approaches from other organizations. In approaching this negotiation process differently and thus in taking certain roles in carrying an idea in a transnational governance system further, the organizations seem to complement each other in carrying their idea forward. Disruptive organizations trigger and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions with a disruptive approach. Being ideologically driven, improvising and dynamic, they can be considered as prime mover, as change agents. A disruptive mindset challenges the pervasiveness of standardized models, interferes in the taken-for-granted playfield and sets new trends to drive innovation and challenge other carriers. Thus, carriers with a disruptive mindset and the persistency to challenge can overcome taken-for-granted structures, in entering the transnational arena to negotiate their approach. As Marshak (1993) argues a “different mindset is necessary” to redirect change. Also Weick and Quinn (1999) argue in their ‘logic of attraction’ for continuous change, pointing out that “leaders must first make deep changes in themselves, including self-empowerment” (referring to Spreitzer and Quinn, 1996). This can in particular be related to the smaller and disruptive organizations, that are strong ideologically driven and carry the mindset that is necessary for change. Compared to this, established organizations are rather characterized by inertia, and due to many stakeholders often not able to quickly induce change. But they seem to support the change process by scope and outreach to a different area of actors within the transnational governance system. Taking a small step approach, they make it easier and more accessible for a broad range of business to make their externalities manageable. Further, as they often gained legitimacy already for decades and do not deviate too much to lose this legitimacy, they seem to have a credibility that makes it easier for them to spread their ideas. Thus, the larger and more established organizations seem to step into the space for new taken-for-granted assumptions that was created by disruptive organizations, and follow on this prepared ground. While the smaller, disruptive organizations seem to take the role as front-runner, pushing the boundaries of taken-for-granted norms, they prepare the ground for larger established organizations as follower to spread the idea on a broader basis. Similar as Weick and Quinn (1999) emphasize “when deep personal changes occurs, leaders
then behave differently [...] and the new behaviour in the leader attract new behaviours from followers” (p. 380) which on a transnational level can be referred to the different roles of organizations and the translation of ideas. Exactly by taking these roles, the two types of organizations complement each other when it comes to gaining legitimacy in the institutional frames they operate in. It seems that in this way they are able to create some sort of balance which is needed for the idea to succeed - between sticking to taken-for-granted assumptions and disruptive change. Definitely, there is a “crawling” for attention with the particular approaches. But as opposing to taken-for-granted assumptions and institutional frames, it can be claimed that all move into the same direction, sharing the goal of bringing externalities to business. Thus, the question is if the success of an approach is really dependent on whether it succeeds against other approaches - but rather if all these approaches succeed in leading macro change in taken-for-granted assumptions. The organizations seem to create what Callon and Latour (1981) call an association of micro actors that gain stability and are then perceived as macro actors. But in all the discourse in the field of accounting for externalities in business, it is exactly the different roles that seem to contribute to bringing the idea forward against taken-for-granted assumptions.

7 Conclusion

The vague phenomenon sustainability is a salient topic on the agenda of many organizations. More and more actors in the transnational arena develop approaches to translate this vague phenomenon into more economic terms in order to make it easier manageable for business. However, there is still a discourse in this field since a humongous number of actors in a transnational governance system engage in the discussion, everyone with their own opinion. But what they all have in common is the vision to bring a broader value conception to business - wherein business takes responsibility for their impacts on environment and society, and “the business of business” is not only business anymore. In questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, these organizations seem to take different roles in the negotiation process with other actors in the transnational governance system as well as with the institutional frames they are embedded in. We encountered the tendency that smaller, strong ideological driven and more disruptive organizations seem to be the front-runner, pushing the boundaries of taken-for-granted norms. Larger and more established organizations are follower that can use their establishment and legitimacy to spread the idea on a broader basis. Thus, it seems to be exactly this discourse that helps carrying the idea forward and gain legitimacy in a
transnational governance system. None of the actors would be able to disrupt the financial system and induce global change. However, acting in their different roles but focusing on the same purpose clusters the impact and creates stability to induce macro change, and could ultimately contribute to a sustainability transition.

Limitations

In total 13 people have been interviewed out of which 8 appeared to be applicable for this research. This sample of 8 participants reflects a certain area of actors within our transnational system. However, it is difficult to generalize the outcomes. In addition, we interviewed the participants in a semi-structured interview which gave room for explorative research, but, at a different point in time the dynamic of the interview setting may differ and influence its flow. Thus, that might have an impact on the outcome. In the given environment, at the given time the interviewees gave us insights and shared their experience. We have to be aware that the outcome of the interviews is analysed as narratives and not taken-for-granted assumptions on how, in general, ideas of accounting for externalities travel within our system.
## Appendices

### Appendix I - Interview overview

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Data usage</th>
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Appendix II - Outline: Semi-structured interviews

Introduction

1. So, tell us more about your current responsibility?
2. What is your view on the idea of accounting for externalities?

Emergence of the idea

1. When did you first come in touch with accounting for externalities? What was your first image?
2. Who came up with working with the idea? When? How did it start?
3. What is your motivation to work with that idea?

Translation

1. When was the idea turned into an action? How? What was the process? What’s your view upon that?
2. How would you describe [concept]? How does it work?
3. How has the [concept] changed or developed over time?
4. In your opinion, what factor influenced or shaped the development? Are there any political/ideological/economic interests as drivers?

Passing on

1. How do you communicate [the concept]?
2. What is the reaction of different actors? How is [concept] adopted?
3. What are the challenges/opportunities to promote [the concept]?

Closing question

1. What is your view on sustainable development?
References


