

## **Opportunity Structures for and from Private Governance**

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Prepared for the Yale Agrarian Studies Colloquium

New Haven, CT

October 4, 2013

## 1. Introduction

A growing body of sociological research examines the activities and processes by which social movements affect the formal and informal rules governing markets (see King and Pearce 2010). One such process is private governance – organizations set up by non-state actors to develop, promulgate, and enforce rules of practice in various economic sectors. These are becoming an increasingly important mechanism by which change in market practices have been occurring, and may continue to do so. From the early work of organic associations to develop and promote organic farming practices to recent attempts to exclude conflict minerals from electronic devices, a growing array of private rule-setting and rule-enforcing processes operate (see Abbott and Snidal 2009).

This paper seeks to deepen understandings of the interrelated roles of market and political opportunity structures in facilitating and shaping the rise of private governance. The emergence of these programs has received considerable scholarly attention (Bartley 2007a, 2007b; Pattberg 2007; Gulbrandsen 2010); I build from this work to identify common conditions for emergence. Central to the rise of private governance is a particular political aim that desires to see behavioral prescriptions diffused and enforced widely in the global economy. Problems of environmental degradation and unequal and exploitative trade and production practices have been framed as global issues that demand broad attention – attention that spans beyond the territorial limits of states and the market shares of individual companies. This is important to understand as it undergirds the analysis of what political and market opportunity structures favor movement strategies that advance the broad diffusion of particular behavioral prescriptions.

To investigate these issues, I draw from ongoing research examining the development of private governance in the forest, coffee and fisheries sectors. Through previous studies, I developed initial ideas about the role of market and political opportunity structures in the formation of private governance (Auld Forthcoming 2014). This paper extends these ideas both by expanding their theoretical groundings and by extending the investigation to consider whether – and with what characteristics – private governance might become an opportunity structure itself.

Opportunity structures alone are not sufficient to explain the choices or outcomes of movements. Available resources and learning within and across movements, among other factors, also play a role in the origins of this form of governance. Here, however, the aim is to try to think about the isolated effects of opportunity structures. I identify two strategies that use private governance as a means to exploit open points of influence to spread behavioral

prescriptions. A *leading-by-example* strategy seeks to use private governance as a means to provide incumbents an incentive to follow the lead of the new specialists. In this way, private governance can pull up standards throughout an industry. A *subverting-market-power* strategy exploits the vulnerabilities of companies along global supply chains. Here the idea is that one company can influence a considerable portion of the market owing to its buying power, but a mechanism to regulate these activities is necessary. Hence, private governance can offer the behavioral prescriptions that give greater certainty about how targeting a vulnerable company in a global supply chain is likely to translate into specific changes in market practices. Adding dynamic considerations, I then discuss the effects of *organizational density* as a further contributing factor that shapes the rise of private governance; this perspective sheds light on how movement activities targeting other market and political units can create the organizational capacity necessary to create private governance. Finally, reversing the analysis, private governance is examined as an opportunity. Here the focus is two questions offered by Meyer and Minkoff (2004) – opportunity for whom and opportunity for what – that reveal how variation in the inclusiveness of private governance as well as differences in the regulatory breadth of programs affects how movements will engage with an existing private governor.

The remainder of the paper proceeds in three parts. First, it briefly introduces work on opportunity structures as a foundation for examining how private governance arises in part from different spatial and territorial configurations of political and market opportunity structures. Second, it provides initial ideas about the opportunity structures for and from private governance. Third, it expands the focus to theorize about opportunity structures as an analytic tool for understanding collective action that operates across spatial scales and within political and economic realms.

## 2. Opportunity structures

Opportunity structures are often defined as “formal and informal political conditions that encourage, discourage, channel, and otherwise affect movement activity (Campbell 2005, p. 44).”<sup>1</sup> Although considerable research focuses on ‘movement activity’ as the outcome of interest, opportunity structures have also been used to explain the formation of movement organizations and policy outcomes. Similarly, work in this area has broad and narrow conceptions of opportunity; they are some times restricted to factors external to a movement, and at other times, they include aspects of the movement itself, such as available resources (for further discussion, see Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Still, the core insights from this area of work are that examining differences in context across space, time, and issue help elucidate the manner in

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<sup>1</sup> See also Tarrow (1998).

which movements seek to gain influence. As Meyer (2004) explains: "... the organization of the polity and the positioning of various actors within it makes some strategies of influence more attractive, and potentially efficacious than others. The wisdom, creativity, and outcomes of activists' choices—their *agency*—can only be understood and evaluated by looking at the political context and the rules of the games in which those choices are made—that is, *structure*."

This section identifies and reviews work on opportunity structures to clarify two perspectives. These combine to provide a framework for considering the role of opportunity structures in shaping the rise of private governance, and the role of private governance as a possible emerging opportunity structure.

The two perspectives are: (1) *opportunity structures of political, jurisdictional units* as a comparative variable that affect social movement activities (i.e., protests, strikes, etc...) and outcomes (i.e., organizational formation and policy outcomes) across time and issue area; and (2) *opportunity structures of market units* as a comparative variable that affect social movement activities and outcomes across time and economic sector. Simply, these can be arrayed on the conceptual diagram provided in Figure 1. The first perspective is by and large situated in territorial space, where political jurisdiction delineates where public authority resides over matters of social, ethical or environmental importance. The second perspective is by and large centered on flows associated with market exchange, where the organization of supply chains for goods and services delineate where private authority can and often does determine terms of exchange.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more discussion of this distinction, see Sikor et al. (Forthcoming) for an application to land-use governance.

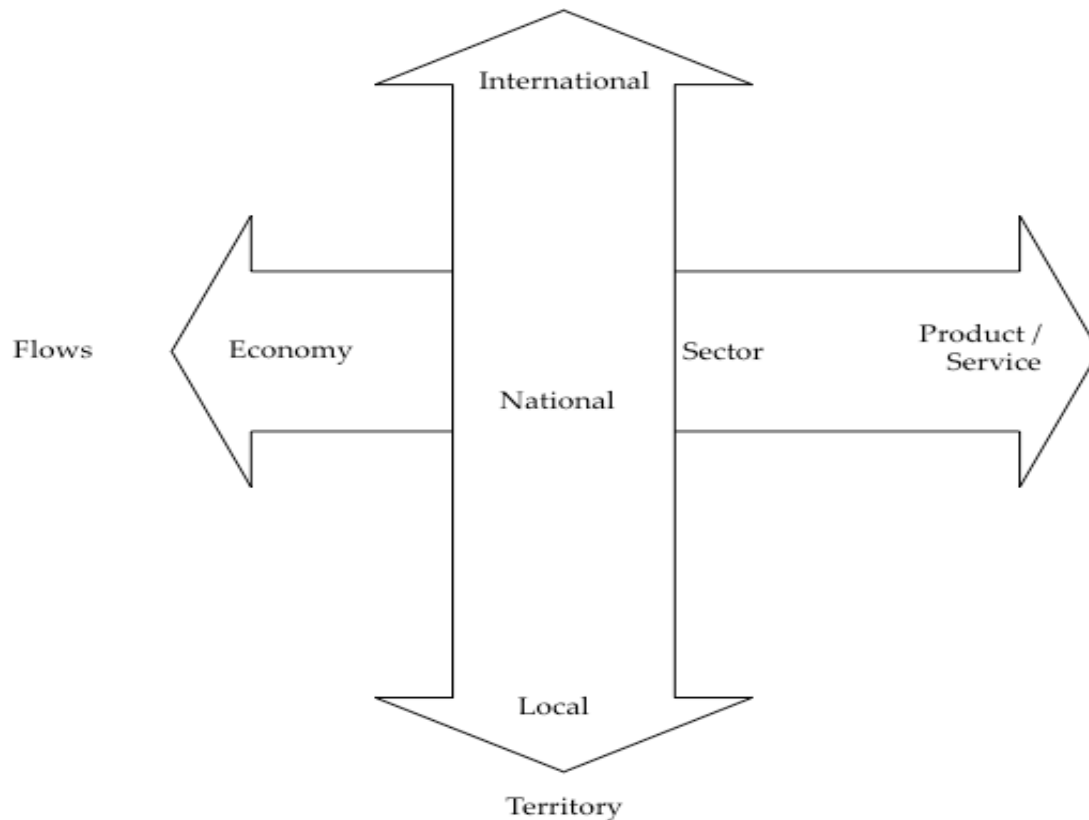


Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of territorial and flow dimensions of opportunity structures as an explanatory variable affecting the activities and outcomes of social movements

These two perspectives are used to organize the discussion that follows. In turn, they serve as the foundation for the analysis of private governance that is taken up in the second part of the paper.

Territory – local to international: Political opportunity structures

Political opportunity structures first arose as an explanatory variable used by scholars interested in explaining the comparative differences in the actions and outcomes of social movements across time and space. While variation exists within this area of work, the political struggle under study typically has been focused on some political unit, from local to national governments or departments there within. Eisinger (1973), for instance, assessed the relationship between the character of local governments in the US and the incidence of protest activity, finding a curvilinear relationship. Extensive protest occurred where local governments were moderately open; lower levels of protests were associated with high and low openness. Kitschelt's (1986) work is another early exemplar. Examining anti-nuclear movements in France, Sweden, the United States, and West Germany, Kitschelt attributed the differentiated strategies and comparative effectiveness of these movements to cross-national differences in the openness

of their political systems and their respective capacity for policy implementation. Considerable work has built from these early beginnings with analyses that identify stable contextual factors that differ across political units to shape movement activities in general and more instable factors that may, overtime, affect the strategic choices of an individual movement working on a specific issue (for review, see Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Meyer 2004).

Building from Meyer and Minkoff (2004), there are several ways in which this focus on structures has directed research. First, a set of questions revolves around the agents, as Meyer and Minkoff (2004) put it, “opportunity for whom?” This relates to the question of whether an opportunity is a general condition of a political system or one more specifically available for one issue and not others. For instance, the first-past-the-post electoral system in Canada has served as an opportunity for regional interests to organize as federal parties (e.g., the Bloc Québécois Party from the province of Quebec and more recently the Reform Party that emerged in Alberta); however, it affords a less supportive context for interests that have comparable citizen support but are not regionally concentrated (see Cairns 1968).

A second area of interest is what outcome do the opportunities influence, or as Meyer and Minkoff (2004) state: “opportunity for what?” As noted above, work on opportunity structures has focused on outcomes including movement activities, the formation of movement organizations, and policy change. These authors note that the conflation of these different outcomes is problematic as certain contextual factors may support movement activities while simultaneously hindering policy change, and that policy change itself can affect movement activities. Indeed, and related to a third set of questions on the operation of opportunity structures, Meyer (2004) notes how scholars taking a dynamic perspective on opportunities consider policy changes or political alignments as key features of opportunity that affect movements (cf. Kingdon 1995). For instance, Minkoff (1997), examining the US between 1955 and 1985, details the relationships between protest and the formation of organizations by the civil rights movement and protest and organizational formation by the feminist movement, finding that organizational density enhances the spread of protests.

In spite of the reviewed differences above, a common theme in this work is the focus on national or sub-national political units as authority centers targeted by movements. In this respect, opportunity structures are territorially construed; they include a cross-scalar perspective only in those instances where a political system (e.g., federalism) facilitates scale-shifting – some times termed venue shopping or forum shifting (e.g., Pralle 2006) – from local to provincial/state and to national scales and vice versa. Returning to Figure 1, this work is situated, by and large, on the vertical arrow and focuses on national and local political units.

International units – as depicted in Figure 1 – have recently become an additional area for study (e.g., Betsill and Corell 2008). As an extension of the national and subnational, comparative work just discussed, this newer focus identifies how features of the international scale affect movements in ways similar to domestic contextual factors. Tarrow (2005, p. 25) expanding on his notion of internationalization<sup>3</sup> as an opportunity, notes: “Although internationalism goes beyond concrete international institutions, regimes, and processes, these are at its core and provide the structure of both opportunities and threats to nonstate actors. The threats are very real – to sovereignty, to equality, to diversity – and have been well documents in the literature on globalization. But internationalization also offers an opportunity space into which domestic actors can move, encounter others like themselves, and form coalitions that transcend their borders, and this process has been less well understood.” Borrowing a central postulate of the opportunity structure literature, Tarrow states: “... we can hypothesize that the openness of the opportunity structure for nonstate actors is a function of the institutionalization of interstate ties and of the degree to which they have produced multilateral interactions (p27).”

Though there are exceptions, this literature largely examines the international piece of the vertical arrow in Figure 1; it focuses on inter-governmental organizations (e.g., the World Bank) and institutions (e.g., the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) as the decision-making units that movements seek to influence (Betsill and Corell 2008). Processes such as the diffusion of movement and counter-movement tactics via transnational networks (della Porta and Tarrow 2012), the exploitation of trade-dependence to influence domestic policy choices (Bernstein and Cashore 2000), or the boomerang effect where domestic blockages are overcome by taking movement claims to international audiences (Keck and Sikkink 1998) each link domestic social movement activities to the international scale; however, these are analytically separate from a focus on markets as the location of political struggles where changes in public policy are not necessarily the immediate or final goal. The discussion turns to this matter below.

#### Flow – sector to economy: Market opportunity structures

Market opportunity structures are distinguished from the above political opportunity structures by the character of the structures seen to affect movements and their outcomes. The structure of supply chains, the reputational assets of companies, and the cultural predispositions of companies and their managers, among others, are key contextual variables that are seen to

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<sup>3</sup> Tarrow defines internationalization as comprising “three interrelated trends: An increasing horizontal density of relations across states, government officials, and nonstate actors; Increasing vertical links among the subnational, national, and international levels; An enhanced formal and informal structure that invites transnational activism and facilitates the formation of networks of nonstate, state and international actors (p8).”

shape the opportunities for movements (Schurman and Munro 2010). This focal point has grown in salience with the rise of multinational corporations that have attained increasing capacity for governance alone and via industry associations (Knill and Lehmkuhl 2002). As Schurman (2004) notes in critique of much of the social movement scholarship reviewed above: "... attention has come to be focused almost exclusively on the state as the target of social movement opposition." Her, along with a growing body of research, has identified the importance of corporations, economic sectors, and global supply chains as social movement targets (King and Pearce 2010; Sasser et al. 2006; Spar and La Mure 2003; Bartley and Child 2011; Baron 2001).

A first useful observation to make on this analytic turn is that there are at least two variants of social movement activity at play. The first is not new. It involves treating a company or industry as an intermediary where the ultimate aim of the movement activity is to either change government policy or to have an existing policy enforced. Labor mobilization through strikes and similar protests are illustrations; a company may be the target, but government policy is largely what movements are seeking to leverage (Soule 2009, p. 25). A second variant – one that has become the focus of most recent research – occurs where a company or collection of companies becomes the target for movement activity and for behavioral change. The political process may end up implicated, but this is frequently a secondary effect, lagging behind changes in the production activities of the company or the suppliers and customers of the targeted company (see Soule 2009, p. 103).

There are many specific forms of activism that fall within this second variant. King and Pearce (2010) usefully distinguish among three broad classes of activism.<sup>4</sup> The first is where activists challenge corporations directly. Soule (2009, p. 10-19) details both insider and outsider strategies that movements can employ separately or in tandem. Insiders (or shareholders) can use certain strategies due to their relationship to the company. As owners or investors, options such as shareholder activism or shareholder resolutions, as well as socially responsible investing can be used in an effort to shape the behavior of a corporate target. As the discussion of market opportunity structures implies, rules about corporate governance and ownership characteristics (e.g., public versus private ownership) will affect the utility of these insider strategies. Outsiders, by contrast, have a different set of tactical options, such as boycotts, protests, and corporate campaigns designed to tarnish a company's reputation.<sup>5</sup> The focus of

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<sup>4</sup> Note, King and Pearce (2010) use the term contentiousness to capture the political struggles in markets that involve social movements. Soule (2009) distinguishes between contentious politics – where a state actor is involved – and private politics (Baron, 2001) – where states are not involved.

<sup>5</sup> Though Soule includes legal action through civil suits as an outsider tactic, arguably this fits more as a tactic flowing from a political opportunity structure, not a market one.



this research in relation to Figure 1 varies. Depending on the company targeted, there may be implications for a single product or service, or a single sector or multiple sectors. Social responsible investing appears to have the greatest theoretical likelihood of affecting the economy as a whole, though empirically it is far from this situation at present.<sup>6</sup>

Second, King and Pearce (2010) suggest that activists can serve as institutional entrepreneurs supporting the creation of alternative markets. According to the authors, research details how movements can be critical for mobilizing resources and legitimating new market categories that facilitate entrepreneurial activities. Sometimes this is the product of industry players acting like social movements, as Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) suggest has been the case with microbreweries and brewpubs in the larger brewing industry. Sine and Lee (2009), by contrast, detail how external social movements shaped the US wind power sector from 1978 to 1992 by not only helping to vilify conventional methods of electricity generation, but by also providing cognitive and normative resources for wind-sector players. One way of interpreting their findings is that organizational capacity developed to influence the political process itself becomes a mobilizing structure to assist entrepreneurs working to shift an industry to a new production practice, in this case wind power. Indeed, Sine and Lee identify both direct and indirect effects of this pre-existing capacity; in their model, membership numbers for the Sierra Club had a direct effect on entrepreneurial activity in the wind industry as well as an indirect effect, by amplifying the influence of land and labor availability and of capacity shortages. As Sine and Lee (2009, p. 150) explain, “by generating problem-solution frames, mobilizing resources, advocating for favorable legislation, and influencing the cognitive valuation processes associated with key resources, environmental social movement organizations fundamentally transformed the entrepreneurial opportunity set associated with wind power.”

Finally, King and Pearce (2010) note that activists can work alone or in partnership to create transnational systems of private regulation (or governance). Bartley’s (2007b) work has been central to advancing this analysis; it carefully details how combining political-institutional and market-based perspectives sheds light on how certification has emerged as a model of private governance across economic sectors. As he explains, the political-institutional perspective highlights the contested nature of rules regulating global capitalism, and that these struggles affect the how private governance takes form (Bartley 2007b, 309-310). The market-based perspective highlights that companies may have reputational, competitiveness, and credibility

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<sup>6</sup> A report on the 2012 SRI market offers some indication of the penetration of this form of activism. According to the report, the more than 1000 signatory firms to the Principles for Responsible Investment account for approximately 20% of the global capital market. In the US market, the same report estimates that there are 3.74 trillion SRI assets, or 11.3% of those assets tracked by Thomson Reuters Nelson (USSIF 2012).

reasons for supporting private governance. It is the calculus of companies – reacting to government, competitive pressures from other companies, and pressure from NGOs and broader public interests and consumer demand – that facilitate the emergence of private governance (Bartley 2007b). More on this final form of action is taken up in the next section.

### **3. Private Governance**

There are two aims of this section. First, I assess how combining an understanding of political and market opportunity structures helps draw together current explanations for the emergence of private governance. As noted in the previous section, research has highlighted the key role social movements have played in the establishment of these programs. For the moment, private governance is broadly defined to encompass organizations formed by non-state actors to develop rules governing the practices in different economic sectors. However, the second aim of this section is to examine how the variation in particular characteristics of private governance may constitute emerging opportunity structures. These two aims are interrelated as the character of private governance that form may partly be endogenous to the character of the opportunity structures present. The empirical examples are from the forest, fisheries and coffee sectors, and the focus is on certification programs – one form of private governance – that set standards for social and environmental production practices, against which operators must be audited in order to sell their products with an on-product label.

#### Opportunity structures for private governance

There are two central conditions that appear to affect the formation of private governance: open points of influence for spreading behavioral prescriptions, and organizational density. Each condition is particularly apparent when political and market opportunity structures are considered in tandem.

#### *Open points of influence for spreading behavioral prescriptions*

Recall that the creation of private governance as a strategy is usefully understood in relation to the political aim of widely diffusing and enforcing behavioral prescriptions to address some social or environmental problem. This is an apt starting point as it helps to identify when movements may support private governance as a strategy as compared to other strategies that they may plausibly believe will also accomplish this same political aim.

Several patterns of social movement pressures are apparent when considering open points of influence and the potential for spreading behavioral prescriptions. Political opportunity

structures remain important here; work on collective action reminds us that actors with interests in a collective outcome will often have strong reasons to lobby governments to impose rules in support of those collective results.<sup>7</sup> That is, governments domestically, and inter-governmental agreements internationally, have the potential ability to spread behavioral prescriptions beyond any given social movement target.

Equally, there are targets within markets that provide similar potential to spread behavioral prescriptions. Considerable research discusses how large, highly branded companies are most susceptible to NGO shaming (Spar and La Mure 2003), and that shaming can have spillover effects on more insulated upstream producers (Sasser 2003; Roberts 2003; Conroy 2006, p. 121-147). Work on global commodity value chains (Gereffi, Korzeniewicz, and Korzeniewicz 1994) identifies the critical role of concentrated points in a supply chain in governing the standards of economic transactions. Several works underscore how these can transmit new standards and practices in supply chains (Sasser 2003; Daviron and Ponte 2005; Roberts 2003; Vandenberg 2007; Conroy 2006; Schurman and Munro 2009).

In light of these alternatives, when do conditions favor the creation of private governance? Why would a movement support establishing rule-setting and rule-enforcing processes as compared to continuing to target governments across spatial scales or companies to promote wide adoption of behavioral change? Two considerations appear relevant.

First, the relative openness of the different points of influence is one potential factor. This factor implies that movements will face incentives to develop strategies that exploit comparatively open points of influence. In work on political opportunity structures (the vertical arrow in Figure 1), scale-shifting strategies are an illustration. Keck and Sikkink's (1998) boomerang effect, for instance, follows this logic; that is, when there is a domestic blockage that prevents NGOs from gaining political influence, they can take their claims to international audiences in the hopes that pressure will rebound back to change domestic policy. Efforts to nationalize debates over the forest harvesting practices in the US Pacific Northwest during the conflicts over protecting the threatened spotted owl are another example (Pralle 2006). Within markets, groups have also recognized the importance of comparative openness by targeting companies

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<sup>7</sup> Hardin (1982) explains two reasons why groups often seek government intervention when dealing with longer term collective action problems: (1) "the barriers to a collective action adequate to engage government may be lower than the barriers to organizing the group to achieve its own provision (p. 52)," and (2) "for an ongoing or recurrent problem, one-time organization to engage government may be considerably easier than continuous organization to regulate internal group action or such external agents as neighbors or firms (p. 52)."

that are the most vulnerable to reputational threats, even if they are not necessarily the companies practicing in the most egregious ways (Bartley and Child 2011).

Second, how an open point of influence will diffuse the behavioral prescription is another potential factor. A company or government may be susceptible to social movement pressure, but the abilities of these targets to spread the behavioral prescriptions may be limited. For instance, with concerns over the loss of tropical forests, targeting a US furniture company that may be highly vulnerable but that buys mainly US-grown hardwoods would have limited direct influence on the problem of concern. This factor builds from Tarrow's (2005) proposition about the importance of international ties as a key factor facilitating transnational social movement mobilization. That is, on the market side, limited international trade works to limit opportunities to influence the behavior of market players around the globe. Indeed, Bartley (2003) suggested that those industries "heavily international in scope" are more likely fruitful grounds for the development of overarching certification systems to check industry claims. Equally, where Tarrow's notion of internationalism is thin or absent, diffusing a behavioral prescription is likely to be challenging. Under these conditions, mechanisms such as Vogel's (1995) California effect would be rendered largely inert since trade relations are critical conduits for carrying pressure for increasing standards to other jurisdictions (cf. Bernstein and Cashore 2000).

What does this mean for the formation of private governance? Based on the forest, coffee, and fisheries sectors, it appears that there are two distinct strategies wherein private governance may be a useful tool for advancing behavioral prescriptions. Each needs to be understood in relation to the potential of alternative strategies to achieve the same objectives.

The first strategy – *leading by example* – builds from King and Pearce's (2010) discussion above about the role of social movements in creating and legitimating new market categories. Research on the resource-partitioning theory, for instance, identifies how concentration among generalists in a market can facilitate the creation of specialists, even when there are strong economies of scale advantaging generalists (see Carroll and Swaminathan 2000). These authors find that specialists often erect their own barriers to entry by constructing and reinforcing signals of authenticity that exclude large generalists. Studying the microbrewery sector, Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) detail how identity strategies are used by microbreweries and brew pubs to fetter out inauthentic claims of status as a microbrewer.

With private governance, the rules and enforcement serve as the signals and sanctions to differentiate authenticity as more informal mechanisms did in the brewing industry. However, unlike this case where market players act to reinforce the specialist identity, social movements

can take on this role too (Bartley, 2007b). The interaction of market and political opportunity structures becomes important in this case. For instance, economies of scale are often considered one barrier that prevents entry of new competitors into a market (Porter 1998); however, barriers may also be a product of government policy, such as restricted access to operating permits or resources extraction rights. Taken together, markets that have low regulatory and limited economies of scale in production are likely fertile for social movements to use private standards as a tool to authenticate specialist operators. By setting an example of leading practice, this interest in private governance sees the market as providing an incentive for incumbents to follow the lead of the new specialists. In this way, private governance can pull up standards throughout an industry.<sup>8</sup>

The forestry, coffee and fisheries sectors offer useful illustrations of this leading-by-example strategy. Of the sectors, coffee has the lowest barriers to entry. While economies of scale are at play in coffee roasting much like in the brewing sector, capital costs of roasting facilitates are comparatively low and access to coffee supplies are reasonably open (Auld Forthcoming 2014). These combined market and political conditions in the coffee sector ostensibly facilitated the creation of many specialist initiatives that sought to legitimize new socially and environmentally responsible coffee offerings. This began with alternative trade organizations that formed parallel distribution and sales channels within the sector, and it continues today with budding initiatives in the US specialty market, such as the Community Agriculture Network discussed by Jaffe and Bacon (2008) that seeks to work directly with farmers in a manner that returns to the roots of fair-trade ideals. The key aspect of these developments was that they were complementary to private governance; for instance, in the UK Cafédirect – a ‘fair trade coffee’ brand – was released before an operational fairtrade label existed for the UK market. Only in 1994 did the UK Fairtrade Foundation launch its fair trade mark, at which time Cafédirect became the first coffee to carry the logo (Cafédirect 2006).

By contrast, in forestry and fisheries, the barriers to entry were such that a leading-by-example strategy was much more difficult. For instance, in the forest sector, there were a number of entrepreneurs that attempted to develop and legitimate a specialist, environmentally and socially responsible forest company. Hubert Kwisthout, a key player in the development of the

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<sup>8</sup> Though, interestingly, the work of Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) notes that in established industries the legitimacy of a new organizational form – such as a timber company that sought to only source responsible, certified wood products – will often rely on existing norms and knowledge, which may make the transformation of incumbents difficult due to visible inconsistencies between the normative category and the incumbent’s practices. Arguably, this process helps to explain the strong reactions certain large forest companies (e.g., Western Forest Products in British Columbia) faced when they sought to achieve certification with the Forest Stewardship Council (see Auld Forthcoming 2014).

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), set up the Ecological Trading Company as an enterprise modeled after the alternative trade companies operating in the coffee and other tropical commodity sectors. The idea was to develop a company that would only trade in responsible tropical timbers. Similarly, in 1997, Greenpeace actively searched the province of British Columbia Canada to find a small-scale forestry operator it could work with to legitimate an alternative approach to forestry in the province. However, because there were high barriers to entry in the province due to the allocation of timber harvesting rights on public lands (constituting ~96% of the land) to a handful companies, the search and the strategy were largely futile (Auld Forthcoming 2014).

In the fisheries case, similar restrictions of access to fishing rights serves as a significant obstacle to this leading-by-example approach. However, recent efforts by US foundations supporting the development of commercially viable closed containment aquaculture pens is a useful illustration of how technological barriers may be overcome. Indeed, the support of foundations such as the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation have helped facilitate commercial pilot projects of closed-containment salmon aquaculture production; this may, in the longer-term, have a significant effect on the commercial practices of the salmon aquaculture industry (Moore Foundation 2012; Auld and McKee 2012).

The second strategy – *subverting market power* – exploits the vulnerabilities of companies along global supply chains. Here the conditions in the market provide a target for social movements that is vulnerable to bad public relations. The interest in private governance arises out of an interest in mitigating risk. Unlike the previous strategy, here the idea is that one company can influence a considerable portion of the market owing to its buying power, but a mechanism to regulate these activities is necessary. This is where a private governance program serves a specific purpose; it offers behavioral prescriptions that give greater certainty to how targeting a vulnerable company in a global supply chain will translate into specific changes in market practices.

Across the three sectors, there are useful illustrations of the conditions when this strategy is favored. In each sector, there had been a history of outsider strategies as described by Soule (2009). In coffee in the 1980s, boycotts targeted US coffee brands, such as Folgers owned by Proctor and Gamble, as a means of criticizing US foreign policy in Central America. In forestry in the late 1980s, Friends of the Earth in the UK and Rainforest Action Network in the US, among other groups, targeted companies importing products from tropical countries that were associated with deforestation (e.g., beef). Friends of the Earth pressed UK tropical-timber importers to sign a code of conduct stipulating a requirement for sourcing from responsibly managed forests (Jeanrenaud and Dudley 1997; Dudley, Jeanrenaud, and Sullivan 1995). In

fisheries, Greenpeace began an active campaign of companies associated with industrial fishing practices in the North Sea in the early 1990s; it demanded that these companies – including Unilever – end purchases of certain species such as sand eels (Brown 1996; Auld Forthcoming 2014).

The vulnerability of these firms was ostensibly an opening to more broadly disseminate behavioral prescription in global supply chains. In some cases, the vulnerability was quite clear. For instance, retailers in the UK in the late 1980s were admitting that they did not know where their wood products were coming from. An official with B&Q, a large UK retailer, was quoted by a reporter stating: “Nobody is in a position to offer a guarantee that their tropical timber comes from sustainable sources (The Times 1989).” This reality was echoed by officials from Home Depot in the US and other importers such as Marks & Spencer and Charles Barr (The Times 1989; Stark 1992). This vulnerability served to spur interest in private governance in the form of certification as a means to move towards sourcing responsible forest products. B&Q and Home Depot, among other major retailers, were important earlier players in supporting the rise of the FSC and its accredited auditors, such as Scientific Certification Systems (Auld Forthcoming 2014).

In coffee, similar dynamics played out. Even though the lead-by-example strategy was feasible in the coffee sector, there were conditions that also supported the subvert-market-power strategy. For instance, the supermarket industry in the UK is quite concentrated and highly competitive (see Schurman and Munro 2010), which groups in the UK took advantage of to advance the broader spread of fairtrade. Groups like Oxfam, Christian Aid, and CAFOD, pressured retailers to sell Cafédirect-brand coffee (Oxfam 1994). Safeway and Co-op trialed these coffees in 1992 in their Scottish stores (Simpson 1992), and, by July 1993, Sainsbury’s agreed to stock them as well (Bain 1993). Sainsbury’s was selling Cafédirect in 150 of its stores by this point (Oxfam 1994). Finally, in fisheries, Unilever developed interest in private governance in part because of targeting from Greenpeace; it would ultimately be the WWF that would partner with the company to develop a private governance program – the Marine Stewardship Council.

A consistent theme with both of the above strategies is an attempt to use a specific target as a leverage point for broader market transformation. The discussion also made clear that it is useful to carefully assess the combined effects of market and political opportunity structures for how they shape attempts to broadly diffuse behavioral prescriptions. In addition, it is useful to add a more dynamic perspective on the interaction of different opportunity structures. The next condition – organizational density – introduces one dynamic element by considering how

movement activities that seek to influence one political or market unit at time one may serve as a foundation for movement activities targeting another unit at time two.

### *Organizational density*

Taking insights from Minkoff (1997), the discussion to follow considers the sequencing of movement activities and how opportunities ebb and flow (cf. Kingdon 1995). Various researchers trace the development of social movement organizations as part of an effort by a movement to influence a political decision-making process. According to the curvilinear relationship Meyer and Minkoff (2004) propose (see also, Eisinger 1973), moderate openness should foster greater development of social movement organizations. If a change then occurs, where either the characteristic of the political opportunity changes (for instance, elite views are no longer aligned with the interests of the movement) or the relative openness of another venue begins to look favorable, these organizational resources then become critical to supporting collective action directed via a new source of possible influence.

Another way to think of this process is that movements may develop specific organizational capacities and resources by targeting one decision-making process that then makes them better able to develop private governance. For instance, Andrews' (2002) work on the rise of white academies as resistance to desegregation in the US state of Mississippi found that pre-existing organizational capacity among whites helped explain variation in the uptake (i.e., student enrollment) of white academies.

Each of the three sectors offers illustrations of this process affecting the rise of private governance. Consider examples from the coffee and forest sectors. In coffee, fair trade certification had roots in earlier alternative-trade initiatives (noted above), which were a precursor that nurtured market awareness and built organizational capacity foundational for labeling initiatives. World shops – such as Ten Thousand Villages formerly SELFHELP – emerged as early as the 1950s in Europe and the US (Kochen 2003; Fridell 2007, p. 62). Starting with handicrafts and other artisan products made in small developing-world villages, commodity food products were incrementally added to the shelves. In 1973, the Dutch Fair Trade Organization began selling “fairly traded” coffee from a Guatemala cooperative. Then in 1979, Traidcraft established as a UK-based, fair-trade mail order business (Hockerts 2005); coffee and tea were first included in its catalog in 1980 (Auld 2009); Equal Exchange founded in 1986 (Equal Exchange 2008).<sup>9</sup> Another example from the time was Coffee Kids, a non-profit

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<sup>9</sup> It began importing Nicaraguan coffee in defiance of the Reagan Administrations embargo (Rice and McLean 1999).



organization established by the owner of Coffee Exchange, a roaster based in Providence, Rhode Island. With the support of other coffee companies, Coffee Kids channeled funds to coffee communities to assist in locally run and developed projects to improve, *inter alia*, health care and education services (Coffee Kids 2008).

The development of these new organizational forms fed into the lead-by-example strategy discussed above. Arguably, these initiatives created a more fertile cognitive and normative space in which private governance could develop. Indeed, the original developers of the Max Havelaar program – the first fairtrade labeling program that developed in the Netherlands in the late 1980s – looked to organizations such as Equal Exchange as a model, but eventually opted to develop a labeling initiative as it was a cheaper option (Auld Forthcoming 2014).

In the forestry sector, the developments occurred in a different way. The curvilinear relationship between openness and organizational density appears useful for tracing the initiation of the FSC. For instance, inter-governmental processes particularly the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the Tropical Forest Action Plan of the FAO were moderately open to NGO participation and pressure, but they stopped short of sufficiently addressing the problems these groups felt warranted urgent attention. Meetings of the ITTO themselves were also critical for building the connections, or community, from which certification emerged. A WWF official, recalling the processes, explained: “[There] were like 50 observers from NGOs at each [ITTO] meeting and they were networking, and exchanging views, sitting in lobbies waiting for things to happen and coming up with all sorts of ideas... I think ITTO, whether it intended to or not, played a role as a kind of forum where lots of people came together, and quite a number of those same people ended up being involved in FSC.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, having some access was important. Ultimately, it was the ITTO’s unwillingness to champion labeling that led NGOs to consider other options, which included the development of the FSC.

### Opportunity structures from private governance

The previous section discussed the formation of private governance in strategic terms. As sets of rules, these initiatives were discussed as parts of movement strategies to leverage behavioral change in markets. Here, the analysis is turned around in recognition that private governance initiatives – once established – become decision-making units with varying characteristics that

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<sup>10</sup> Interview, WWF official, December 2007. As an example, the Rainforest Alliance attended the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> ITTC session meetings in November 1988 and May 1989, respectively (Gale 1998, p. 131, Table 8.2). The WWF attended all of the sessions in the 1980s; many other groups, including Friends of the Earth International and its national affiliates were also regular attendees.

may shape the likely success of movement strategies. That is, movements will not exclusively control private governance, but rather – as organizations – any given private governance program will make decisions and pursue the program’s own agendas. In this respect, it is useful to understand how – once private governance exists – it potentially interacts with the other opportunities discussed above.

By reordering the analysis in this way, two questions posed by Meyer and Minkoff (2004) are important: opportunity for whom and opportunity for what. To assess these questions, I suggest Kitschelt’s (1986) conception of opportunity structure is valuable. He included both an input and output component. The input captures, as noted above, the openness of the political system to influence; the output side deals with the ability of that political system to effectively implement policies that address movement demands (Kitschelt 1986). Based on these distinctions, there are at least two relevant institutional features of private governance to consider. The first focuses on the question ‘opportunity for whom’; that is, what groups have access to influence the private governance initiative from inside? The second has to do with the regulatory breadth of the initiative and how this relates to the salient problems of the day, or the question ‘opportunity for what’. Here the concern is does the private governance program address an environmental or social problem that is relevant to a given group.

With the first issue – who has access – one notable outcome appears to be that this affects whether movements undertake insider and/or outsider strategies (cf. Soule, 2009). A comparison of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and the FSC is illustrative. Over the course of its development, the MSC has offered comparatively more limited opportunities for environmental groups to work within the program to influence decisions. It decided not to allow direct membership in the organization, and it gave discretion to accredited auditors to develop local-specific interpretations of its global standard. The FSC, by contrast, offered many more opportunities for environmental groups to work within the program to shape the global standards, set global policies, and influence interpretations of these policies in specific regions. In my work with Gulbrandsen (see Auld and Gulbrandsen 2010), we show how this difference affected how groups expressed concerns about the operation of these respective programs. With the MSC, groups were pushed towards outside strategies of protesting against MSC certifications given their limited options for voice from within. With the FSC, groups had both inside and outside strategies at their disposal, and to an extent, there was a division of labor between groups using these to pressure the FSC to make certain policy choices (Auld Forthcoming 2014).

With the second issue – the regulatory breadth and its relationship to salient problems – there are notable examples across sectors where a miss-match between movement objectives and

behavioral prescriptions of private governance has affected movement activities. In the coffee sector, as an example, Fairtrade International (FLO, or formerly Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International) has an eligibility criterion that excludes plantation grown coffee. FLO has a standard for plantations in other sectors – bananas and tea, for instance – but it took an early decision to focus on small cooperatives in the coffee sector.<sup>11</sup> This decision, however, was at odds with the envisioned role of fairtrade certification among certain US organizations. Starting in 1994, the US/Guatemala Labor Education program (US/GLAP) pushed Starbucks to adopt a code of conduct that would commit the company to improve working conditions on coffee plantation (Tarmann 2002). Later campaigns by Global Exchange linked the criticism of Starbucks to fairtrade.<sup>12</sup> Notably, the complaints aimed specifically at the poor working conditions of coffee plantation workers, not small farmers; the group even noted how small coffee farmers represented around 15% of Guatemala coffee production and hence the real problem was the plight of coffee workers on the plantations producing the other 85% (USLEAP 1997). This made the debate within the fairtrade labeling community over whether to extend the program to cover coffee plantations particularly significant. With FLO's choice to eschew this issue, there was a gap left unaddressed by existing certification programs. More than a decade later, this miss-match was one reason Fair Trade USA decided to leave FLO. The US initiative made clear that it was going to begin working on certifying coffee estates, arguing that coffee cooperatives only accounted for 10% of the world's production justifying the need for a broader approach (Fair Trade USA 2011a, 2011b).

A different example arises from cases where there is a problem that falls outside the focus of a private governance program. In both fisheries and forestry, for instance, there have been cases where private governance has been controversial because a program helps to legitimize extraction over protection. With fisheries, for instance, there was considerable controversy over an early MSC certification of the Western Australian Rock lobster Fishery because it was seen to be offsetting pressure for marine protection. David Sutton, from the Australian Marine Conservation Society, explained: "Why should industry, fishery managers or politicians support the establishment of areas closed to fishing activities when they can say the activity concerned is certified sustainable, having no impact on biodiversity or on marine structure, function or integrity? (Sutton 2003)" In the forestry case, a similar situation occurred in the province of British Columbia Canada; groups had a long-standing aim of advancing forest

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<sup>11</sup> The sizable numbers of uncertified small-coffee farmers helped justify this decision. These growers were seen as abundant enough to supply fairtrade labeled coffee for some time (Fairtrade Foundation 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Deborah James of Global Exchange wrote about the Starbucks campaign explaining the decision facing consumers as one between "coffee produced under sweatshop conditions, and a product based on principles of fair trade (James 2000)."

protection, which partly ran counter to behavioral prescriptions of certification that permitted continued harvesting. Hence, when Western Forest Products – a company operating on the BC coast – responded to its European customers’ requests for FSC by pursuing certification, several environmental groups reacted with great concern.<sup>13</sup> Behind this reaction was the reality that groups concerned about BC forests had another objective in mind. The emphasis of the demands was an opposition to any certification in BC’s Central Coast, termed the Great Bear Rainforest. NRDC added their support, highlighting how old-growth protection, in this case, trumped support for the FSC. A NRDC official stated: “We think no logging is appropriate in the Great Bear Rainforest until they set aside much more of the area for preservation (Nesmith 1998).”

These illustrations from the coffee, forest and fisheries sectors highlight how a focus on two characteristics of private governance – who has access to decision making and the regulatory breadth of a program and its relationship to salient problems – provides some insights about how different forms of private governance do or do not serve as opportunities for different movement aims. The first issue of inclusiveness was shown to affect the kinds of strategies organizations were able to use to influence private governance and the second issue of regulatory breadth was shown to affect whether private governance was seen as useful or detrimental for advancing a specific aim. Finally, the discussion also has highlighted that it is critical to think of private governance as just one further unit where movement activities can be directed. If we return to the political aim outline at the outset – the broad diffusion of particular behavioral prescriptions – it is important to evaluate the character of private governance that would make it appear a more amenable venue in which to advance this aim as compared to other movement strategies.

#### **4. Concluding Thoughts: Moving Towards a Synthesis**

Building from scholarship on social movements, this paper explored the concept of opportunity structures as a means to partly understand the rise of private governance and the operation of private governance as a new venue of political struggle. It examined private governance largely in instrumental terms, viewing it as a potential component of movement strategies aiming to see particular behavioral prescriptions broadly diffused and enforced within the global economy.

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<sup>13</sup> Just months after the company announced it would seek FSC certification, Greenpeace released a damning report assessing WFP’s practices against FSC’s P&C and concluded that the company would not make the grade (Cashore, Auld, and Newsom 2004; Auld 2009).

I discussed two different strategies that integrate private governance as a means to exploit open points of influence to spread behavioral prescriptions. A *leading-by-example* strategy aims to use private governance to provide incumbents an incentive to follow the lead of the new specialist operators that advance socially or environmentally responsible practices. A *subverting-market-power* strategy exploits the vulnerabilities of companies along global supply chains on the premise that one company can influence a considerable portion of the market owing to its buying power, but that for this to happen a private-governance mechanism for regulating these activities is necessary. The analysis then introduced the idea that sequencing can have important effects; that is, movement activities targeting other market and political units can create the organizational capacity necessary to create private governance. Turning to the question of private governance as an opportunity structure, I showed how variation in the inclusiveness of private governance as well as differences in the regulatory breadth of programs affects how movements will engage with an existing private governor.

Beyond the specific insights offered from this analysis, there are two broader points that emerge from considering the interplay of market and political opportunity structures over time. First, the units in the case of political authority and market authority are different. Territory deals with the space of politics in place and it largely determines the venues wherein political struggles will take place over grievances that are spatial in orientation. Environmental activists that oppose a particular development project will only be able to gain leverage by exerting pressure against governments that hold individual or shared jurisdiction over the area where the project is under consideration. Targeting the company developing the project or that company's suppliers or customers may lead to concessions that are in another spatial location, or the targeting may be rendered moot if the company goes out of business or sells the controversial asset. The recent rail accident in Lac Megantic in the Canadian Province of Quebec is illustrative; protest directed at the implicated rail company – the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway – ended abruptly when the company went bankrupt. Similarly, forest product companies in the US have sold much of their private forestlands in the last decade, meaning that they no longer directly control what happens on forestlands. In the discussion of the limits of private governance as an opportunity for movements, the case of protection versus stewardship is a final example. Environmental protection is spatially specific in a way that appears at odds with the basic regulatory focus of certification as a form of private governance.

Second, the analysis developed some ideas about how sequencing in movement activities may be important for understanding the rise of private governance. The discussion of organizational density shed light on how movement activities targeting other market and political units can create the organizational capacity necessary to create private governance. There is potentially a fruitful parallel between this idea and the work of Bütte and Mattli (2011); they explain a theory

of institutional complementary where the configuration of institutions at the domestic level affects the influence different countries (and the industrial interests therewithin) have in international standard-setting processes. Though their analysis finds that hierarchy in the arrangement of accounting and product standard setting domestically provides an advantage in these standard setting processes internationally, a more general implication of their theory may be a point about sequencing. That is, as the discussion above highlighted, there are instances where mobilization to influence one decision-making unit in time one may have a positive or negative effect on the likelihood of success in mobilizing to influence another decision-making unit in some subsequent time two. This possibility reinforces Meyer and Minkoff's (2004) call for more work on understanding the link between movement activities and the formation of organizations, as different organizational configurations may serve to create the complementary Bütte and Mattli describe.

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