Super-Networks in International Politics:
The Right to a Healthy Environment Coalition

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Some notes on the context of the paper: This paper is based on a theoretical framework developed and empirical material collected within the framework of a funded research project on 'Super-Networks'. The project analyses three case studies, i.e. the Inter-Constituency Alliance at the climate change negotiations (COP/UNFCCC), the Right to a Healthy Environment Coalition (UN Human Rights Council/General Assembly) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Alliance (UNCBD). Because I have already used this analytical framework for another article, I would like to further develop it to link it more to the literature on institutional interaction/institutional complexity. (Unfortunately, due to limited time, I did not manage to do this prior to the workshop). If I do this, the case analysis will likely shift more towards analyzing how interaction/collaboration between TANs/NGOs can advance institutional interaction between the human rights and environmental regimes. After thorough revision and further work on the analytical framework (as elaborated above), I plan to submit this to *Global Environmental Politics*.

Introduction

In a world of enhanced institutional complexity (e.g. Oberthür and Stokke 2011), transnational advocacy is also becoming more complex. Instead of focusing on confined issue areas, transnational advocacy networks (TANs) increasingly address interrelated issues, building larger and more sophisticated networks and transporting norms from one policy field to another, thereby fostering institutional interaction (Schapper 2021).

Our knowledge about how TANs collaborate and build even more advanced networks, however, is limited until today. We also lack insights into the concrete collaborative structures TANs can establish and the impact these structures can have on power and change (Schneiker 2017; Carpenter 2011). Particularly neglected in IR scholarship is the investigation of network collaboration across policy fields (Cheng et al. 2021) or the establishment of partnerships between networks that previously have followed different, sometimes even competing, objectives.

Against this background, this article introduces the new concept of *super-networks* to International Relations (IR) scholarship. Super-networks are mobilization structures *above individual TANs*. In a super-network, several TANs collaborate to optimize political opportunities, to mobilize at a level above single TANs and to establish more sophisticated tactics with the objective of successfully influencing international agreements. The super-network concept reflects a situation in IR where collaboration of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other actors does not necessarily only take place *within one TAN* but *between various TANs across policy fields*. These TANs sometimes have diverse objectives but can temporarily agree on a common goal and a collective cross-policy advocacy strategy. With these alignment shifts towards TAN collaboration, and with influential allies among states and international organizations (IOs), super-networks can increase their legitimacy and institutional access at intergovernmental meetings. Super-networks also use political cleavages to enhance their power vis-à-vis state actors and to change practices of national sovereignty and thus, can impact decision-making in international forums.

What makes a super-network particularly powerful are its multi-level advocacy activities, i.e. using local testimonies to change national decision-making at international negotiations, and the application of a package approach, i.e. consistently using one agreed core message in all interactions with state negotiators. Super-networks focus on one package of demands, which represents a consensus on values or norms to be advocated for. The package approach is a unique tactic that can be applied from above, i.e. at the higher mobilization level via a super-network, and from below, i.e. at the lower mobilization level via individual TANs (see also Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). Due to the higher mobilization structure, super-networks have increased access to information, resources and capacities.

To further explore super-networks in more depth the main research questions addressed in this paper are: *What are super-networks? How do they emerge and function?* The main argument

presented here is that super-networks emerge when brokers bring together different collaborative TANs to optimize the political opportunity structure, to mobilize across policy fields and to apply common cross-policy tactics. Super-networks as collaborative TANs can better influence the existing political opportunity structure than individual TANs as they have enhanced abilities to improve institutional access, shift alignments, work with influential allies, and strategically use cleavages between state actors.

The objectives of this paper are threefold: I will *first* develop a new analytical framework to analyze super-networks highlighting the relationship between political opportunity structures (POS), mobilization and tactics. *Second*, I will present rich empirical details analyzing the emergence and functioning of one particular super-network, the Right to a Healthy Environment (R2HE) coalition. The in-depth analysis of this case highlights the key characteristics of super-networks. And *third*, I will further discuss the relevance and value-added of the super-network concept in IR.

Empirically, this paper investigates an in-depth case study (George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007; Gerring 2017) on the R2HE coalition that successfully advocated for the recognition of the new international human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in the UN Human Rights Council (resolution 48/13, 2021) and in the UN General Assembly (resolution 76/300, 2022). The case study selected can be considered a case of intrinsic importance, and of theoretical, empirical and practical significance (Gerring 2017: 39). This is due to three main reasons: (1) The case study demonstrates how brokers link TANs from various policy fields to establish and mobilize a super-network that can better optimize its political opportunities and apply more sophisticated cross-policy tactics (theoretical significance). (2) The R2HE case study is empirically relevant as it provides explanations to the empirical puzzle that civil society had unsuccessfully advocated for a R2HE for five decades but has now been successful in persuading/pressuring states to recognize the right in 2021/2022 (empirical significance). (3) Recognition of the R2HE also has practical implications. After being recognized in the UN Human Rights Council (2021) and the UN General Assembly (2022), the R2HE became part of the Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan (UNFCCC COP 27 outcome agreement) and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. In addition to this, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment plans to wok on a legally binding human rights treaty stipulating the R2HE (Interview UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, 8 September 2022), (practical significance).

Methodically, the research for this paper is based on a qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014) of primary documents and data (Bowen 2009), comprising policy documents, website content (among several UN websites also referring to the Global Call for a Healthy Environment), Human Rights Council and UNGA resolutions as well as tweets under #HealthyEnvironmentForAll and related data/documents. Furthermore, 13 problem-centered expert interviews were conducted online in August and September 2022, just after the R2HE had been recognized in the UN General Assembly (in July 2022). Interviewees comprised the initiator of the R2HE coalition, TANs and NGOs from the Global South and the Global North that actively participated in the coalition, OHCHR and UNEP representatives that were part of the recognition process as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment. The interviews conducted were semi-structured in-depth expert interviews (Witzel and Reiter 2012) and I evaluated them via a qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014) using the categories highlighted in the analytical framework.

This paper is structured in the following way: It presents a literature review on TANs with a focus on existing research gaps relating to TAN collaboration, before elucidating an analytical framework for examining super-networks highlighting the relationship between POS, mobilizing structures and tactics. Following upon that, it introduces, analyzes and compares the case studies on the R2HE coalition in light of the analytical framework developed. It then discusses the new super-network concept and its relevance in IR before concluding.

What do we know about Transnational Advocacy Networks?

TANs can be grasped as communicative structures, in which a range of activists guided by principled ideas and values interact (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 1). TANs create new linkages, multiply access channels to the international system, make resources available to new actors and help to transform practices of national sovereignty by changing governmental policies. Within these networks, international and local NGOs, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, academics and even members of regional or international organizations collaborate. Although a diverse range of actors can participate, networks are usually driven by advocacy-oriented NGOs that mobilize collective action (Smith and Jenkins 2011; Stroup and Murdie 2012). Their overall objective is to change governmental policies (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 9).

Since the pathbreaking study on TANs has been published by Keck and Sikkink (1998), a significant number of scholars have worked on TANs in a range of different policy fields, including human rights (Reiners 2021), human security (Carpenter 2014; Murdie 2014),

women's rights and gender politics (Joachim 2003; Lang 2009), migration and trafficking (Noyori-Corbett 2017), labour issues (Hertel 2006), trade (Nolan García 2011), the environment (Balboa 2018), climate change (Hadden and Jasny 2019; Author 2021), cluster munitions and landmines (Bolton and Nash 2010), nuclear disarmament (Norman 2017) and biodiversity (Fuentes-George 2016). Thus, the concept of TANs still plays a significant role in IR research until today.

Advocacy networks are known for connecting "people and power" (Young 2001, 73) in a transnational sphere. By bringing local societal concerns into international governmental negotiations (Schapper 2020), they serve as a "transmission belt" (Steffek and Nanz 2008, 8) between civil society and IOs. TANs often emerge when channels between domestic opposition groups and governments are blocked – and activists seek support for their cause in an international arena (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). The emergence of TANs is also likely when political entrepreneurs initiate and actively promote networking to further their objectives and when international conferences create a platform for exchange and network-building (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 12).

Recent scholarship on TANs has highlighted their growing professionalization (Norman 2017; Stroup and Wong 2017). This process describes how NGOs and TANs resemble professional political agencies to enhance their opportunities to attract funding and increase access to international networks and organizations (Minkoff and Powell 2006, 597). Critical scholars discuss this "NGOization" (Alvarez 2009) as a shift towards more hierarchical structures with managing directors, permanent staff positions, project managers and fundraisers that leads to depoliticization and demobilization. Professionalization through a higher degree of institutionalization, centralization, formalization and policy-orientation also means that TANs are more likely to manage their own POS and resource mobilization (Joachim 2003; Norman 2007).

Hierarchies in network organization remain to be an important point of critique in many newer and more critical studies on TANs. Murdie (2014) elaborates how NGOs with weaker resources engage in networks with better resourced NGOs for gaining access, improving public visibility and building capacities. Hierarchical network structures can reinforce power asymmetries (Carpenter 2014). Other critical aspects raised in relation to TANs are that large networks may lose their ties to local civil society, lack legitimacy, are too bureaucratic and operate like multinational corporations (Mitchell, Schmitz and Vijfeijken 2020; Balboa 2018).

What do we not yet know about (collaborative) Transnational Advocacy Networks?

Cheng et al. (2021, 1) argue that we know little about how TANs engage in networking, the nature of their network ties, what structures they build and the impact of these structures on power, change, community and exclusion. This is in line with other studies highlighting our limited knowledge on NGO/NGO or TAN/TAN cooperation, networking among NGOs or TANs and the institutional environment shaping possible interaction patterns as a research gap (Carpenter 2011; Schneiker 2017). NGOs and TANs are more likely to interact if this enhances their opportunities for goal attainment and problem-solving, or increases capacities, resources and the chance to manage environmental constraints, but interaction modes vary and need to be more thoroughly analyzed (Deloffre and Quack 2021).

Empirical analyses so far have focused on TANs in specific policy areas, despite the concern that this would "artificially enforce [boundaries]" and prevent us from understanding a network as a collective whole (Cheng et al. 2021, 3). Intersectoral collaborations and the combination of insider and outsider strategies can increase the power of TANs (Mitchell, Schmitz and Vijfeijken 2020). Inter-personal networks, relationships, biographical overlaps and common experiences seem to play a crucial role in initiating and establishing TAN collaboration, but these factors so far remain understudied in TAN and NGO research (Deloffre and Quack 2021). Fransen et al. (2020), for instance, assert that personal relationships between NGO or TAN staff contributed to the establishment of an emerging sustainability community that can potentially foster collaboration, although certain obstacles remain in place. Because fruitful collaboration between NGOs/TANs can enhance their capacities, resources, and their range of influence, collaborative interactions between networks may also change their organizational characteristics, practices or even policy-orientation (Deloffre and Quack 2021).

In sum, there remain important knowledge gaps in relation to interactions between TANs, in particular TAN/TAN collaboration, and the establishment of more sophisticated TAN structures operating across policy fields. This article contributes to closing these gaps by introducing the new super-network concept and presenting an analytical framework that helps to comprehensibly grasp super-networks.

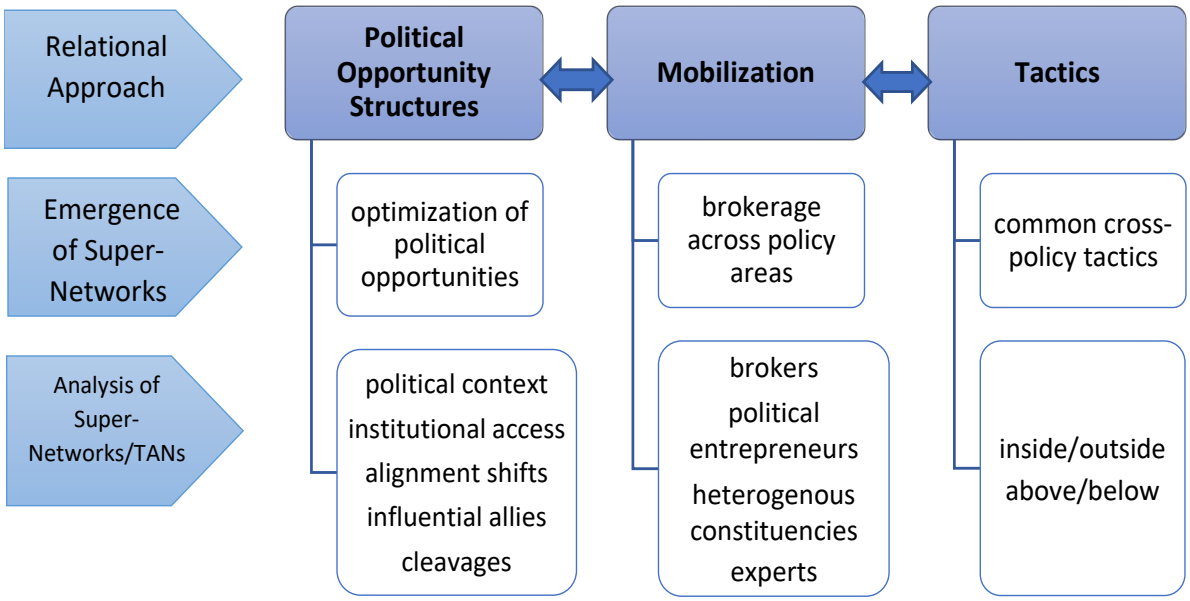
Dynamic Interactions Between Political Opportunity Structures, Mobilizing Structures and Tactics: An Analytical Framework

To understand the emergence and functioning of super-networks, I propose considering the relationship between POS, mobilization and tactics. Adopting a relational ontology means

acknowledging that all three elements, POS, mobilizing structures and tactics, can change and by changing one of these elements, the other elements may also change (Figure 1, 1st level). I argue that super-networks emerge when brokers initiate collaboration between TANs that then optimize political opportunities to initiate new forms of mobilization across policy areas and to apply common cross-policy tactics (Figure 2, 2nd level). I have developed a new analytical framework to study super-networks that synthesizes insights from IR scholarship about dynamic interactions between POS and mobilizing structures (Joachim 2003), more recent studies that explore brokerage in TAN research (Cheng et al. 2021, MacDonald 2018, Goddard 2009) and tactics explaining influential transnational advocacy (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Mitchell, Schmitz, and Vijfeijken 2020), (Figure 1, 3rd level). The framework (3rd level) suggests dimensions to analyze when studying super-networks, which can also be useful for comparing TANs and super-networks.

Joachim's (2003) study explains interactive processes between POS and mobilizing structures. Several scholars also acknowledge how mobilizing structures relate to and affect TAN tactics (Hadden and Jasny 2019). Interaction between POS and network strategies have previously been highlighted in Social Movement Studies (Giugni and Grasso 2015) but have never been adopted in constructivist scholarship or other theoretical camps in IR. I combine these insights from IR and Social Movement Studies and extend previous research results by developing an analytical framework that considers the relationship between all three elements, *POS, mobilization and tactics,* to comprehensively understand the emergence and functioning of super-networks.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework



Source: own compilation based on Tarrow 1996, Joachim 2003, Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017

Political opportunity structures can be understood as access to (state) institutions and the broader institutional context that can provide opportunities or obstacles for frame resonance and political influence. According to Tarrow (1996), POS are defined as:

> "*consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements* […] The most salient kinds of signals are four: the opening up of access to power, shifting alignments, the availability of influential allies, and cleavages within and among elites" (Tarrow 1996, 54, italic in original).

Although the term political opportunity *structures* suggests that these are fixed elements, it is important to note that Tarrow (1996) proposes that several POS components are fluid and can be subject to change. Hence, all these elements, and their fluidity, are relevant for the analysis of super-networks/TANs. The *political context* of mobilization can be understood as the social and organizational environment, in which networks are embedded (Meyer 2004). *Institutional access* is defined as formal admission to international negotiations for making written and oral contributions with the aim to participate in decision-making to initiate social change (see also Lang 2014). *Alignment shifts* can be grasped as a change in support for or close collaboration with a particular group, nation or party. *Influential allies* are powerful partners/collaborators and *cleavages* are disagreements between state actors/negotiators that can be strategically used (Tarrow 1994).

This definition clearly emphasizes that POS contain more consistent elements, such as institutional access, but also more fluid elements, like alignment shifts, increasing availability of allies, or emerging cleavages. Thus, at least certain elements of the POS are dynamic and can be optimized. This is an important insight that supports the argument about the relationship between POS, mobilization and tactics. If POS can be optimized, enhanced mobilization and the application of more sophisticated tactics may be possible.

Mobilization comprises agency, network composition and strategic collaboration between actors involved in TANs. McAdam et al. (1996, 3) define mobilizing structures as "[…] those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action". These collective vehicles can be considered as the source of criticizing and evaluating current (inter-)governmental practices, of developing new ideas and promoting normative change. Mobilizing structures comprise key network actors, including political entrepreneurs, a heterogenous international constituency and experts (Joachim 2003, 251).

To understand how super-networks emerge, I suggest looking at the role of *brokers* that can link TANs from different policy fields and mobilize collaborative TAN activity. Brokerage is still a relatively new concept in the network literature on TANs (Cheng et al. 2021). Brokering processes, however, are relevant for understanding how super-networks emerge as they explain the development of links between different networks that can alter network mobilizing structures. A broker can be described as an actor that connects other (previously unconnected) actors and networks. Brokers can have membership in different communities and engage in complex brokerage processes (Deloffre and Quack 2021). Wenger (1998, 105) highlights that brokering involves coordination, translation and alignment of perspectives between different communities. Mobilization occurs when the ideas of a broker resonate and activate or strengthen ties between different TANs (Deloffre and Quack 2021). Brokers can take on different brokerage roles (Cheng et al. 2021) and can speak to divergent audiences (Stroup and Wong 2017); brokerage positions facilitate exchanges of ideas, information and material resources (MacDonald 2018; Goddard 2009).

The role of brokers in some ways overlaps with the role of *political entrepreneurs* that actively promote networks, collaborative action and campaigns (Joachim 2003, 251). In addition to initiating network campaigns based on valuable experiences in previous campaigns (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 12-14) and well-established connections in the NGO landscape, brokers go further by connecting TANs from various policy fields and establishing super-networks. Thus, brokers can mobilize a more *heterogenous constituency*. This strengthens the overall

mobilizing structure because it weakens arguments that a network only represents particular interests and diversifies the strategies of contention in use (Tarrow 1994, 19). *Experts* can further strengthen mobilizing structures as affected population groups providing knowledge and testimonials or as part of an epistemic community (Haas 1992).

I argue that, in order to understand how super-networks emerge and function, we must pay attention to the interplay of POS, mobilizing structures and tactics. I assume that collaborative TANs develop sophisticated **tactics** building on both: the higher mobilization level (super-network) and the lower mobilization level (individual TANs) at the same time. They establish new collaborative cross-policy tactics but also rely on proven tactics of individual TANs. Thus, they exert pressure/convince governments to change decisions *from above*, i.e. via the super-network, while also interacting with them *from below*, i.e. via individual TANs, building on relationships that have been established over time and at various international negotiations.

Dellmuth and Tallberg (2017) suggest differentiation between *inside strategies* understood as direct interaction with and exertion of pressure on decision-makers in IOs and *outside strategies* referring to indirect interaction and exertion of pressure through mobilizing an international public. Inside strategies include direct interaction with policymakers offering information and expertise or raising awareness on the situation of constituents (Betsill and Corell 2008). Outside strategies comprise public opinion campaigns via social media, events, or protest (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017, 707). Therefore, I differentiate between *inside* and *outside tactics* (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017) in the analytical framework.

TANs now increasingly focus on advocacy and awareness-raising (instead of service delivery), global campaigning and systems thinking to address the root causes of transboundary challenges (Mitchell, Schmitz and Vijfeijkens 2020). Strategies they apply include framing, venue-shopping, lobbying, litigation, policy analysis and advice, naming and shaming, and media involvement. Digital methods and technologies now allow for quicker responses (Mitchell, Schmitz and Vijfeijkens 2020), the inclusion of more diverse actors and more strategy reconciliation ahead of international negotiations.

In the following sections, I show how favorable interplay between POS and mobilization can prompt brokers to establish a super-network that applies new cross-policy tactics to shape international decision-making in UN forums.

The Right to a Healthy Environment Coalition

The emergence of the *Right to a Healthy Environment (R2HE) Coalition* can be understood as a process over several decades. Since the adoption of the *Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment* in 1972, which first discussed environmental concerns as a major issue for human wellbeing (UN Stockholm Declaration 1972), local, domestic and international non-governmental organizations have started advocating for the recognition of environmental human rights.

The year 2012 also saw the initiation of a new mandate at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council: an Independent Expert on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The first office-holder, Professor John Knox, was appointed as UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment in 2015 for another three-year term (OHCHR 2023). His mandate as Independent Expert and Special Rapporteur focused on drafting the Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment. The Framework Principles, which were presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2018, set out the legal obligations of states under existing human rights law in relation to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment (Atapattu and Schapper 2019). From August 2018 on, the mandate of the second UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, Professor David Boyd, concentrated on the recognition of a new *Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment* at the international level. The new international human right was then recognized by governments in the UN Human Rights Council in October 2021 and in the UN General Assembly in July 2022.

The above-mentioned institutionalization processes linking human rights and the environment at the UN came hand in hand with accelerated transnational civil society mobilization. In 2012, with the appointment of John Knox as Independent Expert at the Human Rights Council, a core group of international human rights and environmental NGOs started regular, but informal, discussions on advancing a human right to a healthy environment – in close collaboration with the special mandate-holder (Interview former Executive Director AIDA, 10 August 2022). Regular consultations between the UN Independent Expert and civil society continued until the introduction of the UN Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment significantly boosted coalition-building (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022).

Following consultations with Special Rapporteur David Boyd in October 2018, a critical group of international human rights and environmental NGOs, i.e. those organizations that had held

informal strategizing discussions since 2012, decided to actively build a large and diverse coalition to promote recognition of the R2HE. This critical group comprised environmental partners, namely the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), AIDA (Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense) and Earthjustice, human rights organizations, in particular Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as a faith-based organization, i.e. Franciscans International (Interview former Executive Director AIDA, 10 August 2022). The idea was to actively reach out to and include a variety of different networks and NGOs to demonstrate that civil society speaks with one voice in demanding recognition of the R2HE (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022). In 2020, when the R2HE coalition published the 'Call for the Global Recognition of a Right to a Healthy Environment', a web-based sign-on letter, 1350 TANs and NGOs became part of the coalition (R2HE coalition 2023). The R2HE coalition had a three-layered structure. The first layer comprised those international TANs/NGOs that informally exchanged on ways to advance the R2HE and then decided to build the coalition (i.e. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, CIEL, Earthjustice, AIDA and Franciscans International). This first layer of organizations was also active *inside* the Human Rights Council and General Assembly negotiations. The second layer involved a larger number of TANs and NGOs that engaged in advocacy activities *outside* the negotiations and reached out to and interacted with governmental delegations they had established good working relationships with. The third layer consisted of all the 1350 TANs and NGOs that had signed the Global Call with varying capacities and resources to engage in advocacy and communication work in relation to recognizing the R2HE (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022; Interview Initiator of the R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022).

Political Opportunity Structures

The *political context* for negotiating the R2HE in 2021/2022 was optimal. After governments had, for many decades, refused or hesitated to discuss a new international human right to a healthy environment, the time was right to table it at this point for several reasons. One reason was the 50th anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration in 2022, which created a unique momentum for reaffirming the relationship between human rights and the environment:

"And so we thought that it was very important to have this momentum of the 50th anniversary of Stockholm. We started to call and coordinate with other people and tell other people outside

of this very small coalition about the fact that this was getting momentum at the U.N." (Interview former Executive Director AIDA, 10 August 2022).

Another reason was that states had an increased awareness of the triple environmental crisis they are facing, including climate change, pollution, and biodiversity depletion:

"The fact that we are in this triple environmental crisis provides a lot of impetus for this type of action." (Interview UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, 8 September 2022).

Furthermore, there were five core states, including Costa Rica, the Maldives, Morocco, Slovenia and Switzerland, pushing the process and tabling the resolution on the R2HE in the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly (ibid.).

The three-layered structure of the R2HE coalition ensured that a broad and diverse alliance could be built but *institutional access* varied for the different layers of actors. Prior to the actual negotiations in the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, each network layer could participate equally in regular strategic calls, which were all held online. During the negotiations in Geneva (2021) and New York (2022), only the first layer of critical international TANs/NGOs was present. These were all organizations with permanent offices in either Geneva or New York (and respective capacities and resources), with many years of experiences in interacting with states in the Human Right Council and General Assembly, and with long-established contacts among relevant governmental delegations (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022). Thus, these critical networks had optimized their own institutional access over many years.

In addition to this, this first layer of actors also enjoyed excellent working relationships with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, and representatives of other UN organizations that were present at the negotiations. At the UN General Assembly, for example, when non-state observers were not allowed inside the negotiation forum anymore during the last phase of the debate, a representative from UNEP (who had previously worked for the OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur) acted as intermediary and continuously kept the R2HE coalition informed about what was going on inside the negotiations. In addition to this, she also linked certain governmental delegations with legal experts of the coalition if they needed concrete text proposals (Interview UNEP, 25 August 2022). This means institutional access for the critical group of TANs/NGOs, i.e. the first layer of actors, was very good even at times when they were not allowed into closed meetings.

At the same time, however, partners from the Global South felt left out. They did not have permanent offices in Geneva and New York, could not afford to be present at the actual negotiations, struggled with English as the main negotiation language, and they did not feel supported enough by the first layer of TANs/NGOs that directly interacted with the state governments (Interview former Executive Director AIDA, 10 August 2022; Interview AIDA Campaigner, 16 August 2023). Hence, their institutional access was limited. This was despite the fact that the whole campaign was built on local struggles, experiences and knowledge related to adverse human rights impacts of environmental challenges and environmental policies (Interview ESRC-Net, 4 August 2023).

As opposed to more conventional TAN strategies focusing primarily on interaction with governmental delegations, the R2HE coalition engaged in an *alignment shift*. Instead of concentrating on lobbying activities with state actors, the coalition mainly concentrated on collaboration among non-state actors from various policy fields, including environmental and human rights NGOs, gender advocates, trade unions, youth groups, development organizations but also indigenous peoples' representatives, amongst others. In this way, they did not compete with other TANs/NGOs for government's limited attention. Building a broad and diverse coalition that spoke with one voice meant that it became more difficult for state actors to ignore or neglect their demands. Furthermore, the R2HE coalition did not name and shame those countries that were blocking the resolutions, i.e. India, China and Russia. Instead, they focused on pressuring and persuading states that had not taken a clear position yet or that were considered to be "influencable", including the USA, UK, Norway, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022).

Although some representatives of the coalition insisted that they were solely non-governmental (Interview Initiator of the R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022; Interview UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, 8 September 2022), others saw their collaboration with *influential allies*, especially IO representatives of the OHCHR (including the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment) and UNEP, as crucially important and considered them to be part of the R2HE coalition (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022). Particularly influential was the core group of five states that sponsored the resolutions and worked hand in hand with the R2HE coalition to pressure and/or convince other governmental delegations to recognize the right to a healthy environment. These

five states were Costa Rica, the Maldives, Morocco, Slovenia and Switzerland (Interview UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, 8 September 2022).

In the end, political *cleavages* between states were strategically used by the coalition. To convince states that remained skeptical, like the UK for example, to vote in favour of the resolution, the R2HE coalition used cleavages that were caused by Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. Trying to convince the UK, they raised questions like "[do] you really want to be aligned with Russia on this?" (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022). Russia, although having the right to a healthy environment in its national constitution and environmental legislation, was strongly opposed to the Human Rights and General Assembly resolutions recognizing the right at an international level. The Russian delegation feared that the resolutions, in the longer run, will be used to establish a legally binding international treaty with established monitoring mechanisms (Interview UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, 8 September 2022). Therefore, political cleavages with Russia were a strong instrument utilized by the R2HE coalition.

Summarized, the R2HE coalition optimized existing political opportunities and influenced decision-making in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly due to a favorable political environment, improved institutional access (especially for the first layer of the coalition), and strategically shifted alignments through collaboration (instead of competing) with other TANs/NGOs, but also with influential state actors, and representatives from IOs, further creating cleavages among state delegations. The coalition, therefore, strategically used the more fluid elements of the POS, such as alignments, allies and cleavages, to establish and mobilize a super-network.

Mobilization

Among the group of critical TANs/NGOs, there was one *broker* who played a central role in the mobilization process. Experienced in bringing different civil society constituencies together, knowledgeable in participating in the Human Rights Council and equipped with legal expertise at the intersection of human rights and the environment, the main initiator of the R2HE coalition acted as a broker who linked TANs/NGOs from various policy fields. The broker, an environmental lawyer working for CIEL, modelled the R2HE coalition in accordance with the inter-constituency alliance (Interview Initiator R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022). The inter-constituency alliance was the very first super-network in the

environmental/climate change policy area and had managed to successfully include human rights in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement via cross-policy collaboration of a range of TANs (Schapper and Dee 2023). From the beginning of mobilization, the CIEL initiator emphasized the need to build a broad coalition including diverse TANs/NGOs demonstrating that civil society is united:

"On our side it was a coalition that was built on previous experiences. […] And actually make a principle that this is going to be cross-constituency […] We are able to bring representatives from different constituencies […] from different backgrounds." (Interview Initiator R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022).

All civil society and IO representatives emphasized the role of the main broker in uniting diverse TANs/NGOs and mobilizing them around the demand to recognize a right to a healthy environment (e.g. Interview former Executive Director AIDA, 10 August 2022; Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022). In addition to the brokerage role, there were also other leadership responsibilities. One network, for example, the Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, led all communication activities, whereas a faith-based organization, Franciscans International, acted as the focal point for advocacy (Interview Children's Environmental Rights Initiative, 10 August 2022).

In addition to the broker from CIEL, the core group of international TANs/NGOs (first layer) acted as *political entrepreneurs* reaching out to their respective contacts to include TANs/NGOs from various policy areas, such as youth groups, gender advocates, representatives from indigenous peoples, etc. to establish a broader coalition (second layer) (Interview Amnesty International, 9 August 2022). This strengthened the overall mobilizing structure as it weakened arguments that the campaign only represents very particular interests, and it diversified the methods, strategies, and tactics of contention in use (see for example Tarrow 1994, 19). Both, first and second layer of networks, included important entrepreneurs, with actors of the first layer engaging *inside* the Human Rights Council and General Assembly as international forums, whereas the second layer concentrated on advocacy work interacting with state representatives *outside* the international negotiations.

With a view to establishing a *heterogenous constituency*, the first layer of TANs/NGOs then initiated and drafted the "Global Call for the UN Human Rights Council to urgently recognise the Right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment" (Global Call 2020). The call was launched in September 2020 in English, French, Spanish and Arabic and could be signed

electronically by TANs/NGOs around the world. The first and second layer of actors used their mailing lists to disseminate the call and to ask further organizations or networks around the globe to sign on. The aim was to use key mailing lists of each participating TAN/NGO and to ensure, at the same time, that all receiving actors knew the person that had sent the respective email. Via the website of the global call, TANs/NGOs could see the sign-on letter and they could also view all the signatories (Interview Initiator R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022). Showing the 'live signatures' and possibly detecting collaborators or familiar organizations was intended to encourage further signatories. Eventually, 1350 TANs and NGOs signed on to the call. These comprised local, national and international organizations from the Global South and the Global North, working on a range of issues, including peace, justice, development, heritage, fisheries, health, energy and others. These signatories built the third layer of the R2HE coalition demonstrating that a united heterogenous constituency had mobilized to demand governmental recognition of the right to a healthy environment.

The global call and the R2HE campaign heavily relied on *experts*. In the call itself, scientific evidence of the global assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services (IPBES) is referenced. In addition to this, UNEP reports, human rights and indigenous peoples' rights instruments and scientific insights are mentioned (Global Call 2020). In addition to this, the expertise of the Special Rapporteur played a major role, particularly in relation to his own research on the right to a healthy environment in national constitutions (Interview Initiator R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022; Interview UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, 8 September 2022). Furthermore, the role of local experts was important as it provided the actual empirical evidence on challenges caused by environmental change or environmental policies on the ground, which made the recognition of the R2HE even more important (Interview AIDA Campaigner, 16 August 2023).

Tactics

The main tactic applied by the R2HE coalition was launching the Global Call. It entailed one consistent message that was used in all communications of each of the three layers of TANs/NGOs with state actors at the local, national and international level. The Global Call demonstrated that very diverse civil society organizations spoke with one voice when demanding recognition of the R2HE. This unity is visible in the way the Global Call is written

with those who had drafted it referring to it as a 'manifesto': "The call was the manifesto; it starts with: "we the civil society organizations and indigenous peoples, social movements and local communities…" (Interview Initiator R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022).

By utilizing one key message at various levels of advocacy activities, the R2HE coalition utilized a *package approach*. The package focused on R2HE recognition without defining any specifics or concrete implementation measures yet (Interview Initiator R2HE Coalition, 7 September 2022). As the Global Call, which was originally only drafted for recognition of the right to a healthy environment in the Human Rights Council, was constantly used by a broad range of diverse actors – and the 1350 signatories symbolized this unity – it became very difficult for states to neglect or ignore this demand:

"Actually through our different organizations and our presence in different countries to have a common set of advocacy messages to states so that when things got to the table in Geneva or got to the table in New York, they were hearing the same thing from a multitude of organizations." (Interview WWF, 23 August 2022).

The Global Call was a meaningful tactic because so many TANs/NGOs could sign on digitally without being present at the actual negotiations in Geneva and New York. Thus, it was used by the first layer of international TANs/NGOs *inside* the negotiations, the second layer of the R2HE who addressed individual missions, governmental delegations or single state actors *outside* the negotiations and also the third layer that mainly demonstrated their support by signing on from all over the world. In this way, pressure and/or persuasion mechanisms were applied *from above* with many diverse TANs/NGOs speaking with one voice via the super-network and *from below* using the individual relationships TANs/NGOs had established with governmental delegations over time. Thus, we can observe a boomerang pattern in international negotiations, where pressure and restrictions had been imposed on community groups by state actors through restrictive environmental policies - and this comes back to the state governments at the international negotiations making use of the super-network as transnational advocacy vehicle (see also Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999).

The R2HE coalition engaged in *multi-level advocacy activities*. They mainly used expert knowledge and testimonies from local community groups affected by environmental challenges and policies to demand change at the international level, and to recognize a new human right to a healthy environment that would better protect them. Some NGOs/TANs also explicitly used the R2HE coalition as a transnational advocacy vehicle to bypass their own

government, especially in restrictive states (Interview European Network for Ecological Reflection and Action, 15 February 2023).

The diversity of NGOs/TANs involved, ranging from local to global and spanning across so many different policy fields, which was very visible in the digital Global Call, significantly increased the *legitimacy* of the R2HE coalition. The diversity of actors and the unity of civil society participants demonstrated that this is not only a demand emphasized by the big NGOs players, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Greenpeace or CIEL, but that NGOs/TANs across the world are united in calling for the recognition of the R2HE.

What is New About the R2HE Coalition as a "Super-Network"?

I suggest understanding the R2HE coalition as a new form of TAN collaboration, which I conceptualize as a super-network or a *network above already existing TANs*. Super-networks optimize the given POS for establishing a new mobilizing structure and more sophisticated tactics to increase power vis-à-vis state actors. What is special about a super-network is the *partnership of networks across policy fields* and between TANs that integrate their agendas, agree on a common goal and a collective cross-policy advocacy strategy. Thus, the *study of super-networks focuses on collaboration between TANs*, instead of analyzing individual TANs working in compartmentalized policy fields. With shifts in alignments and collaboration with networks they have previously not worked with, as well as influential allies among states and IO representatives, super-networks enhance their institutional access to international decision-making processes. The R2HE coalition, for instance, used its three-layered strategically to demonstrate that there is a broad alliance of NGOs/TANs behind the global call (third layer), utilized the well-established civil society-state relationships for advocacy purposes (second layer) and took advantage of those organizations that had offices in Geneva and New York, as well as capacities and resources to engage inside the negotiations (first layer) to optimize institutional access. The coalition also relied on UNEP for information-sharing while the UNGA sessions were closed for civil society observers and collaborated intensively with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment for mutual support. It also used the Russian invasion of Ukraine to create further cleavages between states for the purpose of convincing those governmental delegations that remained influenceable to recognize the R2HE.

Thus, a super-network actively tries to optimize the more fluid elements of the existing POS, e.g. through alignment shifts, new partnerships with influential allies, maximization of

institutional access, and the strategic use of political cleavages, to increase its power vis-à-vis state actors and to change practices of national sovereignty.

Super-networks are initiated and guided by specifically skilled and experienced brokers with unique thematic expertise and meaningful personal relationships to various TANs and state actors. Linking different TANs from a number of policy fields to collaborate is an important brokerage role to initiate mobilization of a super-network. With the support of experts, comprising locally affected community groups as well as the expertise of Special Mandate-Holders and IO representatives, a high degree of mobilization inside and outside international negotiations can be upheld.

Super-networks strategically use *multi-level policy feedback loops* by building their arguments on local experiences with environmental challenges and policies – and concrete demands to change these policies to improve the situation on the ground. Through the collaboration of various TANs and the application of digital tools, such as the electronic global call, super-networks can reach out to a heterogenous constituency. They aim at receiving significant media attention to engage an interested international public. Thus, a super-network can be understood as an advanced mobilizing structure built on an optimized POS, guided by experienced brokers, supported by affected local communities and experts, and representing a heterogenous public.

What makes a super-network particularly powerful is the *package approach* – using one core message in all interactions with state negotiators. This is a unique tactic because it means that there is a consensus on values to be advocated for and TANs support the principles of other networks (from various policy fields) and integrate these into their own advocacy strategies. In the case of the R2HE coalition, they had drafted the Global Call, which they then used as a manifesto of civil society in general. If all the different TANs/NGOs collaborating in a super-network speak with one voice, their legitimacy increases, and it is much more difficult for states to deny or neglect their concerns.

A super-network is particularly powerful in the application of these tactics as it can rely on the higher-level mobilization structure and thus, has access to a wealth of information, capacities, material and immaterial resources of a number of different TANs. At the same time, it can apply its tactics, e.g. awareness-raising, persuasion, moral leverage and pressure, by relying on the respective individual networks and meaningful personal relationships. Hence, super-networks apply pressure *from above* and *from below* not on a single government (as suggested by the boomerang pattern, Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999) but on several governments

simultaneously – in order to influence an international agreement or a tabled resolution. Tactics are applied inside negotiations addressing governmental delegations as well as outside negotiations mobilizing an interested public via press releases and (social) media.

As demonstrated in the case study above, super-networks have effects that are relevant in International Relations. By including many different voices, they can serve a transnational advocacy vehicle transporting local concerns to the international negotiation table (Schapper 2020). As they operate across policy areas, they can *link different fields* and they can *transport norms from one policy area into another* (Schapper 2021). Thereby, they *create new order in global governance* (Deloffre and Quack 2021). This means, super-networks emerge as a consequence of institutional complexity (because policies in one area, like the environment, affect another, such as human rights), (see also Orsini 2016; Gehring and Oberthür 2009). By fostering institutional interaction between norms and policy fields, super-networks also contribute to increasing institutional complexity.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have introduced the concept of super-networks and have presented an analytical framework that can be used to examine super-networks. This framework highlights the relationship between POS, mobilization structures and tactics. The super-network concept and framework encourages further studies. Taking up the critique emphasized by IR scholars and their current research on TANs, more emphasis should be placed on intersectoral collaboration (Mitchell et al. 2020) and networking across policy fields (Cheng et al. 2021). The analytical framework introduced here enables in-depth analyses of super-networks as collaborative TANs. The framework also adds to previous analytical underpinnings on TANs (e.g. Joachim 2003, Dellmuth and Tallberg 2017, Deloffre and Quack 2021) by considering how certain fluid elements of the POS can be optimized leading to enhanced mobilization efforts resulting in more complex cross-policy networks and the application of new and unique tactics. This framework is not only designed to consider an inside perspective but also integrates outside elements, including the political context, media resonance and the mobilization of an international public. This analytical framework will be of further use for other IR and Social Movement scholars who engage in investigating super-networks and other forms of TAN collaboration.

By integrating various perspectives and speaking with one voice via a package approach, super-networks work with enhanced legitimacy, better material and immaterial resources, and

improved access to international institutions. Building on local testimonies, they function like an advocacy vehicle enabling multi-level policy feedback loops. By advocating for norm transfer from one policy field to another, they foster institutional interaction and complexity (Schapper 2021; Orsini 2016), and they create new order in global governance (see also Deloffre and Quack 2021).

Due to the high degree of mobilization required for super-networks to emanate, there is a higher likelihood that they will emerge when landmark decisions and important international agreements are negotiated. They are also more likely to evolve around ideas and values many different NGOs and TANs can agree on, such as rights, humanitarian principles and sustainability concerns. With many future questions in international politics being relevant across policy fields and requiring more complex solutions, we will see more super-networks emerge and taking influence in the future. Therefore, further empirical (and comparative) research is necessary to comprehensively understand super-networks. Other interesting super-network cases to investigate are, among others, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons that fostered the adoption of the 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons for which they have received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 or the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Alliance's efforts in shaping the post-2020 CBD framework, which was adopted in December 2022.

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