Conclusion: The Politics of Industry and Globalization

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This book has sought to renew and revitalize research on phenomena frequently synthesized with the term ‘globalization’. It has done so by treating the latter as both a process and a powerful vector for legitimizing regulatory change within specific industries.

Studied as a process, we have certainly seen that globalization encompasses a number of trans-industry trends, in particular the WTO-inspired reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade, the liberalization of markets through competition policy and the financialization of capital – what Saskia Sassen calls ‘the self-evidently global scale’ (2007: 82). Above all, however, our empirical analysis has also shown that globalization is a process which actually takes effect through its translation within specific industries. Notwithstanding the potential power of trans-industry norms and political projects, industries remain highly structured by their respective Institutional Order (IO). Moreover, given that these orders are made up of interdependent sets of Institutionalized Relationships (IRs), we have shown that globalization takes differentiated forms within each industry. This is because the substantive regulatory content and dominant negotiating sites for certain IRs have been more subject to what Sassen terms ‘rescaling’ (2007: 82) than others.

Studied simultaneously as a vector for legitimation, we have also shown that globalization frequently provides actors with a powerful weapon with which to change not only the laws, policy instruments and social norms which regulate industries (Risse, 2007), but also the scale at which these are set and intended to apply (Carter and Smith, 2008). As each of the book’s chapters has underlined, this activity of de- then re-institutionalization has been caused by the political work undertaken by identifiable actors. These company managers, interest group leaders, public officials and politicians have sought to reframe intra-company,
collective and public ‘problems’ whilst building alliances of actors capable of transforming new framings into changed laws, norms and policy instruments.

By conceptualizing globalization in this way, we are not simply stating, as many others have, that globalization provokes ‘divergent responses’ (Bisley, 2007; Braithwaite and Dranos, 2000; Held and McGrew 2007; Levy-Faur, 2006b). Although similarly convinced that globalization is a vector for renewing diversity, we fundamentally disagree with the contention that the phenomena it encompasses can and should be studied in terms of extra-sectoral or macro stimuli and intra-sectoral ‘responses’. As this book has repeatedly shown through its case studies, globalization is not an anonymous, ‘structural’ and exogenous force which imposes itself upon industries and sectors in consistent and predictable ways. Rather the trends, framings and processes it includes are co-produced by the private, collective and public actors who make up each industry’s IO. Indeed, this book has made a central claim regarding the causal impact of ‘political work’ upon the regulation of industries. Through our case studies, it has then demonstrated that it is this work that has changed or maintained the institutions of each industry, and that specific translations of ‘globalization’ have been deployed to effect these outcomes.

Building upon this general conclusion, this final chapter reflects upon the analytical purchase of our Politics of Industry approach for the study of globalization. Over the last four to five years, we have developed and sought to share this approach. This book has thus constituted a concerted attempt to test its robustness and ‘competitive advantages’ as regards other modes of studying industries. From this perspective, this conclusion first revisits four key concepts within our approach – Institutional Orders, Institutionalized Relationships, Problematization and Politicization – from an angle which proposes them as four key stages for analysing the de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization of industries in general, and the role played therein by globalization in particular. Finally, we then present findings about the locus and type of political work which has led to change or stasis in each of the industries which feature in this book.

1. Industries as Institutional Orders

Conceptualizing industries as Institutional Orders first means distancing research from the commonly employed term ‘sector’ as used by statistics and economics on the one hand, and by political scientists on the