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## Select list of research topics on international non-governmental organization

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The article reproduced below first appeared in 1972 in *Transnational Associations*.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In a further effort to stimulate academic study of "international nongovernmental nonprofit organizations", it seemed useful to bring together into one list many of the areas which have not been researched or which merit further attention.<sup>2</sup> This is done below. It is hoped that even if the topics selected do not cover the major areas of interest, they will at least serve to highlight any lacunas. [Comments](#) would be welcomed.

As a complement to this initiative, the authors have prepared a bibliography of about 1000 articles and documents which represent as much of the literature that could be located in the time available.<sup>3</sup>

The term "transnational association networks" was chosen in order to provoke comment on the adequacy of the current term "international non-governmental organization". "International" is not applicable to many INGOs; and the current increasing use of "transnational" seems more appropriate. "Association" is used because international "organization", in the literature and in practice, is nearly always associated implicitly with IGOs.

"Networks" is added in the plural because most bodies are embedded in several inter-organizational networks - this is usually ignored and INGOs are analyzed as isolated entities. The properties of the network and the nature of an organization's involvement in it, may be more significant than that of the sum of the "isolated" entities or an aggregation of their transactions.

"Non-governmental" is dropped because there are many mixed, "intersect", organizations particularly in the developing and socialist countries - also in some cultures "non-" may mean something very close to "anti-". To define "X" as "non-governmental" is a plain confession of inability to conceptualize "X", and in practice means that "X" can only be conceived of in relation to government - and, in practice, as the "hand-maiden" of government. For this reason, at the national level, terms with a positive connotation are mainly used as appropriate (e.g. "voluntary", "professional", etc.)

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#### 1. Political and general aspects

1.1. Changing aims and programmes of international associations consequent upon the evolution of world problems and the setting up of other international bodies, governmental and nongovernmental.

- 1.2.The work of transnational associations as an element in mitigating or exacerbating members' intransigence in the unilateral defense of their own sectional interests.
- 1.3.The development of the concept of "international" and "transnational" association.
- 1.4.The part played by transnational associations in the establishment of intergovernmental bodies.
- 1.5.The degree to which transnational associations can reflect public opinion.
- 1.6.Reasons why transnational associations may be unsuccessful in attaining their objectives.
- 1.7. The effective powers given to organs in transnational associations.
- 1.8.Voting systems within transnational associations.
- 1.9. Role of association networks in the democratic process.
- 1.10.Transnational association networks and the open or pluralistic society.
- 1.11.Transnational association networks and the integration of the world system.
- 1.12.TANs and issue formulation in the democratic process.
- 1.13.TANs and the generation of political will.
- 1.14.TANs as an underdeveloped "Third World" of the social system from which political will and support is extracted for the governmental and economic sectors.
- 1.15.TANs, feudal systems, and the structural theory of revolution
- 1.16.Contribution of TANs to the adoption of intergovernmental conventions.

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## **2. Sociological aspects**

- 2.1.Analysis of the structure of transnational associations and their networks, as compared with their aims.
- 2.2.Classification and typology of organization in a transnational setting.
- 2.3.Functional substitution between styles of organization in different settings and over time.
- 2.4.Association networks as an institutionalization and in some cases, a "reification" of informal interaction.
- 2.5.Forms of association which minimize structural asymmetry and dominance of membership by ingroup elites.
- 2.6. Factors leading up to and affecting creation of new associations in particular parts of the network, and influencing the style of organization chosen.
- 2.7.Ageing and ossification of particular parts of the association network, and strategies used to combat this.
- 2.8.Factors affecting the detection and selection of problems for which new associations or programs are required.
- 2.9.Means of catalyzing increases in association networks activity, particularly in developing countries.
- 2.10.Association networks as a channel for individual participation in the social process.
- 2.11.TANs as a vehicle for value generation and expression.
- 2.12.The "lookout" institution function of associations in the network.
- 2.13.Systematic data collection on association networks and the national, subnational, and community level as an indication of social development.
- 2.14.Lag in the development of association networks compared to government, economic, and mass-media structures, and the consequences for ongoing feedback from the people, their progressive alienation, and the current weakness of the democratic processes.
- 2.15.Impact of the concept of "peoples' organizations" in the Peoples' Republic of China, on the United Nations; consequences for the concept of "nongovernmental organization" and possibilities of convergence towards a new concept of organization.
- 2.16.Voluntary organization in different cultures and political systems, and the continuum between association networks and tribal and kinship groupings.
- 2.17.TANs as a means of maximizing point-of-crisis response in a fragmented society in which resources allocation mechanisms are cumbersome.
- 2.18.Evaluation of the positive and negative consequences of the "proliferation" of associations, and the determination of the social systemic features contributing to it or benefitting from it.
- 2.19.Development of evaluational tools to determine at what stage in the evolution of its activities a given configuration of associations could benefit from a, possibly ad hoc, coordinating body or some equivalent mechanism, and at what stage it is premature.
- 2.20.Future trends in association networks, styles of organization, and modes of action - the concept of a "network action strategy".

- 2.21.Means of determining which bodies are "irrelevant" in a rapidly-evolving democratic society.
- 2.22.Problems created for association networks by the fragmentation of bureaucracies (particularly with respect to interdisciplinary programs).
- 2.23.Speed of response of network components to new needs.
- 2.24.Nongovernmental bureaucracies.
- 2.25.Association secretariats as personal fiefdoms, and the implications for functions of the organization.
- 2.26. Parallels between geographical and functional "territory" and examination of possibility that historical processes and empire building in connection with geographical territory (culminating in the nation-state or the UN) may be repeated in connection with the functional territories claimed by different non-territorial actors.
- 2.27.Weighted voting techniques as a means of making more fragile and unstable associations possible and viable.
- 2.28.Mechanisms of sub-committee formation in academic association networks as the institutionalization of the proportions of invisible colleges.
- 2.29.Methods of communication between international secretariats and their members.
- 2.30.Transdisciplinary and crossmodal communication via TANs.
- 2.31.Ecological advantages of particular styles of organization.

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### **3. Psychological aspects**

- 3.1.Psycho-linguistic problems in non-Western cultures of using negative descriptors such as "nongovernmental" and "nonprofit" for the elements of transnational associations networks.
- 3.2.Psychological factors affecting mutual "recognition" of one organization by another, particularly when the one is classed as the negative of the other.
- 3.3.Psychological factors affecting mutual "recognition" and possible interaction of associations in different parts of the network.
- 3.4.Compartmentalization of public, interest, and private life on the part of each individual, and its consequences for interaction between government and business bodies, and interest, socializing, or value-elaborating groups in the democratic society.
- 3.5.Governmental activity as corresponding to super-ego activity, economic enterprise to ego activity, and association networks to id activity.
- 3.6.Psychology of government bureaucrat perception of TANs.
- 3.7.Psychological factors which favor perception of the isolated organization as opposed to the network of organizations in which it is embedded.
- 3.8.Public and governmental images of transnational association networks, particularly in non-Western cultures.
- 3.9.History and incidence of misconceptions about the role of association networks.
- 3.10.Psychology of participation in transnational association networks, as members, HQ executives, field staff, or on the governing board.
- 3.11.Association networks activity as a vehicle for personal development.
- 3.12.Personality types attracted to association network activity, in an international setting.

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### **4. Consultative status and relations with intergovernmental organizations.**

- 4.1.Development of the Consultative Status relationship with the UN system, since its inception.
- 4.2.Comparative analysis of the equivalents to the UN Consultative Status arrangement at the national level, particularly in non-Western countries.
- 4.3.Working relations between transnational associations and intergovernmental institutions which go beyond official consultative status.
- 4.4.The UN Consultative Status mechanism as a "badge" and, through threat of revocation, a means of blocking strong opposition.
- 4.5.Advantages to government of procedures resulting effectively in a "divide and rule" relationship with association networks.
- 4.6.Procedural devices adopted by UN agencies to provide facilities to, and control over, their respective conferences of Consultative Status NGOs, while depriving such conferences of any recognition.
- 4.7.Polarization and fragmentation of the transnational association network by intergovernmental policies of "recognition".
- 4.8.Methods by which transnational associations arrive at the position adopted in their written or oral statements to intergovernmental institutions.

4.9. Development of the UN administrative distinctions between nongovernmental organizations, youth movements, liberation movements, volunteers, and bodies of experts, and its implications for TANs.

4.10. Effectiveness of interaction between UN officials responsible for NGO liaison, and their interaction with national delegations.

4.11. The status and action possibilities of the administrative office responsible for NGO liaison in each UN agency, and its interaction within the administration with those offices responsible for youth organizations and volunteer liaison.

4.12. Feasibility of creating a UN Ombudsman to function as a clearinghouse for interaction, suggestions and proposals between TANs and many components of the UN system.

4.13. Evaluation of different possible mechanisms for multilateral interaction between TANs, multinational enterprises, and intergovernmental agencies, particularly with regard to the rapid allocation of funds in response to crisis and the rapid processing of suggestions for new action.

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## **5. Inter-Organization relations**

5.1. History of inter-association relationships, conditions under which particular forms have become accepted, and nature of forms likely to emerge in the future.

5.2. Comparative analysis of arguments used in different settings to propose and oppose the creation of inter-association relationships or membership of a coordinating body.

5.3. Relations between transnational associations in theory and in practice, particularly in the light of experience with equivalent organizations at the national and subnational level.

5.4. Multi-level structuring of transnational association activity to give several layers of organizations with members which coordinate other organizations.

5.5. Coordinative features of transnational network activity.

5.6. Incidence and causes of the creation of several associations concerned with the same programme area, and competing for the same resources, and the problems or desirability of facilitating a merger.

5.7. Incidence and role of bodies at the national level attempting to coordinate association network activity; their possible relationships to national governments and to any assembly of transnational associations.

5.8. Feasibility and utility of a general assembly of TANs and possible models of interaction with the UN system, and multinational enterprises.

5.9. Analysis of any imitative relationship between transnational associations and the UN, which may tend to cause transnational associations to adopt structures and procedures inappropriate to their resources and special advantages.

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## **6. National / transnational dimension**

6.1. Relationship between transnational, national and grassroots associations.

6.2. Relevance of transnational association networks as perceived from the national and subnational levels.

6.3. The extent to which national members participate in the activities and decisions of transnational associations.

6.4. Trend towards universality in transnational associations.

6.5. Problems of regionalization of TAN activity, as it affects association programmes, administration, and policy making.

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## **7. Legal, fiscal, and personnel questions**

7.1. History of efforts to introduce a form of legal status for nongovernmental organizations, with particular reference to the reasons for their failure.

7.2. Examination of different mechanisms which could be developed to facilitate transnational association activity.

7.3. Legal instruments required to facilitate the types of transnational association network activity likely to emerge in the foreseeable future.

7.4. Fiscal and fund transfer problems of transnational associations.

7.5. TAN activity as a career opportunity and the possible means of increasing job security in it.

7.6. Problems created by current "international" pension and life insurance scheme procedures for TAN personnel.

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## **8. Transnational associations and special issues**

8.1. Contribution and problems of transnational associations networks, in particular issue areas (e.g. peace, development, youth,

environment, etc.).

8.2. Transnational association activity in response to natural disasters.

8.3. Effects on development projects of ignoring the presence of association networks, and the effects on those networks of development projects which are "successful" according to economic criteria.

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## 9. Operational questions

9.1. Financing of transnational associations.

9.2. Methods of holding and allocating funds (while retaining accountability) that permit them to be moved rapidly to appropriate point of the association network, which must be developed to respond adequately to a particular emerging crisis.

9.3. Means of reducing overhead costs and increasing organizational effectiveness by use of shared administrative facilities and office space.

9.4. Evaluation of different possibilities for facilitating TAN operations and personnel problems through a network of "international centers" offering shared facilities and run as cooperatives.

9.5. Systematic study of operational, administrative, and information problems of transnational associations.

9.6. Methods of evaluating TAN programmes.

9.7. Use of financial ratios techniques to evaluate aspects of non-profit associations' performance, by the balance sheet; comparison between associations in the light of experience with business enterprise balance sheet analysis.

9.8. Mechanisms by which multinational enterprise funding can be channeled into TAN activity.

9.9. Substitution of information systems for permanent organization to facilitate crystallization of appropriate and ad hoc organizations from the network in response to any given network need.

9.10. Mechanisms to facilitate interaction between TAN and intergovernmental networks, by common information systems.

9.11. Possibility of facilitating association network activity by conducting all member-association transactions via data networks, holding all organization files on computer, and obviating the need for office space at physical locations.

9.12. Use of computer interaction graphics to track and display the evolution of association network activity.

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## 10. Data collection needs

10.1. National and local organization foundation in each country on which membership in transnational associations is based.

10.2. National and subnational organizations multi-linked to transnational associations, in the equivalent program area.

10.3. Links of national government agency departments to transnational associations.

10.4. Links of intergovernmental agency departments to one another, and to transnational associations.

10.5. Intra- and inter-organizational structures for intergovernmental and transnational associations, particularly with inclusion of program, projects, and meetings.

10.6. Patterning of organizations with respect to topics in terms of the specialization-multidisciplinary dimension.

10.7. IGO/TAN links and links within the transnational associations network.

10.8. World problems, and the manner in which they are interrelated and the concern of clusters of transnational associations.

10.9. Detailed budgets and fund source data for transnational associations, and their members.

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## References

1. Anthony Judge and Kjell Skjelsbaek. Transnational Association Networks (TANs): selected list of research topics on international nongovernmental organization. *Transnational Associations*, 24, 10, pp. 481-485, 1972 (earlier version of the above) [[text](#)]

2. G.P. Speeckaert. *Theses on International Non-Governmental Relations*. *International Associations*, 12, 2, 1960, p. 93. (Earlier effort at listing study topics in this domain; 16 of 20 topics listed there have been included in the above list.)

3. Anthony Judge and Kjell Skjelsbaek. Bibliography of Documents on Transnational Association Networks. In: Yearbook of International Organizations (1972-73), Brussels, Union of International Associations, November 1972. (Last appeared in revised form in Yearbook of International Organizations 15th edition, French, *Annuaire des Organisations Internationales*, 1974; subsequently superseded by Volume 4 of the Yearbook, Part C of which is an updated Bibliography of Materials Relevant to the Study of Transnational Organization) [[summary](#)]

4. G. P. Speeckaert. *Select Bibliography on International Organizations (1885-1984)*. Brussels, Union of International Associations, 1965,



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