

INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM

The exercise of power through multi-stakeholder initiatives for sustainable agriculture and its inclusion and exclusion outcomes

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Abstract A number of multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) and commodity roundtables have been created since the 1990s to respond to the growing criticism of agriculture's environmental and social impacts. Driven by private and global-scale actors, these initiatives are setting global standards for sustainable agricultural practices. They claim to follow the new standard-making virtues of inclusiveness and consensus and base their legitimacy on their claim of balanced representation of, and participation by, all categories of stakeholders. This principle of representing a wide range of interests with a balance of power is at the heart of a new type of action that forms part of a broader political liberal model for building coalitions of interest groups. The intention of this symposium is to assess the nature of processes and outcomes of this model while paying particular attention to the forms of inclusion and exclusion they generate. In this introduction, we highlight the differences in theoretical approaches to analyzing MSIs and the manifestation of power through them. We distinguish between more traditional political-economy approaches and approaches concerned with ideational and normative power, such as convention theory. We discuss some of the main paradoxes of MSIs related to their willingness to be "inclusive" and at the same time their exclusionary or "closure" effects due in part to interactions with existing political economic contexts and embedded power inequalities, as well as more subtle manifestations of power linked to the favoring of some forms of knowledge and engagement over others.

Keywords: Multi-stakeholder initiatives, private standards, power, sustainable agriculture, exclusion.

Abbreviations

GAP	Good agricultural practices
MSI	Multi-stakeholder initiatives

NGO Non-governmental organization
RSPO Roundtable on sustainable palm oil
RTRS Roundtables on responsible soy

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Introduction

Governing through voluntary private standards – rather than through public law and regulation alone – has emerged as the dominant form taken by early 21st century-regulation. This has had wide-ranging consequences for the actors subjected to – or otherwise affected by – this governance. At the same time, private standard-making is being reshaped by the rise of transnational multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), which are increasingly being seen as the most legitimate private rule-makers, and by the tendency for standard-setting itself to be standardized, reflecting a set of common ‘virtues’ for standard-making (Bernstein and Cashore 2007; Fransen and Kolk 2007; Gupta 2008; Gibbon and Lazaro 2010; Ponte et al. 2011; Fuchs et al. 2011; Loconto and Fueilleux 2013).

MSIs aim to coordinate the interests of different stakeholders, usually business organizations and NGOs, but sometimes also government representatives, and to draw up rules to induce more responsible business behavior (Utting 2002; Fransen and Kolk 2007). Within the field of agricultural sustainability, MSIs – including commodity roundtables – have proliferated since the 1990s in response to growing criticism directed at the negative environmental and social impacts of large-scale agriculture. Based on a rationale which focuses on government failures to address these issues, particularly in the South, NGOs and other organizations have

encouraged companies to participate in private multi-stakeholder schemes to set global sustainability standards, monitor compliance, and certify “good” agricultural practices for a variety of commodities such as coffee, palm oil, soy, biofuels, sugar cane, cotton, flowers, aquaculture, and beef.¹

MSIs are also a response to growing criticism of the non-inclusive nature of most previous private standards designed to govern the sustainability of agricultural production and trade (Gibbon and Lazaro 2010; Ponte et al. 2011; Fuchs et al. 2011; Nelson and Tallontire this issue). This criticism was directed at the exclusionary effects of agricultural sustainability standards on producers in the South and on marginalized actors, especially smallholders. Many standards initiatives have begun to recognize exclusion as a problem and now seek to make their standards more inclusive at the levels of standard-setting, certification, and auditing. This has resulted in a virtual explosion of MSIs. To date, however, little research has been conducted on how effective MSIs have been in remedying exclusion.

Private and voluntary MSIs claim legitimacy based on balanced representation of and participation by “all categories of stakeholders,” especially during the standard-setting process. The principle of representing a wide range of interests, through stakeholders, is at the heart of a broader liberal political model of bargaining and of balancing group interests and power (Thévenot and Lamont 2000). MSIs also claim legitimacy based on inclusive processes through dialog and non-hierarchical (horizontal) decision-making processes (Turcotte 2001). The new standard-making virtues of transparency, inclusiveness, and consensus which MSIs profess to adopt, are codified by the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance – a body which creates norms for setting sustainability standards (ISEAL 2006; Loconto and Fouilleux 2013). In most of the literature, MSIs are nested in normative approaches about their compliance to a deliberative democracy model, which is supposed to neutralize asymmetries (Pattberg 2007; Dingwerth and Pattberg 2009; Bäckstrand et al. 2010). They are therefore perceived as a promising new type of regulation and to form part of a “deliberative turn” in the governance of sustainability issues (Bäckstrand et al. 2010). So far,

¹ For example, the Flower Label Programme (FLP) created in 1996, the Wine Industry Ethical Trade Association (WIETA) in 2002, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in 2003, the 4C Association in 2003, the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) Aquaculture dialogs (consisting of eight roundtables) in 2004, the Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS) in 2005, the Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP) standard in 2005, the Better Sugar Cane Initiative (BSCI Bonsucro), Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) and the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels (RSB) in 2006, the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) in 2012. The first global multi-stakeholder initiative appeared as far back as 1993 with the creation of the Forest Stewardships Council (FSC) to deal with forestry issues.

however, little systematic empirical research exists on whether the new standard-setting norms result in more inclusive standard-setting and more inclusive outcomes.

A worry exists that despite standardization of these new standard-making norms, inclusiveness will, in practice, be limited and fail to extend to the systems which are to implement the standards, particularly regarding the inclusion of the interests and perspectives of developing countries and marginalized stakeholders such as smallholders (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; Utting 2002; Fransen and Kolk 2007; Gupta 2008).² Furthermore, the private and voluntary nature of MSIs has raised concerns about their enforcement capacity and their legitimacy in defining a public good such as the sustainability. Consequently, it is essential to explore and analyze the nature of this model and how it generates, in subtle and less subtle ways, exclusionary and inclusionary outcomes. This is precisely what is explored by the collection of papers in this symposium, which emerged from a conference on the governance of sustainable agriculture through MSIs held in Montpellier, France, in December 2012.

This symposium offers a unique contribution to debates around MSIs because:

1. It goes beyond normative approaches, which claim that MSIs neutralize differences and give voice to all through balanced representation, and instead suggests that power inequalities are not all neutralized. This argument is explored via detailed and diverse empirical studies showing how power is exercised through MSIs and how this leads to different inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes. In particular, the collection of papers addresses two empirical outcomes: do MSIs decrease or reinforce existing power inequalities and exclusion mechanisms at the local level? What vision of sustainability is supported by MSIs and which are excluded?
2. It presents different theoretical approaches to studying MSIs and how power is exercised through them, covering both direct and more invisible forms of power. The combination of these approaches in this collection leads to an improved understanding of the various manifestations of power in MSIs.

² These voluntary sustainability standards are increasingly becoming part of mainstream markets. The result is that for producers in developing countries, particularly smallholders, compliance with sustainability standards is no longer a question of being able to access more lucrative niche markets but, for some products and some end markets (e.g., the EU) at least, is becoming a minimum requirement for obtaining market access (Hatanaka et al. 2005).

In this introduction we place the contributing papers within a broader framework that acknowledges and uncovers differences (and complementarities) in theoretical approaches to studying how power is exercised through MSIs. We argue that a distinction can be drawn between more traditional political-economy approaches and post-structural approaches concerned with power exercised through norms and ideas. Each approach offers distinct but complementary possibilities for analyzing how power is exercised in subtle and less subtle ways. We also argue that we have to be critical of the optimism surrounding MSIs – seen as a horizontal and inclusive organizational form constituting the most important alternative to corporate self-regulation through codes of conduct and to the perceived lack of regulatory capacities of governments. There are three main reasons behind this argument:

1. MSIs are not independent of national and local contexts. On the contrary, MSIs and their standards interact with the local political and economic contexts and are often “seized” by powerful actors embedded in hierarchical local power structures. The result is often a reinforcement of existing local power inequalities.
2. Even in supposedly “horizontal” forms of regulation such as MSIs, traditional categories of power linked to economic resources and actor strategies are still at play and thus MSIs do not always achieve a deliberative and democratic ideal. The supposedly technical and apolitical consensus reached often conceals asymmetries of power and structural inequalities, and exposes disadvantaged groups to greater manipulation and control.
3. In MSIs, as in other so-called horizontal forms of coordination, the exercise of power also operates in less visible ways by favoring some forms of knowledge and modes of engagement over others. As a result, forms of engagement and knowledge favored by more marginalized actors are sidelined.

By highlighting these three processes and the resulting exclusionary outcomes, we are also responding to a call made in a former symposium of this journal by Fuchs et al. (2011, p. 342) for “a better exploration of the interactions between vertical and horizontal dimensions of global food governance,”³ and to move to the center of attention “the discursive nature and power of private governance.”

³ Vertical dimension of global governance refers to relations between actors directly involved in commodity exchange, such as between buyers and suppliers (see also Tallontire et al. 2011).

This symposium gathers a group of articles with diverse empirical foci. The article by Hospes analyzes the creation of alternative standards by Southern governments and large producer associations in Indonesia and Brazil as reactions to transnational roundtables on sustainable palm oil (RSPO) and soy (RTRS). Also looking at the RSPO in Indonesia, Cheyns analyzes the tensions and exclusions resulting from privileging of certain forms of participation and knowledge over others and the role local NGOs play to facilitate the participation of smallholder voices. The articles by Selfa et al. and by Köhne examine the interactions between global multi-stakeholder standards and local political and economic contexts of asymmetrical power, in the case of two MSIs: Bonsucro (sugarcane sustainability standard) in Colombia and RSPO in Indonesia. Nelson and Tallontire explore the framing of different sustainability narratives in the MSIs operating within the Kenyan-UK horticulture value chain, each reflecting different views on sustainability and how it may be achieved. Raynolds looks at tensions within Fairtrade between conventions rooted in standardization and alternative conventions rooted in trust, personal ties, and concerns for social benefits in the case of hired labor on flower plantations in Ecuador. Finally, Busch, in the concluding piece, offers an overall reflection in his discussion of neoliberal governance in the global agri-food market. He argues that the founding myths of neoliberalism are still widely held, having the effect of closing off alternative paths to the future. Yet the papers in this symposium go a long way toward undermining those myths and opening alternatives.

In the remainder of this introduction, we develop a framework laying out different theoretical approaches to analyzing power through private standards. Here we differentiate between more traditional political-economy approaches and post-structural approaches concerned with ideational and normative power, such as convention theory. Based on this framework and the papers contributing to this symposium, we then discuss the processes through which power is exercised in MSIs and its inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes. We conclude this introduction by listing the empirical outcomes in terms of exclusion of actors and perspectives in MSIs. From this critique, we derive three alternative viewpoints highlighted by the literature and the papers of this symposium. Finally, we highlight what is to be gained from combining the two theoretical approaches to the exercise of power through MSIs.

Theoretical approaches to studying MSIs

As noted by Ponte et al. (2011), the literature has approached private sustainability standards—including MSIs—from a variety of perspectives. We argue here that these differences in theoretical approaches to standards also signify differences in how one analyzes the manifestation of power through MSIs and, as a result, different inclusion and exclusion outcomes are revealed. We discuss two broad perspectives found in the existing literature on standards and which are employed (sometimes in combination) by the collection of papers in this symposium devoted to analyzing MSIs. The first consists of political-economy approaches. The second, which we call post-structural approaches, is concerned with ideational, discursive and normative power (Ponte et al 2011; Ponte 2013; Ponte and Cheyns 2013). By making distinctions between such broad ideal typical categories, we invariably reduce and simplify to some degree the theoretical and empirical approaches we classify. We nevertheless make this distinction to illustrate a point, namely that each broad approach offers distinct but complementary possibilities for analyzing how power is exercised in subtle and less subtle ways through MSIs. By focusing just on these two approaches, we exclude others—for example, some institutionalist approaches that have figured prominently in the literature on private standards and MSIs.⁴

In the following, we first distinguish between systemic and constitutive perspectives on power. We then link these conceptions to political-economy and post-structural approaches to analyzing private standards. This is followed by a discussion of the processes through which power is exercised in MSIs and its inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes.

Perspectives on power

When discussing power, we recognize that it is a complex concept that does not easily lend itself to definition (see, for example, Lukes 2005; Haugaard 2010; Allen 2013). Neither do we

⁴ In the institutionalist literature on private standards, based mainly on management and organization studies, the focus has primarily been on identifying and analyzing the sources of private authority and specifically on how legitimacy is achieved by standards and standard-setting initiatives (Tamm Hallström 2004; Fransen and Kolk 2007; Ponte et al. 2011). Existing literature on private standards has been less concerned with the actual manifestations of power and more with how legitimacy is secured, and what knowledge (expert knowledge) is used to do so (Ponte et al. 2011).

postulate that theoretical approaches necessarily define or determine a singular conceptualization of power. Yet, theoretical interests shape conceptualizations of power, at least to some degree. Therefore certain understandings of power tend to be deemed more useful than others depending on the theoretical (and disciplinary) context in which it is deployed (Haugaard 2010).

We differentiate between two broad conceptions of power: systemic and constitutive approaches. Systemic and constitutive perspectives analyze power as either systematically structuring possibilities for action or, alternatively, as constituting actors and the social world in which they act.

In the systemic view, given social systems structure the possibilities that individuals have for action by instilling certain abilities and dispositions in some actors but not in others. This conception thus highlights the ways in which broad historical, political, economic, cultural, and social forces enable some individuals to exercise power over others (Haugaard 2010; Allen 2013).

In the constitutive view, conception of power focuses on more covert forms of power by understanding individuals and the social worlds they inhabit as themselves constituted by power relations (Barnett and Duvall 2005; Allen 2013). Constitutive conceptions figure prominently in the work of Foucault. He outlines a form of power that works through people (rather than just on people) by naturalizing certain belief systems, knowledge or discourses as undeniable “truths,” thereby delineating what is normal and common sense, consequently rendering certain views, thoughts and actions unthinkable (Foucault 1977, 1983).

Systemic and constitutive conceptions of power tend to correspond broadly to what we categorize below as political-economy versus post-structural approaches to sustainability standards and MSIs. As will be argued, we see these two conceptualizations as offering distinct but complementary perspectives on how power is linked to and exercised through MSIs. While the first one allows us to understand more traditional forms of domination focusing on political and economic power, the second is appropriate to analyze forms of domination where power is “widely diffused” (Young 1990), which becomes particularly necessary when analyzing so-called horizontal coordination

Perspectives on power and private standards

Political-economy approaches

The *political-economy* literature on private standards in the global agrifood system addresses the interplay of interests and interest groups while placing standard-making in its economic and political contexts. In opposition to a view of standards as rooted in value-neutral science, this literature contends that standards and standard-making are contested terrains and sites of power and need to be seen in relation to market dynamics as well as the influence of special interests – including increasingly influential NGOs and expert communities (Busch 2000; Hatanaka et al. 2005; Ponte et al. 2011).

Contributions within this approach examine standards from a variety of perspectives focusing particularly on economic structures, interests, and outcomes (Ponte et al. 2011). Sustainability standards have thus been examined, for example, in terms of the costs and benefits of compliance to standards; the outcomes of certification in developing countries, especially for weaker or marginalized actors such as smallholders; or the relation of standards to value-chain governance structures and to restructuring in international trade (e.g., Busch 2000; Ponte 2008; Gibbon and Lazaro 2010).

Power within this body of literature is seen within a materialist framework, as, for example, manifesting itself through unequal access to resources (including information) and structural power inequalities. These latter manifest themselves, for example, through the ability of prominent market actors to influence standard-setting and implementation to further their own strategic and economic interests or through the ability of transnational companies to employ standards to push the costs of compliance with sustainability demands onto suppliers (see, for example, Hughes 2001; Nadvi 2008; Gibbon and Lazaro 2010; Nelson and Tallontire this issue).

Post-structural approaches

Although it is difficult to distil a singular conceptualization of power from the broad category of post-structural perspectives, they do have in common a view of power as manifesting itself through norms, ideas, and discourses. They oppose a vision of social structures as determining the distribution of power. In this way, these perspectives can be seen as understanding power primarily through constitutive and cognitive devices, embodied in specific normative orders,

discourses or narratives. In *narrative analysis* for example, narratives are seen to reflect worldviews and as being used in processes of legitimizing certain paths of development (Leach et al. 2010). Ideas promoted through discursive power in the form of narratives about standards can be seen through this lens as critical in promoting certain ideals related to sustainability and how it should be regulated, thereby reinforcing the power of some actors (Nelson and Tallontire this issue).

Post-structuralist studies look at discourses, as it is the case with narratives, but also at the diversity of forms of knowledge. They focus less on “who has knowledge” (distribution of knowledge), than on the diversity of forms of knowledge, its constitution, and the forms of knowledge which are framed as legitimate. Post-structuralist perspectives also share a vision challenging the strict interest view suggested by the materialist field and based on the assumption that all actions are to be explained by reference to interests. Instead of naturalizing the notion of interests, post-structuralist approaches attempt to study it in two ways. Firstly, they highlight the conditions necessary for individuals to conform to the format of interests (through specific forms of knowledge, forms of information, forms of participation, etc.) and how this format shapes individuals (Thévenot 2013). Secondly, they highlight the exclusion this format (which is required by the liberal political model) generates. These perspectives have been part of both the work of Foucault and Thévenot.

Governmentality approaches (Foucault 1980) have been used to study standards as technologies for governing conducts (Gibbon 2008; Djama et al. 2011; Ponte et al. 2011). For example, Gibbon (2008) employs a governmentality perspective to explore the heightened salience of standards-based regulation. This perspective focuses on the design of new institutions that “govern at a distance” by delegating government in a way that actively involves individuals and groups in “governing themselves.” In this way, standards and standard initiatives are seen to reproduce specific neoliberal rationalities and technologies (Gibbon 2008; Djama et al. 2011).

Convention theory provides an insightful framework for analyzing the constellation of norms, practices, and institutions that guide and justify coordination through a diversity of “conventions” (Dupuy et al. 1989; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). It has been employed to analyze normative aspects of standards and power issuing from specific conventions (Ponte 2008; Raynolds this issue; Cheyns this issue). The related sociology of “regimes of engagement” (Thévenot 2006; 2007) has been employed to analyze how standard-setting processes are shaped

by certain regimes of engagements and the exclusions it generates (Thévenot 2009; Cheyns 2011; Silva Castanada 2012). Convention theory and regimes of engagement are used by four of the papers in this symposium. They offer significant new contributions to the analysis of standards. Therefore, we provide here a brief insight on their contribution to understanding power.

Convention theory and regimes of engagement

Convention theory advanced the hypothesis that coordination between individuals is not limited to market coordination and that coordination cannot be possible without a common cognitive frame: a “constitutive convention” (Dupuy et al. 1989). Based on political philosophy, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) identified six conventions or “orders of worth” used by actors to justify the legitimacy of different forms of coordination. They correspond to different ways of characterizing the common good: the “market” competition, the “industrial” efficiency, the “fame” in public opinion, the trust and reputation based on customs (“domestic”), the “civic” solidarity aiming at a greater equality, and the creative “inspiration” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). The identification of these diverse characterizations of the common good offers fresh insights into the recognition of the different kinds of power associated with these conventions as well as into the processes of making them legitimate or calling them into question when submitted to public scrutiny (Thévenot 2011). Expression of power can therefore be related to the imposition of some forms of “normalities,” that is, specific conventions (Thévenot 1997). In this way, some authors have shown that standard-setting and its implementation processes generally fail to bring into play a plurality of conventions. Instead, they tend to favor the expression of “market” competition and “industrial” efficiency that are naturalized, particularly in the framing of sustainability definitions, at the expense of other conventions (Thévenot 1997; 2009; Cheyns 2011; Silva-Castaneda 2012). Expressions of power can also be related to the imposition of specific “information formats,” which frame the forms of knowledge or forms of proof which are recognized, depending on which conventions are seen as legitimate (Thévenot 2009). In this way, these authors have shown how statistical and technical forms of proof (“industrial” ones) in the constitution of standards usually serve to downplay “monographic” experiences (Thévenot 2009), and how the domination of the statistical or “macro” variables as

the only recognized form of evidence tends to disqualify rural community voices (Cheyns 2011; Silva-Castaneda 2012).

The related sociology of regimes of engagement allowed for another extension of this critique by challenging the naturalization of “interests” and “strategic” engagement. Thévenot (2006; 2007) highlighted different ways in which people can be engaged in regards to their environment, called “regimes of engagements.” One of these regimes is that of “functional and strategic engagement,” where coordination focuses on stakeholders asserting “interests.” This mode of engagement is a well-known focus of most political sciences, which consider interests as individual property and by consequence, limits the political models and naturalizes them to the “balance of interests.” Similarly, political-economy approaches often unveil the strategies used by actors to make standards instrumental to their own interests. While very useful, these approaches focus on the single model of “strategic action” and naturalize the “interests” view, which prevails in political liberal models. The regimes of engagement approach suggests that there are many forms of engagement beyond the interest/strategic one. People can require engaging in “a justifiable engagement” not to promote a range of interests, but to qualify a common good, as noted above, in reference to different principles of justice (conventions). But also, they can require a more “familiar engagement,” where people participate while maintaining personalized and strong attachments for what they are and where they live (Thévenot 2006; 2007). In these perspectives, power relations are also understood as oppressions exerted by one regime of engagement over another (Thévenot 2009). This sociology looks carefully at how the liberal-political model based on the interest format and the strategic engagement shape forms of participation and communication, excluding other forms.

Power and inclusion and exclusion outcomes in MSIs

Based on this framework, we now employ insights from the contributing papers and the wider literature to discuss the processes through which power is exercised in MSIs and its inclusionary and exclusionary outcomes.

Criticisms related to the exercise of power through MSIs refer to the political model that characterizes them. Contrary to hierarchical forms of regulation, MSIs are presented as a more

horizontal form, where all stakeholders will have their voices heard through the principle of inclusion and balancing of interests. MSIs are concomitant with the development of work on “collaborative governance” in the academic and consulting sphere, promoting the inclusion of a diverse range of private agents in regulation (Zadek and Radovich 2006; Glasbergen 2006; Glasbergen et al. 2007). In this perspective, the coalitions that result gain authority and legitimacy from the fact that they (1) speak on behalf of a large number of disparate voices with the involvement of “all specific interests,” (2) have identified all the pros and cons and are able to provide a “broader perspective,” and (3) favor “social learning” and the sharing of knowledge and expertise among stakeholders (Jenkins et al. 2002; Boström 2006; Zadek 2006; Fransen and Kolk 2007). MSIs rely on a political model of interest groups, which legitimates a specific type of participant: the stakeholder defending a specific interest (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; Cheyns 2011). In MSIs, groups are formed around relatively well-defined and stable interests and focus on strategic efforts, for example, to influence other actors through lobbying. This perceived legitimacy of MSIs is part of a broader political “liberal pluralism” model (Dahl 1967; Lowi 1969) where power is dispersed among a variety of interest groups competing for influence. This model is founded on the hypothesis that the public good will emerge from the procedure of bargaining and balancing these particular or specific interests (Dahl 1989, quoted in Thévenot and Lamont 2000).⁵

Studies on how specific interests relate to the public good are often linked to normative approaches about how to achieve an acceptable debate about the public good “in an interested world” (Moody and Thévenot 2000). Internal decision-making rules and technologies of debate in MSIs are widely embedded in the rhetoric of “consensus” and “participation,” which defines the nature of the acceptable debate. MSIs claim neutrality and consensus-based decision-making obtained through dialogue and an open and participative process. In particular, the participative and consensual process is supposed to neutralize political differences for achieving broad agreement and to draw inspiration from a democratic deliberation model (Edmunds and Wollenburg 2001). The main assumption of this deliberative democracy model is that “through open and reasoned argument, free from manipulation and the exercise of power, better and more

⁵ In classical liberalism, the reproduction of the polity results from the balancing of interests. “This model which has become a common locus in American political sciences has been part of the classical liberal doctrine from the time of the American founding fathers (see Lowi 1987), as a defense against what Madison (1987) and Tocqueville (1981) defined as the risk of ‘tyranny of the majority’” (Thévenot and Lamont 2000).

legitimate decisions will arise” (Bäckstrand et al. 2010, quoted in Schouten et al. 2012). While a normative debate on multi-stakeholder deliberation is important, it requires a more rigorous empirical grounding. Based on the contributing papers, this section addresses the question of whether inclusiveness is really incorporated into the practices through which standards are negotiated and implemented.

Two types of criticisms related to the MSI inclusion paradigm have been expressed. They draw on two distinct (but complementary) approaches to the exercise of power outlined in the previous section. Considering the notion of interests in the political-liberal model as a natural one, the first type of critique points at the asymmetries that occur in the balance of interests within MSIs. Studies in a political-economy perspective thus point to the under-representation of some groups and the imbalance of power between stakeholders asserting their interests in the negotiation process. This critique is extended to emphasize how multi-stakeholder standards – presented as neutral and objective – are implemented in contexts of political and economic power asymmetries and how by ignoring this, a common outcome of MSI regulation is to reinforce existing inequalities.

Post-structuralist studies extend the critique to challenge the liberal model of balancing the interests itself. This second type of critique cautions against being seduced by the claim of “horizontality” in MSIs and relies on approaches to power which incorporate diffuse oppressions through forms of knowledge, of information and of engagements. These studies point at the favoring of particular conventions (“industrial” and “market”) and related forms of knowledge (scientific, generalizable, expert knowledge) over others in MSIs, with the result of limiting the plurality of conventions and forms of knowledge that can be used to specify the content of sustainability. This critique is extended to draw attention to the difficulty of MSIs to accommodate other regimes of engagement than the one of stakeholders strategically defending their interests. The consequence is a process of depoliticizing the debate that renders the implicit political choices made invisible, in general to the disadvantage of vulnerable groups.

In the following four subsections we expand on the different types of critiques and how they are laid out in the contributing papers. It should be pointed out however that there is not as strict a divide between political-economy and post-structural approaches as may be inferred from the categorization presented. Actually, there exists more of a continuum and many authors

(including contributors to this symposium) analyze power structures as well as the production of truths and discourses that affect power relations.

Asymmetries in the balance of power and interests within MSIs

Even if in MSIs decisions are supposed to be reached with a balancing of interests, they are often shaped by business or interest parties who engage strategically and this renders political-economy perspectives very useful. Such perspectives have highlighted the weak representation of “disadvantaged” or “vulnerable” groups or “affected people” in the standard-setting process. Utting (2002) note that many MSIs have ignored marginalized workers, trade unions, indigenous people and southern agendas more generally. Scholars also pointed at the inability of MSIs to regulate the balance of power between stakeholders, in particular between the organizations in the North, which usually assume key governance positions in the standard-setting organizations, and the South (Reinicke et al. 2000; Utting 2002; Fransen and Kolk 2007; Ponte 2008; Partzch 2011), or between more and less powerful Southern stakeholders. Asymmetries in participation have been linked to asymmetries of resources where the resources of farmers from the South or even NGOs from the North are limited relative to the resources of business actors (Fuchs et al. 2011; Nelson and Tallontire this issue; Köhne this issue). Finally, the criticism also concerns the incapacity of the organizations from the North, especially NGOs, to represent “vulnerable groups,” both because they are more inclined to defend global issues relevant to the countries of the North and because they are far removed from the vulnerable groups in question, at best enjoying only indirect links with these groups (Utting 2002; Fransen and Kolk 2007; Fuchs et al. 2011; Nelson and Tallontire this issue; Köhne this issue; Cheyns this issue).

Contribution of the articles in this symposium

Looking at the cases of private standards in the horticultural value chain and of the RSPO (roundtable on sustainable palm oil), Nelson and Tallontire and Cheyns show that the representation of smallholders, workers and trade unions during the standard setting process have been frequently substituted by other stakeholders such as plantation companies, international

NGOs, exporters, or consultants, ignoring their divergences in interests. In the case of the RSPO, Cheyns examines how some directors of powerful Asian plantation companies tried to re-impose a hierarchical (and authoritarian/paternalist) relation between them and the smallholders participating. Doing so, they attempted to deprive the smallholders of their power to represent themselves (and transform the reality they face), even though the horizontal mechanism of the RSPO were designed to allow their voice.

Drawing on the roundtables for responsible soy and palm oil (RTRS and RSPO), Hospes examines how powerful Southern actors – such as government and producer associations – provide a challenge to MSIs. The Indonesian government and large Indonesian and Brazilian producers did not find their interests sufficiently included in the agreements bargained with Northern NGOs and retailers who were preoccupied with questions of deforestation and rural community rights. In the oil palm case, government and producer interests rejected the criteria on limitation of deforestation and on greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the criteria of free prior and informed consent, which is supposed to recognize the right of local communities to decide the use of their customary lands. Faced with such balance of interests they opted to develop alternative national sustainability standards, which incorporate fewer restrictions on the expansionary interest of businesses.

Interactions with unequal local power structures

As Selfa et al. (this issue) note, MSIs suggest that their standards, being free from government interference and drawing on scientific metrics, will transcend local and national political-economic contexts for the good of the “global commons” (see also Ponte 2008). Research on MSIs in the agrifood and forestry sectors has however proven this wrong. While many stakeholders in MSIs claim to construct global standards that are objective, value neutral and science-based, in practice local politics and power relations do play a role in how these standards are enacted on the ground (Selfa et al. this issue; Köhne this issue; Ponte 2008; Schouten and Glasbergen 2011; Maccarthy et al. 2012). MSI standards are thus not implemented within a political-economic vacuum. On the contrary, they are influenced and reshaped by power

structures and political and economic interests at various scales (Ponte 2008; Reynolds 2012; Selfa et al. this issue; see also Köhne this issue; Hospes this issue).

Contribution of the articles in this symposium

Two studies in this symposium thoroughly puncture the claim of the ability of MSIs to transcend local and national political and economic contexts. These studies skillfully link transnational arenas and local power relationships by uncovering how, in Indonesia and Colombia, MSIs are employed by strong actors to deepen and legitimize existing unequal access to and use of natural resources like land and water.

Selfa et al. illustrate how the Bonsucro standard for sustainable sugarcane engages in Colombia with deeply entrenched historical patterns of inequitable land ownership. Their analysis reveals how public policy in Colombia strengthens the ability of large-scale sugarcane producers to intensify and extend their control over land and water resources in order to benefit from biofuel development. Large-scale sugar mills and processors are turning to Bonsucro certification to increase their control while providing assurances that their actions are socially and environmentally responsible. By attempting to be apolitical and neutral, with a strict legalistic and scientific focus, Bonsucro actually exacerbates the existing unequal access to land in Colombia precisely because it does not address issues of inequality.

The study by Köhne shows that in the case of the RSPO standard, land conflicts are eventually solved only if more powerful players help rural communities strengthen their bargaining position. To gain access to the MSI in matters of land conflicts, local communities have to team up with local NGOs. The local NGOs, in turn, team up with international NGOs who, if they are able to, link local cases to international concerns or company brand images to gain bargaining power, which can be employed in the specific local land conflict. However, as noted by Köhne, there are an estimated 600 palm-oil-related land conflicts in Indonesia. Only very few of these are likely to successfully rely on this process. Thus local power inequalities and access to resources are very influential in determining the possibilities different stakeholders have for enacting the rules created by the MSI. Köhne examines for example how companies use MSI procedures to provide evidence and knowledge about a local conflict that in turn strengthens

their position in negotiations. Köhne thus concludes that the strengthening of rural communities in land conflicts via RSPO rules is until now of little value in practice.

As illustrated by the examples above, investigations drawing on political-economy perspectives of power, while extending the perspective to encompass the production of knowledge, are very forceful in revealing how MSIs are entangled in – and often reinforce – existing asymmetries of power.

As we will show in the next two sub-parts, post-structuralist studies extend the critique emphasizing the oppression of some conventions, forms of knowledge and engagements over others to explain the exercise of power. They challenge the political liberal model and the interest view which prevails in it, arguing that even if MSIs operated with an adequate “balance of interests,” this political model sidelines some forms of knowledge and participation which would permit the accommodation of justice concerns or attachments. This reinforces the marginalization of small-scale farmers and rural community voices.

Governing sustainability through market competition and efficiency

Several studies have shown that although interactions in MSIs enable actors to better understand the divergence of views among stakeholders and encourage the creation of networks and social learning, this learning often reduces the diversity of perspectives (Stefanick 1998; Turcotte 2001). Cheyns (2011), Schouten et al. (2012) and Fouilleux (2013) have shown how the search for agreement between heterogeneous actors such as banks, plantation companies in the South, European traders, and NGOs contributed to reduce the diversity of perspectives to be included in the debate of the RSPO and RTRS (sustainable palm oil, responsible soy), avoiding confrontation between too diverging visions of sustainability. Scholars have highlighted the prevalence of “industrial” and “market” conventions in MSI interactions. They have shown how these interactions reduce the plurality of conventions that can be used to specify the content of sustainability, focusing on principles of “market” competition and “industrial” efficiency (Cheyns 2011; Ponte and Cheyns 2013; Raynolds this issue; Nelson and Tallontire this issue).

Expression of power has also been related to the imposition of forms of knowledge, depending on what conventions are seen as legitimate. This analysis has been crucial in

explaining how the techno-legal and statistical language (an “industrial” form of evidence) used in standard setting and third-party auditing of MSIs discredits forms of evidence that communities provide on land rights, such as worker and farmer testimonies (or personal markers as trees and rivers), and thus reinforce local power imbalances (Silva-Castaneda 2012; Bain and Hatanaka 2010; Nelson and Tallontire this issue; Cheyns this issue). The rhetorical appeal to techno-scientific values, referenced to the principles of “neutrality” or “objectivity,” shuts down potential discussions about what should count as truth (Bain and Hatanaka 2010; Silva-Castaneda 2012).

This reduced range of conventions has resulted in the support of agro-industrial and intensive models of production through “sustainability” standards, while increasing the production of commodities for international markets. This has been done at the expense of alternative forms of production, such as diversified and family agriculture or agro-forestry systems (Cheyns 2011; Fouilleux and Goulet 2013; Selfa et al. this issue; Nelson and Tallontire this issue).

Contribution of the articles in this symposium

In their study, Nelson and Tallontire identify three narratives active in the MSIs operating within the Kenyan-UK horticulture value chain, each reflecting different views on sustainability and how it may be achieved. Their analysis shows the “Global Sourcing” narrative as dominant, although tempered by a “Pragmatic Development” narrative, which raises concerns about worker welfare and calls for measures to mitigate exclusionary tendencies of global value chains towards smallholders. The dominant Global Sourcing narrative, which is mainly promoted by retailers and brands, prioritizes securing product supply and reputational risk management through technically focused private sustainability standards. In this narrative, smallholder and worker participation is not seen as particularly relevant and is practically non-existent while expert knowledge is given primacy. The strongest narrative is thus characterized by market competition and industrial efficiency, which Nelson and Tallontire argue frame and potentially constrain the participation and agency of smallholders and workers in global value chains. They also point at the expert, scientific and engineering knowledge framed as the appropriate knowledge in MSIs (see also Cheyns; Selfa et al.). This results in the impossibility for

smallholders to introduce their vision of sustainability and express criticism toward the “industrial-market” compromise, which has been naturalized.

By naturalizing industrial and market conventions, MSIs were shown to constantly exclude “civic” claims from smallholders regarding solidarity and equity (e.g., a more equitable system of distribution of value) and independence in managing their production (self-management and access to credit outside contracts with plantation companies) (Cheyns; Selfa et al.; Nelson and Tallontire). Thus Cheyns, Reynolds and Nelson and Tallontire all show that MSIs dealt with more issues relating to safety (e.g., use of chemicals) and/or good agricultural practices (GAP) (especially to increase yields) than they did with those relating to livelihood or social and economic inequality (access to and distribution of resources).

Fairtrade presents a specific case, being the most inclusive of rights and livelihoods as compared to other standards. But even so, Reynolds shows that extending “civic” values to FLO’s “industrial”-based certification has been challenging. In the case she explores, that of certified flower production in Ecuador, the training of workers in plantations is still oriented more towards GAP and management skills, thus shaping a “market-industrial” form of knowledge, rather than on rights and capacities to self-determine and to undertake collective wage bargaining to reduce inequalities. Although we see that many “civic” rules are accommodated in Fairtrade (workers vote in a general assembly, gender issues are taken into account, etc.) constituting progress for workers in plantations, the standard – much like those from other MSIs – incorporates more the liberal perspectives of civic rights than of solidarity, which is aimed at greater equality.⁶ However, Reynolds does observe a recent shift in FLO’s perspective, proposing to move from a requirement of a “minimum wage” to one of a “living wage.” This represents a move to advance Fairtrade’s “civic” commitments toward a new dimension of redistribution of resources, well beyond most current labor standards systems.

Governing through the interest format: depoliticizing the standard

⁶ Criteria under the “social principle” in most MSIs include the right to a minimum wage and outlawing of discrimination based, for example, on race or gender, the freedom of association, etc. While recognized by family producers and workers, this vision is far removed from dealing with social and economic inequality – that is, access to and sharing of resources (Cheyns 2011).

Governing through limited conventions thus constitutes a form of cognitive hegemony, which naturalizes some definitions of sustainability while excluding others. Post-structuralist scholars also analyze the exercise of power resulting in those exclusions. They carefully examine the political models employed to construct agreement in MSIs. They challenge the “interest view” of the liberal pluralism model as well as the rhetoric derived from a deliberative democracy model. In particular, they highlight tensions between the liberal model, which focuses on the strategic engagement of stakeholders, and the rhetoric of improved democratic deliberation, which is supposed to neutralize power in order to reach broad agreement.

In line with Foucault and feminist post-structuralist frameworks (Fraser 1990), some scholars emphasize the strategic engagement of stakeholders concealed behind the rhetoric of consent and inclusiveness. They recall that the liberal model does not focus on inequalities among different groups in accessing or influencing the decision-making process, and even suppose to bracket social inequalities (Fraser 1990; Bickford 1999).⁷ They state that the negotiations in MSIs are based on “an unhealthy combination of deliberative democracy and liberal pluralism” (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001, p. 236).⁸ This combination, which underplays or seeks to neutralize differences among stakeholders, poses considerable risks for disadvantaged groups (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001). They found that exaggerating the level of neutrality and of consensus reached in MSIs masks abuses of power and inequalities, and exposes the disadvantaged groups to greater manipulation and control by more powerful stakeholders who act strategically (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001). They observed, for example, that the apolitical or neutral rhetoric of the multi-stakeholder forum conceals the strategic value of control over information, which can be used against disadvantaged groups (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; Warner 2005; Fuchs et al. 2011).

They critically addressed the construction of consent as a new hegemonic form of domination (Fraser 1990). MacDonald (2010) has analyzed how in multi-stakeholder meetings, self-control and “disciplined docility” through a “culture of meeting” allows the adoption of ideas circulated by dominant interests with minimal opposition while creating the impression that

⁷ For Fraser (1990), the liberal political model even assumes that it is possible to organize a democratic form of political life based on socio-economic structures that generate systemic inequalities. This model supposes that social equality is not a condition for participatory parity. In addition, Fraser critically underlines that the model supposes to insulate political processes from what are considered to be non-political.

⁸ According to Edmunds and Wollenberg (2001), the influence of liberal pluralist ideas on the practice of MSIs has meant that the qualifications of a deliberative model (and especially of a Habermasian’s communicative rationality model) are not taken as seriously as they should be.

decisions are consensus-based. The main technologies of debate and communication within MSIs have been analyzed, highlighting the inherent parallel possibility of controlling the circulation of information, avoiding or minimizing conflicts, and encouraging the suppression of dissent (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001; MacDonald 2010; Poncelet 2001; Cheyns 2011, this issue; Schouten et al. 2012; Nelson et al. 2013).

Extending this critical perspective, other scholars have focused on the expressions of power linked to the oppression of the strategic engagement (Thévenot 2007) upon other forms of engagement, in particular upon forms that would allow the expression of justice issues and attachments. They question the capacity of multi-stakeholder forums to accommodate forms of legitimacy other than that of the stakeholder expressing an interest and organized through interest groups (Richard-Ferroudji 2011; Thévenot 2013; Cheyns this issue). They stress that MSIs reduce pluralism to the expression of interests, diverting from the possibilities to engage participants in the qualification of a common good (e.g., the specification of what is “sustainable”), in reference to different principles of justice. The “principles-criteria-indicators” method, frequently used in commodity roundtables, is emblematic of this possibility of defining sustainability through a list of criteria supported by specific interests (Hospes this issue), avoiding a difficult debate on sustainability principles from a political and justice-oriented perspective (Selfa et al. this issue; Cheyns 2011). This “interest” view is supported by specific technologies of debate which were shown to focus the debate directly on the *end results*, measurable and/or accepted by the market, rather than on *how* to achieve sustainability through a substantive debate and a questioning of the content (Poncelet 2001; MacDonald 2010; Cheyns 2011; Nelson and Tallontire this issue).

Those scholars also show another type of oppression of the strategic engagement. Beside the strategic capacities, the liberal pluralism model requires another type of ability from participants: the capacity to transform their attachments into interests, which are easier to communicate to other groups and which are ready for a bargaining process (Thévenot 2013). Scholars underlined how MSIs require stakeholders to present their view through a form of detachment, sidelining emotions and conforming to procedural objectives (Poncelet 2001; MacDonald 2010; Silva-Castaneda 2012; Cheyns this issue). However, people who are not prepared for this form of participation and communication can find themselves sidelined.

Contribution of the articles in this symposium

Selfa et al. show how in the Bonsucro initiative the framing of the debate on sustainability into technical and legal criteria (like the criteria of “conforming to the law” in relation to issues of access to land) discards political questions and, in particular, the possibility of addressing issues of inequality in access to land. Likewise, Cheyns demonstrates how in the RSPO, the framing of the debate through the interests of stakeholders diverted the possibilities of engaging in a debate around principles of justice and of addressing injustices that the local communities and smallholders wanted to raise related to land issues and farming models. This was especially evident when smallholders tried to engage in a debate on what constitutes sustainability and questioned the “industrial” and “market” conventions that had been naturalized in the RSPO⁹. Under the pressure of urgency and pragmatism, and for fear of a breaking down of the community, the opportunity for an open political debate was denied. Smallholders and rural communities were disqualified in their attempt to open this debate and relegated to “case-by-case” negotiations with plantation companies (see also Köhne).¹⁰

Cheyns also examines the difficulties encountered by affected local communities in the RSPO when attempting to express the adverse circumstances they suffer from expansion of palm oil plantations in their daily lives and when talking with emotion about their (lost) land, using personalized and localized landmarks and drawing attention to specific cases.¹¹ Doing so, they communicated a strong attachment to their proximate surroundings, which embarrassed the other participants. They did not communicate in a generalized interest format, thus rendering their input unusable in the “balance of interests” (or bargaining) framing participation in the RSPO. This is another strong reason for the marginalization of their views since attached and personal interventions are not recognized as legitimate.

⁹ They criticized a dependence on paternalist contract farming, on fluctuating prices and an over-emphasis on high productivity. At the same time they argued for “civic” requirements on the basis of solidarity and the reduction of inequalities.

¹⁰ Even though this approach was acknowledged by the communities concerned, smallholders and community participants demanded a more general approach involving the possibility of discussing “justice” in the plenary session when the rules of the RSPO and sustainability were being defined.

¹¹ Local communities and family farmers report violations of their rights and damage to their proximate surroundings, in and around their living and working areas, all in connection with the expansion of industrial agriculture affecting their livelihoods and attachments to places (pollution, loss of resources, especially the dispossession of customary lands, indebtedness, subordination to companies, criminalization of their political actions).

In the perspectives presented above, scholars underline that the prevalence of the interest format conceals from participants the fact that politics is implicit in the elaboration of choices made, with, in particular and as mentioned above, the support of an agro-industrial model of agriculture founded on a “market-industrial” compromise (Cheyns; Selfa et al.). The dual issues of the impossibility of open political debate and the labeling of the decisions taken as objective given that they are technical leads to talk about (de)politicization – the brackets recalling that this increased technical content is in no way apolitical. Although standards are conceived as mostly technical and neutral, they result in a significant displacement of the loci of power, a phenomenon that remains largely invisible (Selfa et al.) and escapes the full requirements of public democratic deliberation and of inclusion of all voices, including those of the affected people (Cheyns).

Empirical outcomes of the exercise of power: the exclusion of persons and of perspectives in MSIs

By exposing the exercise of power in different ways and the related exclusion outcomes, we have demonstrated multiple reasons why we should be critical of the optimism surrounding MSIs as a horizontal, inclusive and legitimate organizational form constituting the most desirable form of transnational governance of sustainability issues.

Thus far we have illustrated how MSIs often serve to reinforce existing power inequalities. The presented empirical studies highlight different forms of the exercise of power through multi-stakeholder forums which lead to the extended marginalization of small farmers and already-marginalized groups. In addition, local power inequalities and access to resources are very influential in determining the possibilities different stakeholders have for enacting the rules created by MSIs and as a result, MSIs also strengthen elite domination in terms of access to and use of resources like land and water.

We have also illustrated the reduction of perspectives in MSIs and thereby the exclusion of alternative perceptions. This exclusion relates to alternative discourses, for example, by promoting private regulation rather than mandatory regulation. It also relates to the exclusion of some definitions of sustainability by promoting intensification of production rather than

alternative models of production. Finally, it relates to the exclusion of some issues, for example, by addressing the health and safety of workers or the improvement of yields rather than “civic” claims around solidarity aiming at a greater equality in access to resources and autonomy of small farmers.

In the face of these limitations of MSIs, scholars have promoted at least three alternative but complementary approaches (see also Busch this issue), which reflect the different conceptualizations of power presented in this paper.

Creating counter-hegemonic power

In a political economy perspective, since MSIs reproduce existing structural inequalities, approaches are encouraged to create counter-hegemonic power. Several paths have been suggested, such as advocating for coalitions outside the MSIs (for example, international coalitions of smallholders or trade unions, alternative competitive standards or NGO campaigns); advocating for multi-scale alliances with powerful players (for example, with international NGOs, see Köhne this issue) in and outside MSIs; or advocating for stricter mandatory laws by governments.

Making apparent what is political

Radical pluralists and feminist post-structuralists oppose the liberal model and prefer an approach that is explicitly political. One proposal for improving the MSI format is by acknowledging that MSIs are political, by highlighting the interests that are at stake, and by taking steps to address the power inequalities. In this approach the problems of vulnerability or inequalities are not eliminated; however they are brought to center stage (Fraser 1990; Bickford 1999; Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001). Other scholars have advocated for more vigorous and genuine forms of debate (Poncelet 2001) and cooperation. Conway and Singh (2009), for example, have advocated for cooperation via alternative spaces that are not necessarily

deliberative, but decentralized and, importantly, that reject the need for consensus.¹² This would allow for diversity and common purpose to be compatible, while also overcoming the fear of the debate.

Recognizing other regimes of engagements inside or outside MSIs: reintroducing justice and attachments

Other scholars have called for the accommodation of the MSI format to other regimes of engagement (Bühler 2002; Cheyns 2011; Richard-Ferroudji 2011; Thévenot 2013) than just the strategic (liberal) one, opening themselves, for example, to a pluralism of principles of justice in qualifying the common good, and opening up to people affected in their real lives. In this perspective, Cheyns (this issue) shows the crucial role that some local Indonesian NGOs play in favoring and accommodating the voices of rural communities in RSPO, by being close to them and by restoring their dignity through a work of solicitude and care. This was crucial to prepare affected people for public speaking in the context of the RSPO.

Scholars have also highlighted the possibility for marginalized groups to move outside MSIs, to find forums where it is possible to participate through other modes of engagement, for example where participants share the same concerns and address a common cause around issues of inequality and injustice. This is the case of international groups of smallholders or trade unions or solidarity-economy approaches, re-asserting “civic” conventions over “industrial” ones in alternative forums, challenging the terms of trade and aimed at transforming the livelihoods (and value-chain positions) of smallholders and workers. This alternative is raised by Nelson and Tallontire (this issue) in what they called the “potentially transformative narrative.”

Conclusions

¹² Based on their analysis of the World Social Forum, Conway and Singh (2009:75) suggests that “the imperative to arrive at universally binding outcomes may in fact impede social solidarity and hinder collective action by raising the stakes of deliberation in a way that necessarily suppresses diversity, emphasizes division among interlocutors, and turns participants into competitors fighting to define the ‘general’ will and to determine the final outcomes that will be binding on all.”

In this introduction, we have situated analytical points from the papers contributing to this symposium, as well as from existing literature on MSIs, within a framework which acknowledges and uncovers differences (and complementarities) in theoretical approaches to studying how power is exercised through MSIs for sustainable agriculture. The advantage of gathering contributions derived from both political-economy and post-structural perspectives is that MSIs and the inclusions and exclusions they generate can be viewed as constituted at the same time by structural power and by more invisible forms of power.

Combinations of political-economy and post-structural approaches permit the analysis of how exclusion/inclusion mechanisms function due to differences in power dispositions, for example, via differentials in control over and access to resources. At the same time, they help us understand how access to and control over various resources – such as, for example, negotiation processes within MSIs – are constituted by certain “regimes of engagement.” The strategic regime of engagement through which a stakeholder asserts interests represents manifestations of power by naturalizing specific forms of engagement while excluding others, in particular those which would allow to raise issues of (in)justice and accommodate attachments. In this way, access to and control over resources become conditioned both by social systems as well as by more subtle (but no-less powerful) forms of power.

Likewise, combinations of approaches permit the analysis of structural power such as, for example, the ability of prominent market actors to influence standard-setting and implementation. They also help in the analysis of how ideas promoted through discursive power in the form of narratives about standards and the regulation of sustainability are seen as critical in serving the interests of certain actors (along with control over resources and structural power). In this way, the power to influence standard-setting and implementation becomes conditioned both by structural power dispositions as well as by discourses and narratives regarding the regulation of sustainability.

In sum, the purpose of combining approaches is to challenge both more hierarchical power manifestations and more widely diffused forms of power looking at forms of knowledge and of participation, thereby revealing power processes and their inclusion and exclusion outcomes. Systemic models of power were useful in revealing how MSIs are interlinked with historical patterns of inequitable access to resources and hierarchical and/or authoritarian political-economic relations. At the same time, constitutive models of power proved to be

necessary to analyze power in new forms of governance presented as “horizontal democratic forms” of coordination, which profess to neutralize power asymmetries.

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