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Socio-spatial opportunities and the power of place
Bankwatch-NGOs in Washington, D.C.

Ralf Bläser, Cologne

1 Introduction

Since the early 1990s, transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have often been perceived as the spearhead of an emerging global civil society (e.g. KEANE 2001). This is particularly due to their heightened role in the informal talks at the UN world summits during the last decade (CLARK et al. 1998). Although an euphoric media coverage has certainly inflated the activities of such civil society actors, their increasing influence on political decision making procedures at all levels can hardly be dismissed.

This development coincides with a growing concentration on these «sovereignty-free actors» (ROSENAU 1990: 36) in the social sciences from different empirical and theoretical angles. This research interest has produced a continuously growing body of literature in disciplines such as international relations (e.g. KECK & SIKKINK 1998) or social movement research (e.g. SMITH et al. 1997) to name only two (see overview in FRANTZ 2002). Resulting from the distinct theoretical premises underlying these different fields of study, the emancipatory potentials of NGOs are equally distinctly appraised – ranging from euphoric diagnoses like «the new global potentates» (SPIRO 1995) to sceptical accounts like «the most over-estimated political actors of the nineties» (WAHL 2000: 294).

In the wake of accelerating globalisation processes, NGOs have also contributed to the creation of «new ‹transnational geographies› in terms of both innovative constituting contexts and pervasive spatial impacts» (FLITNER & SOYEZ 2000a: 2). But, despite such spatially relevant behaviour on all scales, they have only recently become the object of geographic inquiry (for an early account see SOYEZ 1997, «space-producing lobbies»). Notably within political geography, which has for a long time – just as the international relations literature – been focusing on the activities of state actors («territorial trap», AGNEW 1994), increasing attention has been given to civil society actors. From a critical geopolitics perspective it has been argued that any contemporary notion of geopolitics needs to include non-state actors, practices and means of expression («popular geopolitics», Ó TUATHAIL & DALBY 1998: 5). Most of the work in this field has concentrated on the cultural and political struggles of social movements in their local «terrains of resistance» (ROUTLEDGE 1993; see also PILE & KEITH 1997; MILLER's 2000 «geography of social movements»). The preconditions and strategies of transnational forms of resistance, protest and political influence of NGOs have only shortly been dealt with and conceptualised in the context of this work (see, for example, the special issue of GeoJournal edited by FLITNER & SOYEZ 2000b). Likewise, global city research has recently begun to analyze NGOs as co-shapers of the global city network (SASSEN 2002; TAYLOR 2004). On the basis of CASTELLS' (2000) notion of the network society it is argued that global civil society forms its own political geography by producing strategic nodes in the space of flows from where bottom-up influence can be more easily brought to bear on political decisions.

However, the socio-spatial context of NGO agency has hardly been addressed in any of these studies – in particular with regard to the mobilization of and control over power resources. Taking Bankwatch-NGOs in Washington, D.C., as an example, the present paper elaborates on this deficit in NGO research. The U.S. capitol shows a unique concentration of such NGOs focusing on the policies of the World Bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs). Situated in an institutionally thick socio-spatial context (in the sense of AMIN & THRIFT 1994: 14 f.), in direct proximity to the World Bank and the U.S. government authorities, the Washington, D.C. based NGOs play a key role in the joint reform efforts of the international Bankwatch community. Even in the emerging literature on World Bank-NGO relations in political science, this correlation is severely under-researched (e.g. O'BRIEN et al. 2000). From a (sub)disciplinary point of view, this paper can be placed in the context of what OSSENBRÜGGE (1998: 6) has called the «political geography of postinternational relations» – explicitly including new boundary-permeating non-state actors like NGOs.

Following these introductory remarks as to its scientific placement, the paper unfolds in three parts: First, an inquiry into the origins, as well as the present configuration of the socio-spatiality in which the NGOs are embedded, sets the stage for further analysis. Second, the empirical evidence is reinterpreted on the basis of a theoretical framework that combines more structural notions with arguments from Action Theories. Finally, the main findings are briefly summarized and an outline of a socio-spatial opportunity structure is proposed.

2 Setting the stage: Bankwatch-NGOs in Washington, D.C.

While the aforementioned focus on the UN system still holds true for many NGOs dealing with international relations issues, others have started to direct their attention to the far more powerful institutions of what PEET (2003) has called the «Unholy Trinity» of neoliberal globalization – i.e. the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). In this context the World Bank has already been a major target of transnational NGO-critics challenging the dominant development model since the early 1980s. Following the works of political sociologists like TARROW (1991), the World Bank can therefore be conceptualised as a «global political opportunity structure» for protesting the costly development strategies which have, in many cases, caused severe social and environmental degradation in the developing world (for detailed accounts of the Word Bank's social and environmental legacy see RICH 1994; GEORGE & SABELLI 1994).

2.1 Early NGO-World Bank relations

Although the original structure of the World Bank did not provide for any formal consultations with non-state actors, the interaction with NGOs already began in the early 1970s and continuously increased since that time. In the beginning, the Bank cooperated only with operational NGOs on a largely apolitical project basis (NELSON 1995). Only with the institutionalisation of the NGO-World Bank Committee in 1981, a political dialogue with advocacy NGOs started developing. Yet, more radical NGOs have criticised this committee from its inception for being a «rather tame forum which is over-controlled by the Bank» (O'BRIEN et al 2000: 29). In the aftermath it has been reformed several times and eventually been replaced by the World Bank-Civil Society Joint Facilitation Committee in 2003.

In the late 1980s the World Bank gradually started to open up its activities to public scrutiny. Two major milestones towards an increased accountability at the World Bank were the adoption of its revised Policy on Information Disclosure and the creation of the Inspection Panel, a quasi-independent appeals mechanism, both in 1993 (see CLARK et al. 2003). Notably during the presidency of JAMES D. WOLFENSOHN (1995-2005), the Bank also started to rethink its macroeconomic policy packages known as the Washington Consensus. This paper lacks the space for a deeper analysis and critical appraisal of such reform efforts. What is clear, however, is the fact that they are largely the result not of an internalised dialogue with civil society, but of external pressure politics by another group of influential Washington-based NGOs which are, for the most part, loosely connected to advocacy networks around the world (FOX & BROWN 1998; KECK & SIKKINK 1998: 135 ff.).

2.2 The Multilateral Development Bank Campaign and the evolution of the Washington, D.C. context

One of the World Bank's founding fathers, JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES, was already aware of the potential implications of the socio-spatial policy context in the capitol of the Bank's largest shareholder when he had called for the Bank's headquarters to be located in New York instead of Washington, D.C. Indeed, «the combustible mix of political psychology and microgeography» (KAPUR 2002: 66), together with Congress's control of the U.S. contributions to the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's «soft loan window» for the poorest countries, provides an entry point for the US policy community to influence the Bank. Washington, D.C. based NGOs began to take advantage of this unique geography in order to increase their leverage on the World Bank more than two decades ago.

More precisely, the origin of what has become known as the Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) Campaign dates back to 1983, when representatives of large Washington, D.C. based environmental NGOs for the first time testified in hearings before the U.S. Congress to the negative environmental and social consequences of the World Bank's lending policies. At that time, the Polonoroeste road construction project in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest was taken centre stage by a group of NGOs (key actors included Friends of the Earth, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Environmental Defense). They strategically constructed Polonoroeste as the first paradigmatic case study, not only to reveal the nexus of World Bank financing, rainforest destruction and human rights violations, but also to point to more fundamental shortcomings in the Bank's governance («case study approach», WIRTH 1998).

Although development NGOs like Development GAP, Center of Concern and Oxfam America, as well as advocacy networks such as Jubilee USA and Fifty Years is Enough, later joined the advocacy campaign, the pivotal role of the environmental NGOs in the reform process is widely acknowledged. It has been suggested by numerous commentators that they can, most notably, take credit for having invented the successful strategy of shaping U.S. policy towards the World Bank by persuading key members of Congress to support their demand for environmental and social reforms in the World Bank and other MDBs through the legislative process. This essentially works in two different ways: First, by adopting legislation that contains specific directives for the U.S. Executive Director at the World Bank either to promote institutional reforms or to vote against any loans for environmentally and socially harmful projects or programs.

Second, by raising specific reform issues around the triannual negotiations for the replenishment of the IDA fund, which mainly consists of donor countries taxpayer's money. Since the Treasury Department's IDA contributions need to be authorized and approved by key congressional committees these negotiations have successfully been used as a vehicle for promoting reform at the Bank (e.g. the creation of the Inspection Panel; for details on Congress's role in reforming the World Bank see Bowles & Kormos 1995).

In the mid-1980s the campaign started to reach out to other parts of the world, both in the north and the south. NGOs in the richer World Bank donor countries began to replicate the parliamentary strategy in their respective national systems. The cooperation between the Washington, D.C. NGOs and groups in borrowing countries intensified after the first counter-summit at the occasion of the IMF/World Bank Annual Meeting in 1986. This «partnership advocacy» (Wirth 1998: 52) is crucial for accessing local knowledge, which in turn can be used for lobbying in Washington, D.C., and for achieving legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the Congress and the Treasury Department. This latter goal has proven to be particularly important in the campaign since «testimony from those most directly affected by Bank projects was often a more powerful organizing tool than information produced by outside experts» (Keck & Sikkink 1998: 141).

2.3 The institutional context and actors constellation

While the previous paragraph provided a more historic record of the evolution of Washington, D.C., as a preeminent node in the joint reform efforts of the transnational Bankwatch community, this article will now turn to the current institutional context in which the day-to-day activities of the NGO representatives are embedded. This context is unique insofar as it aggregates various local and transnational flows of knowledge and social relations of three different groups of actors at one spatially discrete place. In addition to the U.S. state authorities (especially members of Congress, but also representatives of the executive branch, e.g. Treasury Department) and the IFIs, various civil society actors make up this socio-spatial context. About twenty NGOs from the environmental and development community as well as «green» think tanks (e.g. Institute for Policy Studies, World Resources Institute) are dealing with IFI issues regularly, several others on an ad-hoc basis. The above-mentioned single-issue NGO Bank Information Center (BIC) acts as a hub organization in the international Bankwatch community, especially by collecting and providing official and internal information on the MDBs and by empowering groups in borrowing countries. An excerpt from BIC's mission statement depicts its *raison d'être* quite clearly:

> «Our position in Washington, expertise with the MDBs, and networking capacity all enable us to serve as a Washington ‹embassy› for groups in the field so that they can more effectively represent their interests at the MDBs and achieve more sustainable development outcomes» (Bank Information Center 2005a).

Moreover, this concentration of actors in Washington, D.C., provokes a «high traffic of external organizations through Washington», as one interviewee called it, seeking face-to-face-time with their NGO-colleagues and their antagonists in the IFIs. At least twice a year during the IMF/World Bank spring and fall meetings, such personal interactions provide an important opportunity to establish networks and trust relations among the different actors, which can then easily be kept up at a distance by e-mail and telephone contacts. Transnational interactions like these take place with NGOs from both borrowing and donor countries. As a general tendency, the cooperation with southern groups is more intensive on specific projects, while northern Bankwatch-NGOs rather focus on policy reforms. Examples of the latter include groups like World Economy, Ecology & Development (WEED)/ Germany, Berne Declaration/Switzerland and the Bretton Woods Project/UK (cf. fig. 1).

In terms of lobbying the U.S. government on MDB matters, the so-called Tuesday Group plays an important role in the Washington, D.C. context. Co-chaired by the Bank Information Center and the US Agency for International Development, the monthly gatherings of the Tuesday Group are usually attended by 20-25 representatives of a wide range of environmental, development and human rights NGOs and U.S. government agencies discussing current MDB projects and policy issues.

In general, extensive qualitative field work suggests that the cohesion of these networks is primarily based on the informality of the relationships. This generates mutual trust, which in turn highly facilitates cooperation and coalition building among the actors, as Kay Treakle, a former executive director of the Bank Information Center, points out:

> «This coalition is very informal. (...) It's unique in that there are very few loose contacts in the sense that people are just off, doing their own thing and nobody knows what they are doing. You know, everybody kind of tries to keep in touch. There is more coordination and there is friendship and there is sort of like a community» (Treakle 2002).

3 Reinterpreting the Washington, D.C. context

If the «political effects» of this socio-spatial context are to be theoretically framed, societal macrostructure

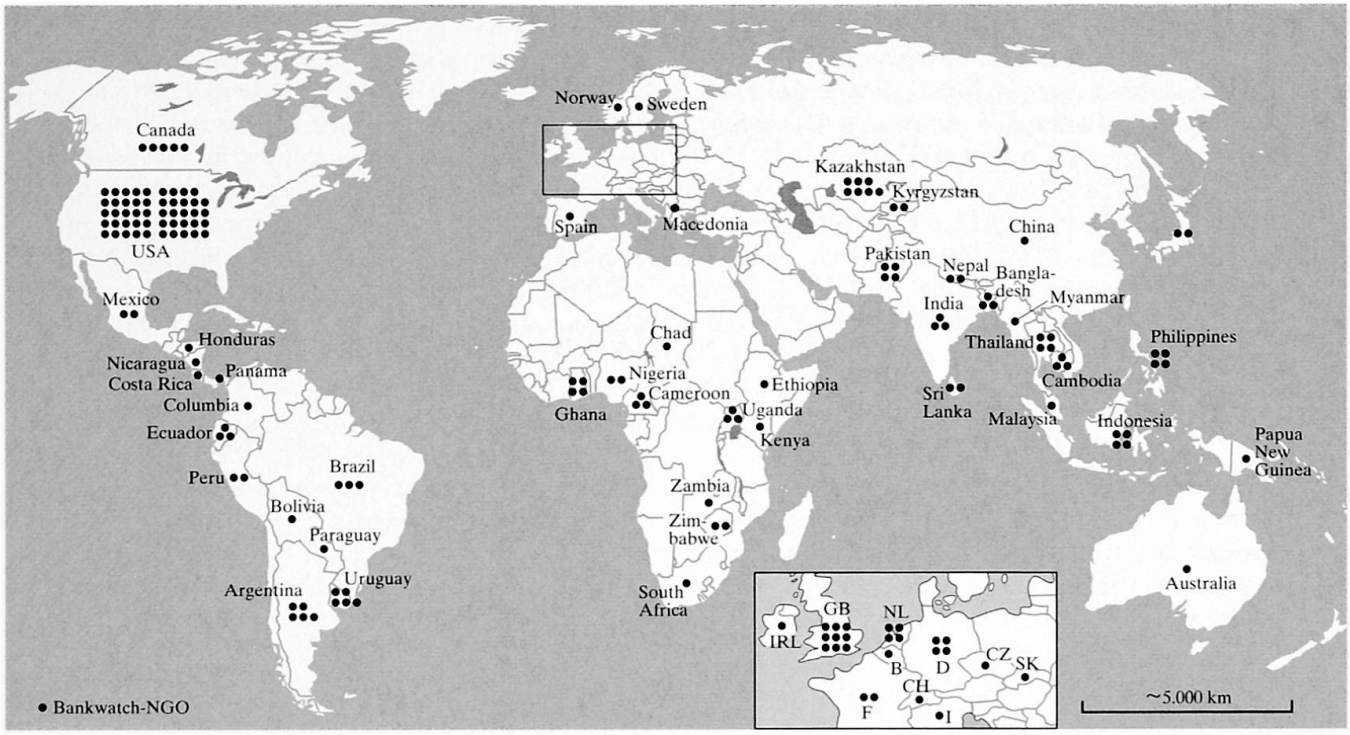

Fig. 1: Bankwatch-NGOs worldwide. Each mark represents the office of an NGO that is involved with World Bank issues.
«Bankwatch»-NGOs weltweit. Jeder Punkt repräsentiert den Sitz einer NGO, die sich an diesem Standort mit Weltbankfragen beschäftigt.
Les ONG «Bankwatch» dans le monde. Chaque point représente le siège d'une ONG, qui s'occupe à cet endroit de questions relatives à la Banque Mondiale.
Database/Source: Bank Information Center 2005b; IFIwatchnet 2005; cartography: J. Kubelke

and individual microstructure have to be integrated. Since they are both recursively corresponding, as Giddens' (1995) Structuration Theory suggests, they ought not be examined separately. However, for the purpose of this paper, insights from Action Theory are put in the fore. Nevertheless, some rather structural notions, notably from Hegemony Theory, form the conceptual background of the analysis of the NGO's everyday activities and are, therefore, discussed first.

3.1 NGOs and hegemony formation

In terms of placing NGOs within present processes of societal restructuring, two principal approaches can be distinguished: In the context of Regulation Theory, NGOs are frequently conceptualized as a constitutive element of a postfordist mode of regulation, ensuring the survival of late capitalism by alleviating its most disastrous consequences (e.g. Brand 2000). This contrasts with the second, and more widely held, point of view in which NGOs are assessed as countervailing powers, adding bottom-up perspectives to the top-down politics of traditional power elites. This assumption is at the basis of most global governance concepts (e.g. Rosenau 1990).

Arguments from the Neogramscian School of International Political Economy (IPE; see Scherrer 1998; Bieler & Morton 2003) help to converge from this more structural level to the level of identifiable and locatable actors. In the tradition of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which is mainly focused on the struggles within nation states, the IPE tries to expand the analysis of hegemony formation onto the transnational level. In this regard, hegemony does not denote to the dominance of one state over others but to a consensus-based mode of transnational sociation – the latter being achieved by social struggles in civil society. In Gramsci's notion of the state, civil society (also referred to as the «extended state») forms the terrain where societal power relations are solidified and hegemony develops. Not until then is it transformed into governmental policies, executed by state apparatuses equipped with coercive power («state in the narrower sense»). The extension of Gramsci's State Theory beyond the nation state has occasionally been criticized, primarily on the ground of a lacking integrated state on the transnational level (Hirsch 2001). However, nothing militates against using the Gram-

scian concept flexibly, thus interpreting the societal campaigns in the run-up to intergovernmental decision-making processes as struggles for (counter)hegemony in the «international extended state» (e.g. DEMIROVIC 2001: 160 ff.),

Furthermore, it has been suggested by several authors to give up the IPE's analytical obsession with the capital elites of the «transnational managerial class» (GILL 1990). Instead, attention should be directed toward obtaining a deeper understanding of the hegemony formation capacities of novel transnational actors, such as NGOs, whose interests cut across traditional class-based concerns (e.g. BORG 2001; SCHERRER 1998). In addition, the Neogramscian School has been challenged to overcome its structural bias and to emphasize the day-to-day activities and conflicts, which are at the basis of any hegemonial articulation, i.e. to concentrate on the options for action and the power resources of social actors on the ground (BIELING & DEPPE 1996: 735). From what had been discussed earlier it became apparent that such options for action depend on the socio-spatial contexts in which the actors operate. In this respect, Washington, D.C., as the venue where a major part of the societal struggles in this particular subject matter takes place, provides a unique set of resources and opportunities for influencing the processes of (counter)hegemony formation. Against this background, Action Theory poses the question, how such socio-spatial requisites translate into available and effective power resources?

3.2 Socio-spatial power resources as political opportunities

A conceptualization of the socio-spatial requisites for action requires a notion of space that allows for an analysis of the NGO's activities in Washington's face-to-face society without privileging purely spatial conditions over social relations. With reference to MASSEY's (1993) and AGNEW's (1987) concepts of place, the Washington, D.C. context ought to be interpreted as a progressive and extroverted place where wider-ranging societal macrostructure and more localized social agency are uniquely corresponding. Citing MASSEY (1993: 68), the specificity of the Washington, D.C. context can be read as the result of «a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations» whose juxtaposition «may produce effects that would not have happened otherwise». This is to say, that, apart from their sheer spatial proximity to power, the key role of the Washington, D.C. based NGOs can be attributed to their position at a unique intersection, where various local and wider flows of knowledge, experience, influence and social relations are mutually articulated. Therefore, as MASSEY's (1993: 66) argument against the dualism of ontological inside and global outside reminds us,

> «uniqueness of a place (or a locality) is constructed (...) in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself.»

In other words, the socio-spatial context in which the NGOs operate cannot be defined as the product of solely local action. Instead, it ought to be clearly established that its uniqueness is the outcome of a constant articulation of social interactions and more structural conditions, both transcending scale. This structuration of localized micro and wide ranging macro processes is best captured in AGNEW's (1987: 31) notion of place:

> «Places in which activities occur are the product of institutions which are in turn produced by structure. Place, then, provides the context in which agency interpellates social structures. Rather than epiphenomenal to society, place is central to its structuration».

Unlike traditional Action Theories, which are, for the most part, based on rational choice models, modernized Action Theories do not argue purely individualistically. Instead, they acknowledge the restrictive and enabling effects of the structural and contextual preconditions of action. In this regard, the place-specific context, as set out above, provides a distinct set of resources which can be used by individual agents in order to achieve their political goals. According to GIDDENS'(1995) Structuration Theory these resources (and social rules) as well as the control (and knowledge) thereof bridge the gap between concrete social systems of interaction and more virtual societal structures. As mentioned above, the opportunities to access and control these resources and know the rules and conventions are not ubiquitous. Rather, they depend on an actor's social embeddedness in a specific socio-spatial context, i.e. the result of individual action is at least partly contingent on that context (or place). For analytical reasons these socio-spatial power resources are identified as relational power, knowledge power and framing power.

Relational power refers to the integration into local and transnational networks of like-minded as well as antagonist individual and institutional actors. These networks can best be set up and maintained by a high degree of interaction among the different actors. In particular, the possibility of regular face-to-face meetings in informal settings allows for the creation of personal trust relations, which are a decisive factor for coalition building and lobbying success. In fact, the building of trust-based coalitions with individual key actors in the U.S. Congress has been instrumental in most successful reform campaigns of the Washington, D.C. NGOs (instructive examples are the campaigns for the creation of the Inspection Panel and the abolition of user fees for primary education and health services; see BLÄSER 2005: 126-143). Following GIDDENS (1995: 81 ff.), such personal contacts with, and

control over, decision makers and their actions can be analyzed as «authoritative resources», whereas «allocative resources» refer to the material inputs for action. The last-mentioned are equally important for the NGOs and can also be more easily attained through personal relations (see also REUBER 1999: 21 ff.).

These relations greatly enhance the construction of a place-specific knowledge base, which serves as another important power resource for the NGOs. Some of these stocks of knowledge can easily be obtained and updated through regular meetings such as the Tuesday Group or other types of interaction among individual actors. Some NGO representatives also maintain personal relationships to sympathetic Bank staff. This enables them to access crucial information, including confidential documents, which can then be strategically used for lobbying. While some of that knowledge is codifiable and can therefore easily be transferred over long distances (e.g. concrete information on a Bank project), there is also a great deal of tacit knowledge involved. This latter type, here referred to as procedural knowledge, is «sticky» in the sense that it is largely tied to individual actors (and groups thereof) operating in certain contexts. The effective transfer of this knowledge requires specific learning environments, which largely depend on personal face-to-face interactions and spatial proximity. Hence, specialized knowledge archives intrinsic to the Washington, D.C. process have developed over time and are advanced continuously. They comprise knowledge as to the routines, conventions and rules of social interaction as well as to juridical and technical issues, including the internal functioning of the antagonist institutions and informal paths of influence.

Personal relations and specialized knowledge are both indispensable for the construction and exertion of framing power. The authority of recognized «expert knowledge» greatly facilitates the access to key decision makers in Congress, the U.S. government and the World Bank. For that reason, it is much easier for Washington, D.C. based NGOs to feed their frames, definitions and perceptions into the dominant discourses in these institutions than for groups without representation in Washington, D.C. The same holds true for the relationships with correspondents and editorial offices of influential newspapers (e.g. Washington Post, Financial Times), making it much easier for the NGOs to get articles placed, which publicly challenge the hegemonial discourse on MDB issues.

Such privileged access to crucial power resources raises serious questions of dominance and equity within the international Bankwatch community. Even though this issue cannot be dealt with at length in this paper, it should be noted that the Washington, D.C. based NGOs also channel the views and interpretations of southern grassroots groups, to which most of them are connected through transnational advocacy networks. By functioning as a mouthpiece for dissident voices from regions in the Global South where political power is lacking, their nodal position in global civil society's space of flows fosters the articulation of an emancipatory political agenda (for a thorough discussion of North-South accountability see WIRTH 1998; JORDAN & VAN TUIJL 1999).

4 Conclusion: outline of a socio-spatial opportunity structure

The predominant influence that Washington, D.C. based NGOs can bring to bear on World Bank policies is primarily based on their unique opportunities to control a distinct set of socio-spatial power resources. Their place-specific situatedness shall, therefore, be conceptualized as an enabling socio-spatial opportunity structure. It deliberately refers to notions of political opportunity structures (e.g. TARROW 1991) and elaborates on those by stressing the relevance of spatial variations in the analysis of political opportunities. This research has clearly shown that the opportunities to influence the processes of hegemony formation, in general, and the policies of the World Bank, in particular, are subject to contexts and conditions that are not only historically but also socio-spatially variable. In other words, their embeddedness in enabling socio-spatial contexts provides social actors with superior opportunities to participate in political decisions. As MILLER (2000: 25) rightly contends, «political opportunities are as much geographic as they are historic».

It is important, however, to reiterate that Washington's socio-spatial opportunity structure is not only based on the actor's access to power resources in their local context. It is also embedded within a wider context of structural conditions: foremost, the balance of power in the international system, which is responsible for the U.S. dominance in the World Bank. This is the essential precondition allowing for the NGOs' successful strategy to focus on shaping U.S. policy towards the Bank – hence reproducing that context in order to preserve their opportunity structure. Furthermore, the fact that the NGOs concentrate their lobbying efforts on their respective national executive and legislative organs strongly suggest that they constitute an integral part of the «extended state» on the national level, even though they interfere with genuinely transnational issues.

The proposed concept of a socio-spatial opportunity structure makes it feasible to interpret Washington, D.C., as the spatial aggregation of power relations

between NGOs, the U.S. nation state and the World Bank. This allows for an integration of NGO agency and structural influences, operating at both local and transnational levels. By focusing on the social interactions in Washington's face-to-face society, the everyday struggles for (counter)hegemony can be analyzed from a decidedly geographic perspective.

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Summary: Socio-spatial opportunities and the power of place. Bankwatch-NGOs in Washington, D.C.
For quite some time, social science has been dealing with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from different empirical and theoretical angles (FRANTZ 2002). However, one aspect is severely underdeveloped in this research: the role of the socio-spatial context conditions under which NGO actors operate. Using the example of Bankwatch-NGOs in Washington, D.C., who have been advocating World Bank reform for more than two decades, the present paper elaborates on this deficit in NGO research. Following Action and Structuration Theory, it is argued that their embeddedness in an institutionally rich context provides them with access to a distinct set of power resources. Furthermore, it is suggested that such privileged access to resources puts the Washington, D.C. based NGOs in a favorable position in terms of influencing the processes of hegemony formation in this particular subject matter. In conclusion, the unique Washington, D.C. context is conceptualized as an action enabling socio-spatial opportunity structure.

Zusammenfassung: Sozio-räumliche Gelegenheiten und die Macht des Ortes. *Bankwatch*-NGOs in Washington D.C.
Nicht-Regierungsorganisationen (NGOs) werden von den Sozialwissenschaften seit einiger Zeit aus unterschiedlichen empirischen und theoretischen Blickwinkeln erforscht (Frantz 2002). Am Beispiel von *Bankwatch*-NGOs in Washington D.C., die sich seit über zwei Jahrzehnten für eine Reformierung der Weltbank einsetzen, greift dieser Beitrag ein offensichtliches Defizit dieser Forschungen auf: den fehlenden Bezug zur Rolle des sozio-räumlichen Kontexts des Handelns von Nicht-Regierungsorganisationen. Auf der Grundlage handlungs- und strukturationstheoretischer Überlegungen wird argumentiert, dass die Einbettung der NGO-Akteure in einem institutionell dichten Kontext diesen einen privilegierten Zugang zu spezifischen Machtressourcen gewährt. Dieser erlaubt es ihnen, in den Auseinandersetzungen um Hegemonie in ihrem Politikfeld eine überlegene Position einzunehmen. Abschließend wird der einzigartige Kontext von Washington D.C. als besonders günstige Ausgangslage für das Handeln von Nicht-Regierungsorganisationen zusammengefasst.

Résumé: Opportunités socio-spatiales et pouvoir du lieu. Les ONG *Bankwatch* à Washington, D.C.
Depuis quelques années, les sciences sociales étudient les organisations non-gouvernementales (ONG) sous divers angles empiriques et théoriques (Frantz 2002). Néanmoins, un aspect de la recherche est négligé, celui du rôle du contexte socio-spatial dans lequel s'inscrit l'action de ces ONG. L'article a pour objectif de combler le déficit des recherches dans ce domaine précis, en présentant l'exemple des ONG *Bankwatch* à Washington, D.C., lesquelles, depuis plus de vingt ans, prennent fait et cause pour une réforme de la Banque Mondiale. Sur la base des théories de l'action et de la structuration, nous posons l'hypothèse que l'insertion des ONG dans un tissu institutionnel dense leur garantit un accès privilégié aux ressources de pouvoir spécifiques. Cette situation permet aux ONG localisées à Washington, D.C., d'acquérir une position influente dans les luttes pour l'hégémonie dans ce champ politique. En somme, la spécificité du contexte institutionnel de Washington, D.C., est ici conceptualisée comme une structure d'opportunité socio-spatiale permettant l'action.

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