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Enacting meaning-in-use: qualitative research on norms and international relations

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Abstract. This article proposes a framework for empirical research on contested meaning of norms in international politics. The goal is to identify a design for empirical research to examine associative connotations of norms that come to the fore when norms are contested in situations of governance beyond-the-state and especially in crises. If cultural practices shape experience and expectations, they need to be identified and made 'account-able' based on empirical research. To that end, the proposed qualitative approach centres on individually enacted meaning-in-use. The framework comprises norm-types, conditions of contestation, types of divergence and opposition-deriving as a specific interview evaluation technique. *Section one* situates the problem of contestation in the field of constructivist research on norms. *Section two* introduces distinctive conditions of contestation and types of norms. *Section three* details the methodology of conducting and evaluating interviews and presents the technique of opposition-deriving with a view to reconstructing the structure of meaning-in-use. *Section four* concludes with an outlook to follow-up research.

Introduction

According to the literatures on globalisation, constitutionalisation, civilisation, bureaucratic institutionalisation and so on, a new constitutional quality can be observed in the international realm.[1] It has been constituted through processes of international interaction, and, it is special since its organisational roots and normative substance cannot be derived from either the modern nation-state or from that of an international organisation. Thus, neither the literature on constitutionalism nor the literature on international relations is especially well equipped to address the phenomenon in an encompassing way.[2] The particularity of this constitutional quality lies 'in between' conceptions of political entities such as for example national

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[1] The term 'international realm' is used instead of 'world politics' so as to offer a terminology which works as a reference frame for international lawyers and political scientists alike.

[2] For example constitutionalists struggle with multi- or internationality whilst international relations scholars struggle with formal validity in the anarchic environment of international politics.

states or international organisations.[3] It can be described as hard institutions such as international organisations as well as soft institutions such as norms, rules and principles and an increasing number of studies have found it to guide politics and law in the international realm in distinct ways.[4]

While modern constructivist literature has focused on the stable structuring quality of norms, this article begins from the observation that despite an enhanced constitutional quality in the international realm, norms are contested. Designated norm-followers are often reluctant and need to be shamed and coerced into norm-implementation. Subsequently, it could be argued that norm 'erosion'[5] rather than the 'power' of norms[6] will eventually carry the day. However, if norms evolve interactively, as most constructivists will agree, then any process of contestation will reflect a specific re/enacting of the normative 'structure of meaning-in-use'.[7] It will therefore be constitutive towards norm change. If this is the case, the challenge for research on the role of norms in international relations is to find out how meaning is enacted and whether it is possible to identify distinct patterns or conditions of this process so as to carry out empirical research based on some general research assumptions. This article addresses the potential political impact of norms, considering that they are a social phenomenon which carries specific contextualised meanings and therefore is prone to create contestation at best and conflict at worst when dealt with out-of-context. It makes the case for a contextualised approach (as opposed to a universalist approach) to examine the impact of social practices on international politics empirically. The following section one places the issue of contested normative meaning in the – predominantly – constructivist international relations literature on norms. Section two introduces distinctive conditions of contestation and types of norms. Section three details the qualitative methodology and the steps of obtaining and evaluating discursive data. And section four concludes with an outlook towards further research based on research assumptions.

***Inter*national relations: globalisation without transnationalisation**

To disentangle the broad and descriptive term of 'constitutional quality' it is helpful to focus on the social practices that are constitutive for its emergence. Social practices

[3] Deidre Curtin, 'Betwixt and Between: Democracy and Transparency in the Governance of the European Union', in J. A. Winter, D. M. Curtin, A. E. Kellerman and B. de Witte (eds), *Reforming the Treaty on European Union – The Legal Debate* (The Hague/Boston/London: Kluwer Law International, 1996), pp. 95–121.

[4] Compare the legalisation literature, the constitutionalisation literature and the constructivist literature on norms in international relations more generally (detailed references in the following sections). K. W. Abbott et al., 'The Concept of Legalization', *International Organization*, 54:3 (2000), pp. 401–19.

[5] Elvira Rosert and Sonja Schirmbeck, 'Zur Erosion internationaler Normen: Nukleares Tabu und Folterverbot', Nachwuchstagung der Sektion Internationale Politik der DVPW, 26–28 May 2006, Arnoldshain.

[6] T. Risse, ' "Let's Argue!" Communicative Action in World Politics', *International Organization* 54:1 (2000), pp. 1–39. Stephen C. Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights. International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[7] Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco, 'Making State Action Possible: The United States and the Discursive Construction of "The Cuban Problem", 1960–1994', *Millennium*, 25:2 (1996), pp. 361–95.

are defined as discourses.[8] Following the constitutionalism literature,[9] they are distinguishable as formal, organisational practices and as informal, cultural practices. Both play a key role for the analysis of constitutional quality. Thus, organisational practices are central to the development and understanding of modern constitutionalism while cultural practices are predominant in ancient constitutionalism.[10] While under conditions of globalisation, social practices transgress the boundaries of organisational units such as modern national states, social learning is largely confined to the stable environment of international organisations.[11] It therefore remains an exclusive process that involves the participating individual elites only. That is, this context is limited rather than all-pervasive. Subsequently, its impact on the role of norms in international politics may be underestimated. To highlight its potential, this article proposes to disaggregate norms along the dimensions of formal validity, social recognition and cultural validation. And then proceeds to study the way individuals enact meaning-in-use with regard to a specific norm. For example, does an international treaty in which abstention from torture is agreed allow for deviating from the norm under specific circumstances?[12] While modern constructivists have been able to demonstrate how and why state behaviour changes in light of powerful norms, we know less about the potentially conflictive impact of divergent interpretation of norms. That is, while a norm such as human rights may be agreeable within an international negotiating setting, say within the context of the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Union (WTO) or the European Union (EU), the actual meaning of this norm may differ in the actual contexts of norm implementation.

To examine the potential impact of diverging interpretations of norms this article proposes a methodological approach to make meaning 'account-able'.[13] It draws on international relations theory, and, especially qualitative foreign policy analysis. In addition, it borrows from the neighbouring disciplines of anthropology,

[8] Ruth Wodak, *Disorders of discourse* (London: Longman, 1996). Stefan Titscher, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter, *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publishing, 2005). Jan Kruse, *Seminar-Reader: Introduction to Qualitative Interview Research*, unpublished manuscript (Freiburg: University of Freiburg, 2007).

[9] This article defines constitutionalism as an academic approach which entails two goals. On the one hand, it sets parameters for studying the process of constitutionalisation empirically. On the other hand, it provides a framework for normative discussion about the role and purpose of a constitution as a democratically conceived instrument that seeks to keep politics at bay, see Snyder 1990; Preuss 1994; Weiler 1999).

[10] James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[11] Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Why Comply? Social Norms Learning and European Identity Change', *International Organization*, 55:3 (2001), pp. 553–88. Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Treating International Institutions as Social Environments, *International Studies Quarterly*, 45:4 (2001), pp. 487–515.

[12] Eric Wyler, 'From "State Crime" to Responsibility for "Serious Breaches of Obligations under Peremptory Norms of General International Law"?', *European Journal of International Law*, 13:5 (2002), pp. 1147–60. Christian J. Tams, 'Do Serious Breaches Give Rise to Any Specific Obligations of the Responsible State?, *European Journal of International Law*, 13:5 (2002), pp. 1161–80.

[13] Note that the expression to make meaning 'accountable' is derived from Harold Garfinkel's ethno-methodological approach to capture the indexicality of meanings by making it visible. Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967). It is therefore not to be confounded with research on governance which conceptualises accountability as an organising principle of legitimate governance, in Mark Bovens, 'New Forms of Accountability and EU-Governance', *Comparative European Politics*, 5:1 (2007), pp. 104–20. Sonja Puntscher-Riekmann, 'In Search of Lost Norms: Is Accountability the Solution to the Legitimacy Problems of the European Union?, *Comparative European Politics*, 5:1 (2007), pp. 121–37.

ethno-methodology and sociology.[14] It is designed for single case studies that seek to generate a working hypothesis for follow-up studies[15] and engages discourse analysis to derive a methodological approach to examine the role of norms in the international realm. In distinction from long-term group constellations and individual input into transnational politics, the empirical focus is on interventions made by individuals who operate on a micro-level in 'settings of interaction' which are identified as 'locales' of day-to-day practice.[16] Following the contingency condition of norms[17] actors operate within a context that is structured by the interplay between structures of meaning-in-use and individuals enacting of that meaning. The latter hold associative connotations which become recognisable through interaction and characterise rule following on the basis of individual perception of norms.[18] The interpretation of norms is therefore individually enacted yet not purely based on sentiment.[19]

The methodological approach allows for conducting case studies that are able to reveal 'the essential relevance [. . .] of a concern for common sense activities as a topic of inquiry in its own right and, by reporting a series of studies, to urge its "rediscovery" '. By bringing normative contingency to bear empirically, case studies will seek to investigate the 'constitutive phenomenology of the world of everyday' meanings in order to identify their impact on politics as 'background expectancies' which are individually held. Harold Garfinkel's studies focused on enhancing 'sociological inquiries' by making 'commonplace *scenes* visible'.[20] In adopting this approach this article seeks to make the impact of commonplace *meanings* visible for the study of politics.

Following insights from discourse analyses especially in the field of qualitative foreign policy analysis, it is assumed that even if we know the words and speak the same language, a word in and by itself provides insufficient information about its meaning.[21] To catch the meaning of a word or a phrase it is helpful to examine 'the cultural and social day-to-day context in which it has been used' and 'marked by indexicality'.[22] Associative connotations allow for an assessment of the degree to

[14] See, for example, Schutz 1932; Garfinkel 1967; Berger and Luckmann 1991; Doty 1993; Weldes and Saco 1996; and Milliken 1999.

[15] This type of case study focuses on exploration as opposed to description or the investigation of explanatory theories. For the distinction, see Titscher et al. (2005, p. 44).

[16] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

[17] See Table 1, condition 1 below.

[18] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 887–917.

[19] Note that this conceptualisation is distinct from Max Weber's concept of 'affectional action' (Gerth and Mills 1946, p. 56).

[20] Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

[21] See for example, Roxanne L. Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines', *International Studies Quarterly*, 37:3 (1993), pp. 297–302; Weldes and Saco, 'Making State Action Possible: The United States and the Discursive Construction of "The Cuban Problem", 1960–1994', *Millennium*, 25:2 (1996), pp. 361–95; Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:2 (1999), pp. 225–65; Fierke, 'World or Worlds? The Analysis of Content and Discourse, *Qualitative Methods, 2, Symposium: Discourse and Content Analysis*, 1 (2004), pp. 36–9; and Diez, 'Constructing the self and changing others: Reconsidering "normative power Europe" ', *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 33:3 (2005), pp. 613–36.

[22] Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967). Gerhard Hauck, *Geschichte der soziologischen Theorie. Eine ideologiekritische Einführung* (Rowohlt: Reinbeck bei Hamburg, 1984).

which the meanings of norms converge. This assessment provides information about individual dispositions towards these norms. Understanding is never unmediated but subsequent to interpretation against the background of individual experience. Therefore, individually experienced and enacted expectations about norms hold the key for comparing interpretations in international settings.[23]

The role of norms

The international relations literature offers two types of theoretical frameworks to study the role of norms. Conventional (or modern) constructivists focus on the structuring power of norms and their influence on state behaviour in world politics.[24] Critical constructivists focus on the meaning of norms as constituted by and constitutive of specific use.[25] The formers' focus on *reaction* to norms is helpful to indicate the influence of one fundamental norm over another, say the power of human rights or the diffusion of a specific Weberian administrative culture, or, in focusing on a specific decision-making situation in which norms guide processes of deliberation. The latter's interest in *relations* to norms enhances the understanding of how intersubjectivity plays out in international relations and identifies avenues towards change based on normative structures as entailing meaning that is actually 'in-use'. It is therefore receptive of the interrelation between agent-centred and structural change.

As the literature has demonstrated, norms may achieve a degree of appropriateness reflected by changing state behaviour on a global scale. However, in the absence of social recognition, norms are likely to be misinterpreted or simply discarded. In any case, contestation is expected. This also holds true for legal norms which require social institutions to enhance understanding and identify meaning that is normative practice. The documented language about norms indicates no more than the formal validity of a norm, while its social recognition stands to be constructed by social interaction. In other words, understanding does not follow from reference to 'objective reality [. . .] rather it is inherently constructed and sustained by social processes'.[26] Since norms – and their meanings – evolve through interaction in context, they are therefore contested by default. This is particularly important in beyond-the-state contexts where 'no categorical imperatives' are in practice, and where 'the context, or situation, within which activities take place is extremely important'.[27] As social constructs, norms may acquire stability over extended periods

[23] See Shapiro and Bonham 1977, p. 165; Weldes and Saco 1996, p. 369.

[24] Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Why Comply? Social Norms, Learning and European Identity Change', *International Organization*, 55:3 (2001).

[25] See Kratochwil 1989; Weldes and Saco 1996; Reus-Smit 1997, 2003.

[26] Monica Colombo, 'Reflexivity and Narratives in Action Research: A Discursive Approach', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 4:2 (2003), 〈http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2–03/2–03colombo-e.htm [accessed 25 July 2007].

[27] Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant. Human Conduct in a World of States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [2000]), pp. 19–20. Martha Finnemore and Stephen J. Toope, 'Alternatives to 'Legalization': Richer Views of Law and Politics', *International Organization*, 55:3 (2001), pp. 743–58. Jutta Brunnée and Stephen J. Toope, 'International Law and Constructivism: Elements of an Interactional Theory of International Law', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, 39:1 (2001), pp. 19–74. Brunnée and Toope, *Legitimacy and Persuasion: The Hard Work of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (in preparation).

of time, yet they remain flexible by definition. The link between formal validity and social recognition becomes disturbed when contexts of norm-setting and norm-following are decoupled. Subsequently, the interpretation of norms in beyond the state contexts becomes distorted.

To address the consequences and discuss ways of remedying the lacking link, this article suggests examining individual interpretations as an additional dimension that allows for identifying cultural validation based on everyday experience, that is enacting meaning-in-use. Structures of meaning-in-use are defined as 'intersubjective structures [. . .] that provide the categories through which we represent and understand the world'.[28] They therefore offer a reference frame for empirical studies that seek to reconstruct the respective meaning which has been enacted at a particular point in time by particular actors. They represent meaning in use. According to critical constructivists the central assumptions for such an analysis are, first, intersubjectivity,[29] second, relationality[30] and third, critical contestation. The respective analytical categories that play a key role are first, the dual quality of norms as both structuring and constructed, second, the structure of meaning-in-use as providing access to specific meanings that are influential at a specific time and place, yet will only be revealed through individual use and third, the application of the normative standard of legitimacy based on equal access to contestation.

Cultural practices

Transnationalisation both in its narrow political definition as *type of actor* including at least one non-state actor, or, the wider social definition as *type of activity* in which no specific national characteristics are dominant, has produced constitutional quality beyond national state boundaries. Is this quality however accepted across the board so that international actors can move along and turn towards sign-posts for direction? For example with reference to European integration the question could be raised whether, as a process, integration actually produced wholesale *trans*nationalisation, or, whether the European Union remains a partially transnationalised *inter*national organisation where the majority of interaction still involves international encounters?[31] That is, conventions, agreements and treaties may trigger different expectations, even among readers of the same text. To understand the impact of individual experience, it is therefore proposed to identify the constitutive

[28] Jutta Weldes, 'Bureaucratic Politics: A Critical Constructivist Assessment', *Mershon International Studies Review*, 42 (1998), pp. 2216–25.

[29] Friedrich V. Kratochwil and John G. Ruggie, 'International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State', *International Organization*, 40:4 (1986), pp. 753–75. Peter Niesen and Benjamin Herborth (eds), *Anarchie der kommunikativen Freiheit. Jürgen Habermas und die Theorie der internationalen Politik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007).

[30] Charles Tilly, 'Reflections On the History of State-Making', in Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 3–83.

[31] The italics are used to stress the consideration of relations between different national entities and/or their representatives. This literal application of the term indicates the constitutive role of nations in the United Nations system of civilised nations; see, for example, Habermas (2004), p. 117. It stands in contrast with the term '*trans*national' indicating a situation in which national boundaries are blurred.

input of cultural practices. How to address this by way of empirical research is the main concern of the remainder of this article. Drawing on qualitative foreign policy analysis the suggestion is to focus on the process through which individuals enact meaning-in-use.

Cultural practices play a key role for the project of uncovering hidden meanings of norms which deviate from the texts of legal documents and expected shared recognition stipulated by modern constitutionalism. This specific perspective on cultural practices involves a 'prospective' as opposed to a 'retrospective' method of analysis.[32] That is the focus is set on specific decisions taken at 'major historical choice points' in the past to inquire why they come about and seeks to show that the outcomes might have been different if additional information had been available.[33] For example, choice points that matter to an investigation about the meaning of fundamental norms involve the series of decisions which led to the signing a particular convention or treaty. As the following will demonstrate in more detail, the additional and heretofore hidden information can be revealed by empirical research on cultural practices as the dimension which has become increasingly neglected with the hardening of modern constitutional features and its reliance on organisational practices only.

Accordingly, comparative research needs to identify patterns of interpretation. Following the rule-in-practice assumption which argues that meanings of norms to differ according to social practices in context,[34] it is therefore expected that interpretations of norms will be contested as a consequence of decoupling organisational and cultural social practices. It follows that the transfer between different contexts enhances the contestation of meanings, as differently socialised individuals – for example politicians, civil servants, parliamentarians, lawyers, lobbyists, journalists and so on – who have been trained in a variety of traditions and been socialised in different day-to-day circumstances seek to interpret them. While the potential for misunderstandings and conflict can be kept at bay by adding a deliberative dimension to facilitate arguing and ultimately persuasion that one meaning should legitimately trump another,[35] it is important to keep a key limitation of this approach in mind: Arguing takes place within a *limited* context of negotiation, say within one particular committee. It is hence conducive to establishing social recognition of a fundamental norm, say human rights, within that specific and limited context only.

To warrant social recognition of human rights in another context, arguing would need to resume anew, and so on. That is, once norm interpretation and implementation happens in various contexts (which is usually the case when researching the role of norms in the international realm), the meaning attached a norm is likely to differ according to the respective experience with norm-use. It is therefore important to recover the crucial interrelation between experience with and enactment of

[32] Charles Tilly, 'Reflections On the History of State-Making', in Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 3–83.

[33] Charles Tilly, 'Two Callings of Social History', *Theory and Society*, 9:5 (1975), pp. 679–681 (special issue).

[34] Uwe Puetter and Antje Wiener, 'Accommodating Normative Divergence in World Politics: European Foreign Policy Coordination', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2007, 45:5 (2007), pp. 1063–86.

[35] Thomas Risse, ' "Let's Argue!" Communicative Action in World Politics', *International Organization*, 54:1 (2000), pp. 1–39. Nicole Deitelhoff and Harald Müller, 'Theoretical Paradise – Empirically Lost? Arguing with Habermas', *Review of International Studies*, 31:1 (2005), pp. 167–80.

Steps	Type	Condition
1	Contingency	Historical *contingency* means that norm interpretation depends on context.
1+2	Social practices	Moving selected *social practices* (that is organisational practices only) beyond a given social context reduces the social feedback factor when interpreting norms.
1+2+3	Crisis	A situation of *crisis* raises the stakes for norm interpretation as time constraints enhance the reduced social feedback factor.

Table 1. Enhanced contestation of norms: three conditions
Source: Wiener (2008) p. 64.

meaning in use. In order to fill this gap, it is helpful to reconstruct structures of meaning-in-use in different contexts including domestic and transnational political arenas. To identify the more detailed aspect of the research design, the following first defines conditions for norm contestation as well as generic norm types. The framework comprises norm-types, conditions of contestation, types of divergence and opposition-deriving as a specific interview evaluation technique.

Conditions for contestation and types of norms

Reactions to norms have been conceptualised as habitual rather than reasoned.[36] In other words, in the absence of established and formalised procedures of arguing or, in any case access to a modicum of contestation, norms are likely to acquire political significance when their meaning is disputed. At that point, they obtain political visibility. Such points of contestation are triggered by contingency, out of context application and in situations of crisis. They are a regular occurrence in processes of governance beyond the state, when inter-national encounters occur on a regular basis. And they are particularly visible in situations of 'crisis', 'a moment of crucial decision in the context of immense danger'.[37] It can therefore be hypothesised that the contested meaning of norms is enhanced under three conditions, with each condition indicating enhanced contestation due to declining social feedback. That is, the possibility to turn to social institutions as frameworks of reference for the interpretation of norms (social recognition). First, the contingency of normative meaning indicates a change of constitutive social practices both cultural and organisational, and hence normative meaning over time. Second, the extension of governance practices beyond modern political and societal boundaries changes the social environment and hence the reference frame provided by social institutions. And, third, a situation of crisis raises the stakes for understanding meanings based on social institutions (see Table 1).

[36] James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions. The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).
[37] M. Griffiths and T. O'Callaghan, T, *International Relations. The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2003).

The case study design developed in the following section focuses on empirical research that seeks to explore the impact of changing governance processes, understood as moving social practices beyond the boundaries set by modern nation-states. Here it is important to note the selective or, out of synch, movements of organisational and cultural practices, respectively. If norm interpretation is historically contingent (see *Contingency Condition*, Table 1), then moving social practices outside the domestic political arena indicates a transfer of normative meanings outside the familiar context of interpretation. While social feedback is high in the domestic arena where organisational and cultural practices overlap, it is expected to decrease with a lack of overlap between these two types of social practices (see *Social Practices Condition*, Table 1). To understand the potential for conflict such misunderstandings might cause, the social feedback factor is measured with reference to the individually enacted cultural validation of norms.

Empirical research will therefore seek to reconstruct the varying relations between formal validity, social recognition and cultural validation of a norm. This is important, since diverging interpretations of meaning may induce a clash of normative meanings and hence potentially present a source of conflict. The aspect which is particularly interesting to explore, is the question of whether globalisation and transnationalisation will contribute to 'solve' the problem or whether the reverse is the case and the level of contestation increases. While we can hypothesise that the more transnational a context of interaction, the less likely are clashes over norm interpretation, this hypothesis only works, if the process of transnationalisation turns out to be all-encompassing. If this is not the case, transnational arenas have to be considered as enhancing rather than reducing diversity in the international realm. That is, as additional political arenas they increase the range of reference frames for social recognition and hence the potential for conflicting interpretations.[38]

Types of norms

In the interest of the transdisciplinary accessibility of the proposed research design, three *types* of norms are distinguished: fundamental norms, organising principles and standardised procedures (see Table 2). The types are identified according to the respective degrees of generalisation, specification and contestation on ethical grounds. Thus, research conducted in different disciplines may refer to these generic types and engage in meaningful conversation with neighbouring disciplines.

Fundamental norms include core constitutional norms which are commonly applied with reference to modern constitutionalism and basic procedural norms which are commonly applied in international relations theory. They include citizenship, human rights, the rule of law, democracy, sovereignty, non-intervention, abstention from torture and so forth. As the glue of a community, they are

[38] Whether or not such *inter*national conflict of meanings must necessarily be considered as a problem that requires solving through harmonisation, or, whether it might actually be used to establish routine procedures of contestation so as to enhance legitimacy remains to be addressed from a normative theoretical standpoint. The issue would lead beyond the limited space of this article. It is addressed elsewhere in some detail. Antje Wiener, *The Invisible Constitution of Politics: Contested Norms and International Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Type of norms	Substance	Generalisation	Specification	Contestation on ethical grounds
Fundamental norms	Sovereignty Citizenship Human rights Fundamental freedoms Democracy Rule of law Non-Intervention	More	Less	More
Organising principles	Proportionality Accountability Responsibility Transparency Flexibility Gender mainstreaming Mutual recognition International election monitoring	Medium	Medium	Medium
Standardised procedures	Qualified majority voting Unanimous decisions Proportional representation	Less	More	Less

Table 2. Types of norms
Source: Wiener (2008), Ch 3, p. 66.
Note: The norms presented in the 'substance' column are listed as examples which are not all inclusive. They are not fixed; especially, fundamental norms and organising principles are likely to shift between types.

conceptualised as core constitutional norms in domestic contexts. That is, they express that what is agreed to following organisational practices of modern nation-states. In turn, fundamental norms are defined as 'basic procedural norms' including sovereign equality, respect for human rights, and non-intervention in international affairs among others[39] in the context of global politics. In this context, they are established through the agreement of states. That is, they are established following the interaction among 'civilised nations'.[40]

Organising principles are more closely linked with processes of policy or political processes. They evolve through the practices of politics and policymaking and include for example accountability, transparency, gender mainstreaming, peacekeeping and peace-enforcement. They inform political procedures and guide policy practices and include for example accountability, transparency, legitimacy and gender mainstreaming. *Standardised procedures* entail specific prescriptions, rules and regulations. This norm-type is the least likely to be contested on moral or ethical

[39] Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant. Human Conduct in a World of States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [2000]), pp. 19–20.
[40] See Article 38 (1) c of the Statute of the International Court of Justice.

grounds. It is not contingent and entails directions that are specified as clearly as possible, such as for example the instructions to assemble a flat-pack piece of furniture.[41] They involve for example electoral rules or assembly regulations which are clearly defined and expected to facilitate unmediated understanding.

It follows logically that the most contested norms are the least specific, that is the fundamental norms, while the least contested are the most specific, that is the standardised procedures. As fundamental norms are subject to contestation, they can also be upgraded to the status of a fundamental norm. For example, the norm of accountability may be understood both as an organising principle with reference to one particular policy process in one policy, yet it may well be a fundamental norm in another.[42] For all norms, the three conditions of contestation apply. That is, while they have been identified with reference to a specific context, for example, modern constitutionalism as it evolved through social practices of modern nation-state politics, they may well change in light of ongoing contestation. In addition, the way they work, depends on how they are interpreted according to the three conditions of contingency, moving social practices and crisis (see Table 1). Since 'no rules in international law are absolute,' indeed, 'nothing in this normative sphere is absolute',[43] lawyers expect the interpretation of legal texts to depend on input through legal discourse, such as deliberation, jurisprudence, learned opinion and other discursive interventions. The contested issue regarding this input lies in different legal traditions. Nonetheless it can be argued that while considering the input of discourse at different stages, we can attribute a constitutive role to discursive interventions in the process of shaping and changing norms within international law.

Studying diverging, converging and diffused interpretations of normative meanings may appear a rather elusive exercise. I contend that the main challenge lies in locating the cultural dimension analytically and in examining it empirically. After all '*a constitution* can seek to impose one cultural practice, one way of rule following, or it can recognise a diversity of cultural ways of being a citizen, but *it cannot eliminate, overcome or transcend this cultural dimension of politics*'.[44] Therefore, case studies need to compare the input of cultural practices in an *emerging* transnational arena, on the one hand, with those in *enduring* domestic arenas, on the other. To that end, indicators need to be identified at a level of desegregation that allows for the empirical assessment of meaning. When considering that individuals carry normative baggage wherever they go, yet are always exposed to normative structures, interpretations achieve a considerable radius of input and therefore influence under conditions of transnationalisation. Most importantly, elites who have been socialised in domestic political contexts ('national' elites) will carry the respective domestically constituted normative baggage into international negotiation environments. In these

[41] Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions. On the conditions of practical and legal reasoning in international relations and domestic affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Kratochwil, Leaving Sovereignty Behind. An inquiry into the politics of post-modernity. Presentation at the *Normative International Relations Speakers Series*, University of Bath, 15 November 2007, European University Institute Florence, unpubl Ms.

[42] For such a distinct assessment of accountability see for example Bovens (2007) and Puntscher-Riekman (2007), respectively.

[43] Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant. Human Conduct in a World of States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [2000]), pp. 19–20.

[44] James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

environments conflict is therefore more likely when decisions are taken by elites who have little experience in sustained and continuous transnational interaction and hence are unable to refer to a common reference framework. In the absence of a significant increase of transnationalised politics and policy processes, international politics remain just that, that is they are 'international' in the literal meaning of the word.

Methodology and method

Following the distinction between visible factors of a treaty or convention such as principles, articles, and provisions (indicating formal validity), on the one hand, and invisible factors such as individual interpretations of fundamental norms based on social institutions (social recognition) or individual experience (cultural validation), on the other, research on hidden meanings dedicates particular attention to the latter. While constitutive for political outcomes, interpretations of norms remain largely invisible. They are most likely to entail the hidden meanings which need to be made accountable to offer empirical reference points for a comparative assessment of divergence, convergence or diffusion of the meanings of constitutional norms. The following elaborates on the details of making meanings accountable by applying discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis offers a specific perspective on social phenomena which begins with the assumption of discourse as a social practice. It is not an approach or a research technique for the analysis of texts such as qualitative content analysis or reconstructive analysis. The choice of method for a specific text therefore remains to be made. It may be used as a cognitive map that will facilitate access to a more detailed understanding of fundamental norms than currently available. The details are located in social practices that reflect experience within specific contexts. To grasp meanings that are attached to social practices, reconstructive analysis is more helpful than content analysis. The latter will reveal constellations and frequency of code noted prior to the evaluation. In turn, the former offers interpretative tools with which meanings that are constituted prior to a discursive intervention can be uncovered. As a reflexive process, reconstructive analysis allows bringing intangible aspects of discourse to the fore.[45]

The case studies are conducted according to methodological triangulation that is combining qualitative and quantitative research methods.[46] The evaluation period

[45] That is, '*[m]eanings* produced through a discourse ''pre-exist their use in any one discursive practice'' ', or '[. . .] by any one individual. *Discursive practices*, in turn, *are social acts, enabled by a discourse*, through which some relevant aspect of the world is actively defined and constituted', Weldes and Saco (1996), pp. 343–4; cf. Fiske (1987), p. 14; emphasis added by author.

[46] See for example King, Keohane and Verba (1992); Tarrow (1995), p. 473 and Lustick (1996), p. 616. As Tarrow notes '[T]riangulation is particularly appropriate in cases in which quantitative data are partial and qualitative investigation is obstructed by political conditions' (Tarrow 1995, p. 473). My

typically involves five empirical phases, each requiring specific decisions with regard to technique and procedure. In the first phase, interviews are conducted; during the second phase, interviews are transcribed and a general text *corpus* is compiled; the third phase involves text analysis using the techniques of excerption, keyword selection, and deriving oppositions. In the fourth phase, the normative structure of meaning-in-use is reconstructed with reference to the relevant political arena, elite group, and modern constitutional norm. Finally, in phase five, a quantitative evaluation of types of divergence, convergence or diffusion of meanings is carried out based on the set of associative connotations generated by the interviews to indicate a direction for a larger quantitative study as a follow-up.[47] This final step uses the method of 'structured, focused comparison'[48] based on the systematic collection of information.

Data collection

It has been proposed to examine 'contemporarily produced texts' in order to reconstruct hidden normative meanings.[49] Such texts may include a range of data sources, such as parliamentary debates, the media, or interview transcriptions, or examine interview transcriptions as the primary data source. In the latter case, interviews are conducted anonymously to create an environment that warrants spontaneous answers that reveal personal reactions.[50] This emphasis follows the distinction between 'informative', 'expressive' and 'directive' uses of language where this case study sought to avoid informative or directive uses of language. Instead, it stressed the 'expressive' use of language to generate emotional responses.[51] That is, technical or other types of rationalised expert opinions that are likely to reproduce standardised rules and general guidelines rather than revealing 'emotive' personal views were not encouraged.[52] Such views would simply restate the formal validity of

turn to triangulation reflects a lack of quantitative data – hence the invisible constitution of politics – and, the additional problem of generating data based on the qualitative method.

47 This approach follows the research design and experience documented in Schneider (2001).

48 Gary King, Robert O. Gary and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

49 Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco, 'Making State Action Possible: The United States and the Discursive Construction of 'The Cuban Problem', 1960–1994', *Millennium*, 25:2 (1996), pp. 361–95. Hannelore Bublitz (ed.), *Das Wuchern der Diskurse. Perspektiven der Diskursanalyse* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus. 1999). Jens Schneider, *Deutsch Sein – Das Eigene, das Fremde und die Vergangenheit im Selbstbild des vereinten Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2001). Anne Huffschmid, *Diskursgerilla: Wortergreifung und Widersinn. Die Zapatistas im Spiegel der mexikanischen und internationalen Öffentlichkeit* (Heidelberg: Synchron Publishers, 2004).

50 Typically, in this type of case study, interviewees will remain anonymous and interview evaluation proceeds on a strict anonymity basis that is, providing letter-coded reference only.

51 For this distinction of three different uses of language, see, for example, Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), cf. Donald Kalish, 'Review of 'Introduction to Logic' by Irving M Copi', *The Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 29:2 (1964), pp. 92–3. See also the distinction of different types of speech acts as 'directive', 'assertive', 'commissive', and 'expressive' as well as a group of 'declaratives', in Jacqueline Nastri, Jorge Pena and Jeffrey T. Hancock, 'The Construction of Away Messages: A Speech Act Analysis', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11 (2006), pp. 1025–45.

52 See Holbrook, Krosnick, Carson Mitchell (2000), '[E]motive meaning' indicates attitudes and feelings associated with the use of a word, phrase, or sentence, in contrast with its literal

norms, and, as such they would not be conducive towards the task of making the individually held associative connotations accountable.[53] In sum, the empirical focus on discursive interventions is expected to reveal the intersubjective engagement *with* rather than the discourse *about* a particular issue. The discursive interventions take place within the interviewee's day-to-day context. They set the micro-level for the empirical investigation. Once transcribed, the collection of spontaneous remarks constitutes the text *corpus* as the main database.[54]

The focus on interview transcriptions allows for obtaining indirect references to fundamental norms which are distinguishable by individual, group, or other categorical indicators. It is conducive to compiling a data base for insights into the individual and contextualised cultural validations of selected norms. The case study's main data source will normally consist of interview transcriptions in order to reconstruct the structure of meaning-in-use with regard to selected fundamental norms. The compiled text is to include all transcriptions. The keyword selection is inductive that is keywords are derived from the main text *corpus*. The selection is carried out on the basis of semantic references to specific fundamental norms. The cross-linkage between keywords and norms allow for a comparative distinction of individually held associative connotations. The analysis seeks to reveal hidden meanings ascribed to norms by individuals who are selected from different contexts such as for example transnational and domestic political arenas.

It is held that this kind of empirical research allows for a shift in perspective from the discursive event at the *macro*-level as the level of high complexity (international politics) towards the discursive event at the *micro*-level (individually held associative connotations) to reduce this complexity.[55] The individual interview situation provides a setting in which interaction in context generates the text *corpus* as the empirical data base. This data base allows for identifying the structure of meaning-in-use. It is of central interest to reduce the complexity created by that situation, for example, by reference to theoretical assumptions and by choice of empirical design. The case study seeks to generate a working hypothesis for a follow-up project targeting a larger more representative sample. The interviews are conducted on the basis of a *guided questionnaire*. They follow three basic assumptions about social practices raised by critical discourse analysis (see Table 3).

significance. See, for example, Brandt's definition, '[T]o say a word has 'blind emotive meaning' is to say it has a dispositional capacity to arouse emotive effects of substantial order, in certain circumstances, independently of any alteration the hearing of it introduces into the cognitive field (except for the sensory presence of the word itself)'; Richard B. Brandt, 'Stevenson's Defense of the Emotive Theory', *Philosophical Review*, 59:4 (1950), pp. 535–40.

[53] Since '[M]any of the most common words and phrases of any language have both a literal or descriptive meaning that refers to the way things are and an emotive meaning that expresses some (positive or negative) feeling about them. Thus, the choice of which word to use in making a statement can be used in hopes of evoking a particular *emotional* response', Garth Kemmerling, *Philosophy and Logic* (2002) (emphasis added by author): ⟨http://www.philosophypages.com/lg/e04.htm⟩ [accessed 29 October 2007].

[54] This should also note the interviewees' socio-cultural context based on the question about their respective living and working circumstances during the decade prior to the interview, that is following an additional question prior to the interview such as 'How many times a month do you generally engage in international interaction, that is in spoken language'?

[55] See Titscher et al. (2005), p. 156.

No	Assumption
1	Discourse is a social practice.[56]
2	Structures of meaning-in-use are constituted through social practices.[57]
3	Discursive practice represents the link between text and social practice.[58]

Table 3. Research assumptions about social practices
Source: Wiener (2008), p. 78.

Interview evaluation

Reconstructive analysis refers to a basic text *corpus* which is generated through discursive interventions at the micro-level. The evaluation of the text is conducted in order to reconstruct the specific structure of meaning-in-use in a selected context. The language of discursive interventions is understood as constitutive in a Wittgensteinian sense; that is, it not only functions to describe facts but also constitutes new meaning.[59] For example, at the meta-theoretical level discourse analysis assumes that 'the meaning of a comment rests in its usage in a specific situation'.[60] It follows that individually held associative connotations about meaning are derived from and contribute to the structure of meaning-in-use. The following distinguishes between the type of data that is to be collected and the method of evaluation.

The text analysis engages in the three evaluative steps. First, the text *corpus* is organised according to policy fields, each of which provides a framework with significant relevance for one of the three constitutional norms that lie at the centre of this case study. Secondly, interview comments are sorted according to elite group and keyword families that provide patterns of associative connotations for comparison. All data are presented in one case excerpt document. As the script for the evaluation this document needs to provide direct links between keywords and individual utterances. The text *corpus* is thus linked directly with the associative connotations and the norms key norms under investigation. Thirdly, associative connotations are recalled and identified as sets of *oppositions* which derived from the text *corpus* of interview transcriptions.[61] Jennifer Milliken proposes to distinguish between core oppositions and derived oppositions. While both types of oppositions are derived from the text *corpus* through induction, core oppositions also relate to the academic literature that exists outside the text.

The technique involves 'abstract[ing] from two particular oppositions to a *core opposition* underlying both'.[62] It allows for conducting the opposition deriving

[56] Ibid.
[57] See Weldes and Saco (1996); Milliken (1999).
[58] See Fairclough (1992); Titscher et al. (2005), p. 150.
[59] For example, as an alternative to the positivist 'set of labels which can be compared to the world, Wittgenstein demonstrates that language is constitutive for the world', K. M. Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 3.
[60] Jürgen Gerhards, 'Dimensionen und Strategien öffentlicher Diskurse', *Journal für Sozialforschung*, 32:3/4 (1992), pp. 307–18.
[61] The oppositions are rendered by single documents which are identified as 'the language practice of predication – the verbs, adverbs and adjectives that attach to nouns', Milliken (1999), p. 232.
[62] Ibid., p. 234.

A:	domestic vs transnational
B:	domestic vs domestic
C:	transnational vs transnational

Table 4. *Types of divergence*
Source: Wiener (2008), p. 81.

process with regard to one core opposition several times. For example, when examining meanings attached to the fundamental norm of citizenship a meaningful core opposition according to the citizenship literature would be identified as 'inside' vs. 'outside' interpretations of citizenship. The repetitive process of identifying derived oppositions allows for a larger sample and hence empirically more comprehensive results. In turn, derived oppositions with regard to citizenship may, for example and pending on the context of the case study, be identified as 'travel' vs. 'security' or as 'civil rights' vs 'external borders.'[63] This exercise is repeated with the same interviewees and with reference to a number of different fundamental norms.

The next step of reconstructing the normative structure of meaning-in-use sheds light on diverging, converging or diffused meanings of norms. It derives oppositions between different groups of interviewees (that is from domestic and transnational arenas, respectively) and compares their associative connotations. Here it is of interest whether core oppositions can be identified in each of the compared issue areas and whether these core oppositions do prevail in the transnational political arena as well, or whether they are diffused in the transnational context. The point of research based on interviews is less one of demonstrating how one particular norm is interpreted in a generic sense; but rather, it allows for identifying and subsequently comparing patterns of divergence, convergence of diffusion of structures of meaning-in-use that will guide the interpretation of norms in a situation of crisis (see *Crisis Condition*, Table 1). The method of deriving oppositions can be applied to the case excerpt that is the reduced text *corpus* to which discursive interventions of a number of individuals have generated passages when making utterances about different issues for example a specific event, topic or policy area.

In sum, case studies conducted in this way allow for assessing divergence, convergence or diffusion of meanings which individuals associate with fundamental norms in international politics. A finding of divergence of normative meanings rather than convergence to be the dominant pattern would indicate an absence of a significant degree of cultural harmonisation among elites. In turn, if converging meanings prevail, Karl Deutsch's 'layer-cake assumption' would be sustained. That is, social groups harmonise differently with elites displaying more social interaction and hence a higher likelihood of harmonisation then other social strata.[64] Should the outcome entail both diverging and converging interpretations – and possibly a third pattern of diffusion as well – the variation remains to be distinguished according to type of divergence (as in Table 4). The key question is, whether the transnational elites' respective utterances demonstrate a divergence from their respective national domestic pattern. Three types of variation are considered as indicators of divergence.

[63] For such findings, see for instance Antje Wiener *The Invisible Consitution of Politics: Contested Norms and International Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Ch. 5.
[64] Karl W. Deutsch (1956).

Choice of indicators

The following turns to the selection of indicators for empirical research as the final remaining detail of research operationalisation. Indicators include the following generic types: social groups, norms, political arenas and issue areas.

Elites. The decision to interview elites follows Karl Deutsch's 'layer-cake' assumption which expects that of all social strata elites are most likely to generate cultural harmonisation as a result of regional integration.[65] Elites are the most likely social group with full access to a political community. It has been demonstrated for example that 'discourse elites' have 'influence for important decisions with regard to the entire society [. . .] based on particular positions within public discourse'.[66] Based on these two considerations, the selection of interviewees would want to include elites who enjoy full membership in the political community in question and who operate either within the transnational arena or in domestic political arenas. That is, each interviewee must – in principle – be able to both make use of and shape the resources of the public sphere. Only thus is the individual's constitutive input on the interrelated dimensions of cultural validation, social recognition and formal validity, that is the dimensions which have been singled out as key to norm interpretation, warranted. This would involve, for example, the production of texts such as policy documents, draft legislation, newspaper articles, academic writing, official documents and so forth, in addition to access to information and use of resources. In sum, the interviewed elite samples involve a group of highly flexible, well informed, and boundary crossing citizens who are able to both influence and access public discourse.[67] These individual elites carry normative baggage which informs their respective expectations towards the meaning of norms. Unless contested by others, or within an otherwise non-agreeable context, the baggage will prevail, notwithstanding the crossing of societal or political boundaries. The baggage is conceptualised as associative connotations. The case study details its quality, quantity and durability.

Fundamental norms. To assess associative connotations with fundamental norms by elites of different nationality and operating within different political arenas, case studies would focus on those fundamental norms which have found their way into international treaties, conventions or agreements. This choice follows the 'liberal community' hypothesis which assumes that members of a liberal community with a given identity will share respect for the same norms, values and principles.[68]

Issue areas. The issue areas will typically refer to a topic which is widely accessible, hence offering a shared reference point for all interviewees. Accordingly, issue areas may involve topics that are dealt with in the media. Such topics are accessible to all interviewees both as users and constructors, and they are meaningful

[65] Karl W. Deutsch, 'The Growth of Nations: Some Recurrent Patterns of Political and Social Integration', *World Politics*, 5:2 (1953), pp. 168–195.

[66] Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, 'Eliten in der modernen Demokratie', in Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, *Eliten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), pp. 11–27; Norman Fairclough, 'Discourse and Text: Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse Analysis', *Discourse and Society*, 3 (1992), pp. 193–217.

[67] Bernhard Peters, 'Public Discourse, Identity and the Problem of Democratic Legitimacy', in Eriksen (ed.), (2005), pp. 84–123.

[68] Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Post War Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). Frank Schimmelfennig, *The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

as topics of conversation with regard to a selection of fundamental norms. For example, the fundamental norms of 'democracy' and 'the rule of law' fit well with a topic such as EU enlargement, the norms of 'sovereignty' and 'non-intervention' are addressed by the topic of internationally administrated territories and humanitarian intervention, and so forth. The selection of such pairings is based on the assessment of which keywords are most likely to be uttered in structured qualitative interviews that focus on the respective fields.[69] The selection follows the rule-in-practice assumption which stresses the individual input in the formation of normative structures that is elites will only refer to structures of meaning-in-use that are accessible to them.[70] The issue areas are considered as reference frames which allow for a structured approach to individual expert interviews.

Political arenas. Case studies will examine the process of enacting of meaning-in-use in both domestic and transnational political arenas. The proposed selection of long-standing member states which enjoy several memberships in supranationally formed communities follows the liberal community assumption which would assume that the more community memberships any two countries enjoy, the higher the shared recognition and appropriateness of fundamental norms is likely to be. For example, a choice of Germany, France and UK would imply an overlap in membership in various international organisations including NATO, the United Nations and, last not least the European Union, as well as the respective supranational communities which have been forged in their suite. This set of strong community memberships has for instance been considered as generating a normative pull based on a shared identity as 'civilised' nations in the larger realm of world politics.[71]

Conclusion

The article argued that if cultural practices shape experience and expectations, they need to be identified and made accountable based on empirical research. To that end, it proposed a qualitative approach centring on individually enacted meaning-in-use. The framework comprises norm-types, conditions of contestation, types of divergence and opposition-deriving as a specific interview evaluation technique. The proposed methodological approach offers a research design for conducting comparative studies of elite perceptions of fundamental norms in political arenas of two different types (domestic, transnational). By including transnationally operating elites of the same nationality as the domestic elites it offers a cross-check function to empirically demonstrate whether or not, and to which degree national identity matters for norm interpretation. The thus obtained database is to be evaluated with

[69] Note that this choice is made primarily to provide a structure for the interview and keyword organisation. It does not assume to present an exclusive relationship between a particular policy area and a particular norm. The point is rather to demonstrate that, despite their all-pervasiveness, norms do retain different meanings to individuals.

[70] Uwe Puetter and Antje Wiener, 'Accommodating Normative Divergence in World Politics: European Foreign Policy Coordination', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45:5 (2007), pp. 1063–86.

[71] Thomas Risse, ' "Let's Argue!" Communicative Action in World Politics', *International Organization*, 54:1 (2000), pp. 1–39.

a view to establishing diverging, converging or diffused interpretations of meanings of fundamental norms. And each norm is to be considered as being predominantly addressed with reference to one issue area. Based on these data case studies aim at identifying individually held associative connotations which are then coded according to keywords and families of meaning indicating their relation with fundamental norms. Pending on the scope of the respective case study, research will generate a working hypothesis, or be used for a larger more representative investigation.

Based on the choice of elites and political arenas the following research assumptions are possible. If, the choice of elite groups entails, for example, French and British elites in the domestic arenas of Paris and London, respectively, and the transnational elite groups entail French and British elites operating in Brussels (over a distinct period of time) the following findings could occur. First, if harmonisation between all elite groups in both types of political arena – domestic and transnational – can be identified, the layer-cake assumption and the liberal community assumption trump. That is, this finding would support the assumption that either elite interaction leads to harmonisation across national boundaries, or, membership in a community with a given identity socialises members into recognising the same group of norms. Secondly, if divergence among the domestic sample groups can be established, that is, the French and the British interpretations of fundamental norms are distinct, and, if this divergence is maintained among the British and French Brusselites as the two national groups operating in the transnational arena, then assumptions about 'national identity options'[72] carry the day. If however, thirdly, a new pattern of divergence between domestic samples, on the one hand, and transnational sample groups, on the other, can be distinguished, that does not overlap with either national identities or supranational communities, then the constitutive impact of interaction in context on the interpretation of fundamental norms is confirmed. This third finding would raise questions about *diversity* within international communities, and indicate the need to rethink leading modern constructivist assumptions about membership in a community with a given identity as the basis of shared norms, beliefs and principles.

[72] Martin Marcussen, Thomas Risse, Daniela Engelmann-Martin, Hans-Jochen Knopf and Klaus Roscher, 'Constructing Europe? The Evolution of French, British and German Nation-State Identities', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6:3 (1999), pp. 614–33 (special issue).