

# The New Regionalism in Global Organic Agricultural Governance Through Standards: A Cross-Regional Comparison

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## Abstract

In recent years, scholars in global environmental politics have contributed to the development of regional environmental governance (REG) research. This article contributes to the ongoing debate from an international relations perspective. It provides findings from a comprehensive qualitative comparative analysis of the six regional organic agriculture standards (OAS) in Europe, East Africa, the Pacific, Central America, and Asia. Building on research on norm localization, the analysis draws attention to interactions between the global and regional regulatory levels, regional issue-specific normative infrastructures, and the pooling of different sources of political authority by transnational entrepreneurs and regional agents. The analysis serves three purposes in the light of the ongoing debate on REG: (1) to conduct systematic comparative research; (2) to locate regional OAS within the context of conceptual debates about global norm and policy diffusion, critical norm research, policy mobilities, and comparative regionalism; and (3) to outline future areas of research.

In recent years, scholars in global environmental politics have directed sustained attention to the regional in environmental cooperation and, thus, contributed to the development of regional environmental governance (REG) research (e.g., Balsiger and VanDeveer 2012; Gruby 2017). While early REG studies involved descriptive analyses and single case studies, most recent research has put forward more systematic conceptualizations and a larger number of cases in quantitative research (Balsiger and Prys 2016; Haas 2016). Regionalization is expected to increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of environmental politics. Regions are more conducive to promoting norm diffusion than other regulatory entities, create and sustain culturally embedded authority, and manage asymmetries of power and voice better than other regulatory scales (Conca 2012, 127–131). Regions can also

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compensate for implementation gaps as early adopters of global norms (Acharya 2014, 108).

Any study on REG should take into account its embeddedness in the international system (Balsiger and Prys 2016). In this regard, theory development in REG can benefit from current attempts of international relations (IR) scholars to consolidate the fragmented field of research on comparative regionalism (Börzel and Risse 2016). Comparative regionalism draws our attention to the multifold interactions between state and nonstate actors, norms, institutions, and processes at various interacting regulatory levels that constitute a dynamic and complex global system (Söderbaum 2016, 30). As Gruby (2017, 13) rightly argues, REG is embedded within interlinked political interactions at local, regional, and global levels. Even though theory development in REG research is gaining momentum, some research gaps remain. The knowledge of public-private and private REG arrangements, interactions between state and nonstate actors on different regulatory levels, and social mechanisms of REG is still limited (Haas 2016, 447). More research is particularly needed regarding if (and how) external actors can induce cooperative REG arrangements (Balsiger and Prys 2016, 258).

The article contributes to filling these gaps. It focuses on an area that has, so far, not received sufficient attention in REG research—regional organic agricultural governance through standards. Regional organic agriculture standards (OAS) are an important part of the global food regime of public, private, and public-private institutions and norms on different regulatory levels. While global OAS set general frameworks, regional OAS focus on context-specific production and consumption patterns (Vogl et al. 2005, 22). Although scholars from IR and public policy have done research on OAS (e.g., Arcuri 2015; Daugbjerg 2012; Schwindenhammer 2017, 2016), we know little about the emergence of regional OAS.

The analysis asks why and how regional OAS evolve. It provides findings from a qualitative comparative analysis of the six regional OAS that have emerged worldwide. The analysis has three purposes in the light of the ongoing debate on REG. The first purpose is to serve the need for more comparative research (Balsiger and VanDeveer 2012, 8). The second purpose is to locate regional OAS within the context of conceptual debates about the “mutually constitutive relationship between global and regional environmental governance” (Gruby 2017, 13). The research is done within an integrative framework for analysis that combines different literatures, including global policy and norm diffusion (Biedenkopf et al. 2017; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), critical norm research (Acharya 2004), comparative regionalism (Risse 2016; Söderbaum 2016), and policy mobilities (Prince 2012; Temenos and McCann 2012). The framework argues that exogenous and endogenous conditions (independent variables) influence the development of regional OAS (dependent variable). The main assumption is that regional OAS setting involves the construction of ideas and the formation of identity in particular regional settings of collective action. Building

on the work of Acharya (2004) on norm localization, I introduce “sponsored norm localization” as a slightly modified causal mechanism. I argue that in regions that lack endogenous conditions conducive to OAS setting, transnational entrepreneurs can step in and sponsor the regional issue-specific normative infrastructure needed. The third purpose is to outline future areas of research.

## The Regional in Organic Agricultural Governance Through Standards

Organic agriculture (OA) is a growing segment of the global food regime. As of the end of 2016, it has been practiced in 178 countries with 57.8 million hectares of agricultural land managed organically (Willer et al. 2018, 22). There are almost 2.7 million organic producers, with more than 80 percent coming from Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Willer et al. 2018, 23). OA serves as a laboratory for analyzing the cross-level interplay between state and nonstate actors and the increased use of voluntary approaches to regulation.

OAS have proliferated on all geographical levels. Since 1980, the standards of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) have provided the first globally agreed-upon private OAS reference framework. In 1999, WHO and FAO released the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) guidelines to facilitate the international harmonization of the requirements for organic products in terms of production, marketing, inspection, and labeling. Next to these global OAS, there is a significant turn to the regional in OA governance through standards.

Regional OAS exist in Europe, East Africa, the Pacific, Central America, and Asia (Table 1). The spread of regional OAS has paved the way toward a “new regionalism for organic agriculture” (UNCTAD et al. 2012a, i). According to the senior officer of the FAO Organic Agriculture Programme, this new regionalism stems from “a general increase of regional integration processes, as well as

**Table 1**

Summary Table of Regional OAS

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Regional OAS</i>	<i>OAS-Setting Period</i>
EC 834/2007	European Council Regulation No 834/2007	2005–2007
EAOPS	East African Organic Products Standard	2005–2007
POS	Pacific Organic Standard	2006–2008
AROS	Asia Regional Organic Standard	2010–2012
ASOA	ASEAN Standard for Organic Agriculture	2012–2014
HORCA	Harmonized Organic Regulations for Central America, Panama, and the Dominican Republic	2010–2012

the growth of domestic organic markets in developing countries and intra-regional trade" (Nadia Scialabba, cited in UNCTAD et al. 2012b, 38). Interest in intra-regional and interregional trade has brought state and nonstate actors together to formulate regional OAS based on regional commonalities (UNCTAD et al. 2012a, iii). Today, regional production conditions and the need for regional standards are commonly accepted aspects of OA governance and "something we have to work with, rather than eradicate or resolve" (UNCTAD et al. 2006, 15).

Regional OAS can vary in form and content. Applying the differentiation of REG arrangements according to the coordinating agency, regulatory substance, and nature of territoriality (Balsiger and VanDeveer 2012, 7–8), most regional OAS-setting processes start with nonstate actors as the rule-making agency and end with governmental actors taking over regulatory control (Arcuri 2015). The scope of issues addressed exceeds single-issue arrangements, since OA cuts across environmental, health, social, developmental, and trade policies. If we attempt to locate regional OAS and use geographical scale as an ordering concept (Allen and Cochrane 2007, 1167), we find that they are part of governance systems involving territories and actors belonging to several neighboring states (De Lombaerde et al. 2010, 741). The jurisdictional nature of regional OAS formally corresponds with state borders but can also exceed regional boundaries when standards are applied in other regional contexts.

In any case, the use of the terms *regional* and *region* is highly ambiguous. There is an increasing pluralism of definitions of regions, scales, and spaces (De Lombaerde et al. 2010, 739). Following a relational approach, regions involve fluid and overlapping sets of political relations, networked across spaces that have little respect for geographical scales, which questions the usefulness of conceptualizing regions as territorially fixed (Allen and Cochrane 2007, 1163). In contrast to neofunctionalist and rational choice approaches that rest on assumptions of fixed and instrumental motives of actors, constructivism has brought ideational and normative elements to the study of regionalism (Acharya 2016, 120). Regions are not fixed geographic and cultural entities but dynamic and socially constructed areas of social life (Acharya 2016, 122; Haas 2016, 431). Regions can be contested and reconstructed through social practices and in discourse (De Lombaerde et al. 2010, 739). Regional values and preferences are not independent but can be shaped in processes of social interaction (Söderbaum 2016, 28).

From a constructivist perspective, regional OAS setting is, thus, a dynamic and open-ended process. The knowledge and rationality of policy actors are constructed in regional OAS setting through accumulating new information about experiences and context-specific conditions, also from multiple places (Allen and Cochrane 2007, 1171). Policy agents make up the regional in regional OAS setting and define their own role within it. Expert response indicates mutually consistent role expectations in regional OAS setting. Transnational agents perceive their role as managing regional learning processes and building capacity (I1). "We were facilitating but not guiding the regional process too

much. We showed examples and to some extent also provided funds for those things to happen" (I1). Regional agents see the role of transnational actors as "acting as mediators," "providing financial resources," and "coming from the outside" (I3)—a perception that corresponds with the self-perception of the transnational actors: "Myself and [two representatives from international organizations] are the ones who have moved the experience from one part of the world to the others" (I1).

## An Integrative Framework

The integrative framework for analysis combines different literatures relevant to regional OA governance through standards, including global norm and policy diffusion, critical norm research, policy mobilities, and comparative regionalism. Starting from the general distinction between the classical "global norm diffusion perspective" and the critical "transnational perspective" in IR norm research (Zwingel 2012, 16), the framework takes advantage of the different approaches' explanatory strengths while compensating for their weaknesses. The framework argues that exogenous and endogenous conditions influence regional OAS.

The global norm diffusion perspective treats international norms as *causes* that produce *effects* within domestic contexts (or fail to do so) (Zwingel 2012, 116). Norm life-cycle models (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) or the world culture model (Meyer et al. 1997) cover general tendencies of international norm development. While for Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, 895–896), the success of a global norm depends on whether it reaches wide acceptance, Meyer et al. (1997, 148) see "transnational forces at work" that lead to structural similarities and isomorphism. Similarly, classical approaches to policy transfer track the diffusion of policies across space in relation to macro-level processes (Dobbin et al. 2007). The incoherence between world models and local conditions serves as a starting point for "extensive internal decoupling" (Meyer et al. 1997, 173). Norm reinterpretation and contestation indicate the questioning of the validity of a global norm (Zimmermann 2016, 107).

Proponents of the transnational perspective criticize the global norm diffusion perspective in several respects. From their point of view, classical models conceptualize the spread of norms as a simple dichotomy between adaptation and rejection (Wiener 2009, 179), barely questioning the dominance of Western concepts of norms (Epstein 2012, 140–141). Although "even the strongest global forces are subject to local inflections" (Zwingel 2012, 121), classical models leave domestic dynamics of norm creation and appropriation underestimated (Zwingel 2012, 118). They neglect local reactions to global norm promotion and the intentional reinterpretation of ideas across cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts (Zimmermann 2016; Großklaus 2015). Similarly, policy mobility scholars criticize classical approaches to policy transfer for fixating only on the act of transfer between countries while holding the rest of the world still (Prince 2012, 191).

Acharya introduced the concept of “norm localization” as the reframing of foreign norms by regional agents to ensure a better fit to their cognitive priors, identities, and normative frameworks (Acharya 2004, 245). Regional agents re-define foreign norms, which they take as generally good and desirable but not fully consistent with their existing cognitive prior (Acharya 2014, 100). Norm localization may start with the reinterpretation of a foreign norm but may develop into more complex processes of reconstitution to make the norm congruent with the preexisting regional normative order (Acharya 2004, 244). The success of norm diffusion depends on the extent to which a foreign norm fits to the existing regional set of values, such as discourse, the legal system, and bureaucratic agencies (Acharya 2004, 243). The better the cultural match of the foreign norm, the more likely it is that it will become localized. The norm localization concept shifts the understanding of entrepreneurship from outsider proponents committed to a universal moral agenda (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) or to a global policy “marketplace” (Prince 2012, 191) toward insider proponents committed to a localized normative order. Transnational entrepreneurs “are guests not actors, they bring in new ideas, and new incentives, but it is the locals who buy and use them” (Acharya 2014, 108).

Although the norm localization concept adds high analytical value in pointing to the impact of endogenous conditions, it rests on two assumptions that need further conceptual clarification: the assumption of a preexisting regional issue-specific normative infrastructure and the prioritization of regional agents over transnational entrepreneurs.

Norm localization implies that regional actors reconstruct foreign norms to create congruence with existing regional beliefs (Acharya 2014, 100). Similarly, scholars of norm translation, norm appropriation, policy transfer, and policy mobilities highlight the impact of existing domestic structures, processes, and beliefs in norm or policy diffusion. Zimmermann (2016, 106) points to the importance of domestic discursive processes, frames, and “existing worldviews” in norm translation. Zwingel (2012, 120) argues that each state represents a mix of various value systems that can overlap with and differ from global norms. Großklaus (2015, 1257) highlights the dialectic relationship between foreign and domestic ideas and their “contextualisation and re-contextualisation into existing structures.” Similarly, policy mobilities literature considers history and context central rather than treating them as background (Prince 2012, 193). The authors of the 2017 special issue of *Global Environmental Politics* argue that domestic factors are of great importance for understanding the global diffusion of emissions trading systems in different jurisdictions (Biedenkopf et al. 2017). They apply a bottom-up perspective and highlight the “strong strategic component” in policy making (Müller and Slominski 2017, 53). Learning from abroad serves as a strategic tool for domestic policy makers “to enhance argumentative power vis-à-vis other stakeholders” (Müller and Slominski 2017, 63).

From a constructivist perspective, a policy’s successful mobilization does not only depend on political will and the strategic use of regional infrastructures.

Contextual specificities elucidate cognitive backgrounds, shape the constitution and flow of knowledge, determine central actors' successful cooperation, and enable them to mobilize a favored policy (Werner and Strambach 2018, 24–25). Similarly, Temenos and McCann (2012, 1390–1391) argue that the mobilization of policies benefits from imported policy models and necessitates an “ongoing practical and participatory learning endeavor.” They highlight the importance of how the local political ground is prepared for globally mobile policies and how policies can be implemented through learning, adoption, and molding (Temenos and McCann 2012, 1394). There is a need for a regional issue-specific normative infrastructure that serves as the basis for OAS setting and allows for rereading the meaning of global norms in context (Zwingel 2012, 126). However, in regional OA governance, preexisting regional structures, processes, and beliefs cannot be taken for granted, especially in the developing world.

The original norm localization concept prioritizes regional agents over transnational entrepreneurs and is, as Acharya (2014, 112) self-critically remarks, state-centric, neglecting the role of nonstate actors. According to Zwingel (2012, 116), norm translation is an open negotiation process in which various norm proponents are involved. Transnational entrepreneurs are increasingly seeing it as part of their political project to promote regional normative change (Söderbaum 2016). In doing so, they are no longer merely “guests” (Acharya 2014, 108). Transnational entrepreneurs cooperate with regional agents and engage as active “brokers” or “translators” between and within different regional contexts (Risse 2016, 91). I argue that the cooperation between state and nonstate agents from different regulatory levels can be mutually reinforcing. However, to take into account the blurred functional division of labor between the public and the private sectors, it is necessary to widen the original norm localization concept to include the interaction of different sources of political authority (Boström and Tamm Hallström 2013). Political authority exists when an “organization has decision-making power over a particular issue and is regarded as exercising that power legitimately” (Cutler et al. 1999, 5). I differentiate between legal, moral, and technical authority sources (Schwindenhammer 2016). Legal authority refers to the constitutionally institutionalized delegation of competencies by democratic procedures and is thus exclusively exercised by state actors.<sup>1</sup> Moral authority is based on the credibility with which actors pursue goals in the public interest. Technical authority rests on the promise of more rational policy outcomes by providing knowledge-based expertise or financial means. Authority pooling implies that both state and nonstate actors can exercise moral and technical authority at the same time, while state actors additionally exercise legal authority (Schwindenhammer 2016, 106–108).

1. Although legal authority can be delegated by state to nonstate actors, state actors remain the only authorities that ultimately set the rules of the game and provide legal checks and balances.

### *Sponsored Norm Localization*

The integrative framework argues that exogenous and endogenous conditions influence regional OAS.<sup>2</sup> The conceptual limitations of the global norm diffusion perspective do not invalidate the impact of global norms per se. REG is both enabled and constrained by external agendas (Gruby 2017, 25). I argue that global norms provide points of orientation that still weave into regional normative configurations. There are two exogenous conditions that may influence regional OAS: global norms and OAS reference frameworks, and transnational norm entrepreneurs.

However, I also agree with Risse (2016, 90) that global norm diffusion is an “active process.” Global norm diffusion depends on the context into which norms are being brought (Zwingel 2012, 125). In line with the transnational perspective, I argue that regional agents are not simply passive recipients that download global norms but rather that they actively engage in processes of norm translation, interpretation, and incorporation (Risse 2016, 90). Endogenous conditions that may influence regional OAS include regional agents (insider norm proponents); regional OA norms, policies, and styles of policy making; and regional OA knowledge and resources.

Building on the work of Acharya, I introduce *sponsored norm localization* as a slightly modified causal mechanism that works in regions without the issue-specific normative infrastructure needed for OAS setting. In regions where endogenous conditions conducive to OAS setting are absent, weak, or still nascent, transnational entrepreneurs can step in and sponsor the regional issue-specific normative infrastructure. In sponsored norm localization, transnational entrepreneurs are neither only guests who bring in new ideas that regional actors buy and use (Acharya 2014, 108) nor strategic global policy consultants who only promote widely taken-for-granted and pervasive knowledge (Prince 2012, 194). The components of global OAS reference frameworks are often unequivocal and need regional discursive filtering and reinterpretation. In regions that lack the issue-specific normative infrastructure, regional agents may not know what to buy from global frameworks and how to use global OA norms. In sponsored norm localization, transnational entrepreneurs enable regional agents to localize global norms in their regional contexts. They engage as active brokers who help regional agents build the market for buying and using global norms, that is, to prepare the ground upon which regional OAS can be developed. Transnational entrepreneurs tap the regional potential where it exists, raise or advance regional OA awareness, and help define regional OAS as an issue of political concern. They provide expertise; increase regional knowledge, for example, through regional surveys or reports; and provide financial resources. Transnational entrepreneurs engage in regional network building (e.g., regional

2. These conditions have to be understood as exogenous and endogenous to the region, not to the process of regional OAS setting.



working groups) and facilitate multistakeholder cooperation between state and nonstate actors. Transnational entrepreneurs foster the pooling of legal, moral, and technical sources of political authority. Regional OAS setting is closely linked to the moral authority of transnational entrepreneurs but also touches on knowledge-based expertise of contextual conditions (e.g., regional agricultural traditions and techniques) that relates to the moral and technical authority of regional agents. While the exercise of moral and legal authority may add legitimacy and help overcome mutual distrust, technical authority may provide problem-solving resources for OAS setting.

The issue-specific normative infrastructure is not only a vehicle for top-down norm diffusion but allows regional agents to discover or redefine their interests. Regional values, preferences, and identities are not fixed and independent but can be shaped in processes of social interaction and intersubjective understanding between transnational and regional agents (Söderbaum 2016, 28). According to Gruby (2017, 24), “the so-called regional voice is not one but many voices that are seeking both shared and context-specific goals in political struggles that are simultaneously local, regional, and global.” The regional issue-specific normative infrastructure provides institutional opportunities for the regional formation, articulation, or modification of preferences and the mutual understanding of beliefs. I argue that (sponsored) norm localization may also involve “acquiring and incorporating new norms and understandings into one’s belief systems” (Risse 2016, 90). Even though fixed policy objectives cannot be taken for granted, this does not mean that regional agents do not have any strategic interests at all. However, interests such as obtaining economic benefits from organic trade need to be seen in the light of the regional construction of identity and purpose.

## The New Regionalism in OA Governance: Results and Discussion

Aiming at a systematic and contextualized analysis of regional OAS, I opted for comprehensive coverage instead of carrying out an in-depth analysis of one case.<sup>3</sup> I included the six regional OAS that represent the universe of cases. I received empirical data from IOs, NGOs, and regional working group meetings (standards, reports, and website material) and eight semistructured expert interviews conducted from 2012 to 2014 (coded as I1–I8). I sampled the interviews to reduce randomness as much as possible. The sample includes principal protagonists from the public and private sectors who participated in at least one regional OAS-setting process.<sup>4</sup> To validate the integrative framework, I applied the method of structured focused comparison (George and Bennett 2005) and took snapshots at a number of specific moments to find and interpret diagnostic evidence.

3. For an in-depth case study of a regional OAS, see Schwindenhammer (2016).

4. To maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, I do not provide further information about individual organizational membership.

### *Exogenous and Endogenous Conditions*

Each final standard document refers to global OA norms and at least one global OAS reference framework (see Table 2). All standards refer to the CAC guidelines. The regional OAS in Europe, East Africa, the Pacific, and Asia also refer to the IFOAM standards. However, the reference to global OAS frameworks does not imply that regional OAS just copy global standards. Global OAS reference frameworks tend to be abstract and open to interpretation (Vogl et al. 2005, 22). They allow for considerable variation on different regulatory levels (Daugbjerg 2012).

Transnational entrepreneurs participated in five out of six regional OAS-setting processes (Table 2). IFOAM engaged in East Africa, Europe, the Pacific, Central America, and, at first, Asia. Transnational entrepreneurs from the public sector participated in East Africa, Central America, and, at first, Asia. The entrepreneurial involvement highly varied from advocacy in the EU to the provision of financial resources in Central America and a more comprehensive engagement in OAS setting in East Africa, the Pacific, and Asia. Transnational entrepreneurs also raised global awareness of regional OAS. The new regionalism for OA only gained momentum when transnational entrepreneurs promoted the idea of regional OAS to enhance global organic trade, “starting with intra-regional trade in developing countries” (UNCTAD et al. 2012a, iii). In 2002, IFOAM, UNCTAD, and FAO established the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (ITF) to facilitate regulatory harmonization, recognition, and equivalence. In 2008, the ITF developed the Guide for Assessing Equivalence of Standards and Technical Regulations (EquiTool) and the International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies (IROCB) as practical tools for equivalence and mutual standard recognition. In 2009, UNCTAD, FAO, and IFOAM launched the Global Organic Market Access Project (GOMA) as a follow-up to their work in the ITF. GOMA pursued the objectives of promoting regional OAS, EquiTool, and IROCB.<sup>5</sup>

Regional agents actively engaged in all regional OAS-setting processes. However, their level of organization, OA awareness, and engagement varied depending on the regional context. Whereas East Africa lacked community-building processes, the close economic, political, and sociocultural connections within the EU enabled regional agents to act as one regional subject with its own identity. Regional OA norms, policies, and styles of policy making turned out to be more or less compatible with the multistakeholder approach to regional OAS setting promoted by transnational entrepreneurs. While the approach conflicted with the existing set of regional expectations in Central America (Bowen 2013, 18) and the style of OA policy making within the EU, it was accepted in East Africa, the Pacific, and Asia. The initial level of regional OA knowledge and

5. In 2012, GOMA revised EquiTool and IROCB and introduced a new instrument, the Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards (COROS), to serve regional OAS setting.

**Table 2**  
Overview of Empirical Results

Regional OAS	Causal Mechanism			Exogenous Conditions		Endogenous Conditions		Regional OA Norms, Policies, and Policy Making	Regional Knowledge and Resources
	Type of Norm Localization	Regional OAS-Setting Approach	Global OAS Reference Frameworks	Transnational Entrepreneurs	Insider Norm Proponents				
EC 834/2007	norm localization	public policy making	CAC guidelines, IFOAM standards	IFOAM EU Group (lobbying only)	highly organized, national and regional organic agents, EC	EU regulatory framework, regional statutory regulations	high		
EAOPS	sponsored norm localization	public-private policy making	CAC guidelines, IFOAM standards	IFOAM, UNCTAD, UNEP	nascent national organic movements	EAC, nascent national OA policies and standards	low		
POS	sponsored norm localization	public-private policy making	CAC guidelines, IFOAM standards	IFOAM	national organic movements, Secretariat of the Pacific Community	Pacific Community, national OA policies and standards	medium		
AROS	sponsored norm localization	public-private policy making	CAC guidelines, IFOAM standards, COROS, IROCB	IFOAM, FAO, UNCTAD	national organic movements, governments	national OA policies and standards	medium		
ASOA	norm localization	public policy making	CAC guidelines, IFOAM standards, COROS, IROCB	ASEAN, governments	ASEAN, national governments	ASEAN, national OA policies and standards	high		
HORCA	norm localization	regional public-private policy making	CAC guidelines	IFOAM, FAO, UNCTAD (financial support only)	competent authorities on organic agriculture	national OA policies and standards	medium		

resources differed from rather low in East Africa (I2), to medium in the Pacific (Mapusua and Maccari 2007) and Central America (GOMA 2010) and from medium (and later high) in Asia (Kung Wai 2011) to high in the EU (I7).

Although exogenous and endogenous conditions varied, regional OAS evolved in all cases (Table 2). Thus the causal mechanism through which the six OAS evolved needs further empirical investigation.

### *Sponsored Norm Localization in East Africa, the Pacific, and Asia*

The East African Organic Products Standard (EAOPS), the Pacific Organic Standard (POS), and the Asia Regional Organic Standard (AROS) provide empirical evidence of regional OAS that evolved through sponsored norm localization. While the idea of regional OAS gained ground globally, EAOPS, POS, and AROS were the first regional OAS ever developed between state and non-state agents from different regulatory levels. While multistakeholder OAS setting was “ground-breaking for the East African Community” (I2), it was accepted by the Pacific Community and Asian stakeholders right from the beginning (I3). The multistakeholder approach today “serves as a successful and replicable model for developing regional standards worldwide” (UNEP and UNCTAD 2010, 37).

In all cases, transnational entrepreneurs gave the impetus for regional OAS setting. In East Africa, the merger of two transnational projects enhanced the awareness of OA among regional agents. In 2005, the IFOAM Organic Standards in East Africa program and the UNEP/UNCTAD Promoting Production and Trading Opportunities for Organic Agricultural Products in East Africa project joined forces to pursue the goal of a regional OAS. In the Pacific, IFOAM initiated the Organic Standards for the Pacific project in cooperation with the Italian Ethical and Environmental Certification Institute to develop POS in 2006. In Asia, IFOAM, FAO, and UNCTAD gave the impetus for the development of AROS in the context of GOMA in 2010.

In all cases, transnational entrepreneurs sponsored the issue-specific normative infrastructure needed for regional OAS setting. In East Africa, IFOAM, UNEP, and UNCTAD cooperated with representatives from the national standard bureaus, organic movements, organic certifying bodies and the East African Business Council in the Regional Standard Technical Working Group (RSTGW). In the Pacific, IFOAM brought together the secretariat of the Pacific Community, representatives of national organic movements, government bodies, organic businesses, and NGOs from the Pacific island countries and territories in a Regional Organic Task Force. In Asia, the creation of the GOMA–Asia Working Group allowed for cooperation between IFOAM, FAO, UNCTAD, and regional agents from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, with most agents coming from the latter two regions.

In all cases, transnational entrepreneurs and regional agents collectively pooled moral, technical, and legal sources of political authority. In East Africa,

transnational entrepreneurs “tried to stand back and not to push” (I2) to let regional agents “discuss and decide what they wanted to do” (I2). RSTGW allowed for the exchange of global OA norms and regional values. It conducted a systematic comparison of global OAS reference frameworks (CAC guidelines and IFOAM standards) with nascent East African organic policies, standards, and market institutions. Although traditional African agriculture provided significant growth opportunities at that time, the East African organic market and regulatory frameworks turned out to be “almost non-existent” (I2). Transnational entrepreneurs took the early stage of organic sector development into consideration, helped to develop the capacities of regional agents, and enabled them to “gain ownership” (I1). The dialogue between transnational entrepreneurs and regional agents enabled the formation of regional OA preferences and improved the mutual understanding of East African agricultural systems. EAOPS basically reflects the regional agents’ own ideas of “what organic is and what the relevant issues are” (I2). By means of pooling moral and technical authority sources, IFOAM, UNCTAD, and UNEP provided normative, procedural, and technical expertise and helped to answer the regional agents’ questions: “What is organic?,” “How do you develop a regional standard?,” “How do you approach the process?,” and “How do you formulate a standard document?” (I1). The EAOPS draft text developed through ongoing input from a series of national and regional consultations. National NGOs working with local farmers contributed most of the relevant regional knowledge (I1).

In the Pacific, transnational entrepreneurs “moved the successful experience from East Africa to another world region” (I3). Solid data on the state of OA in the Pacific backed up the OAS-setting process and allowed for the cross-level exchange of global norms and regional values in the Regional Organic Task Force. IFOAM commissioned a professional assessment of the state of regional and national OA production, policies, and market developments (Mapusua and Maccari 2007). The results helped to identify the underlying objectives of national regulatory frameworks and draw conclusions about the challenges and obstacles experienced in the Pacific organic sector. The interplay of moral and technical authority sources, complemented by networking in the Regional Organic Task Force, paved the way for the POS. Transnational entrepreneurs and regional agents commonly defined what OA meant in the Pacific and soon reached mutual consent on the POS as a shared governance aim. “The Pacific Island countries are small and have very limited capacity. Going for the regional solution was extremely natural” (I4). The Regional Organic Task Force received feedback on socioeconomic and cultural demands from a series of regional workshops, national consultations, and trainings. The POS is the first regional OAS in the world to include the issues of climate change mitigation and adaptation. The most important achievement in regional OAS setting “was to start standard-setting in the Pacific over again and to make it better adapted to local conditions” (I4).

In Asia, the GOMA–Asia Working Group cooperated with seven governments to compare national OAS and certification requirements with COROS

and IROCB. The systematic comparison of national regulations and the global tools for equivalence and mutual standard recognition provided the knowledge base needed for the development of AROS (Bowen 2013, 15). The findings revealed regulatory fragmentation and the need for improved equivalence (15) and corresponded with the growing interest among regional agents to reduce regulatory fragmentation and to foster intraregional trade as a development option (Kung Wai 2011, 122–123). The GOMA–Asia Working Group commissioned a Drafting Group to develop the AROS draft text. The Drafting Group organized national consultations and workshops in the Philippines, Laos, and South Korea. The standard draft went through three revisions (2011–2012). It was prepared with input from governments, nonstate agents, and the members of the GOMA–Asia Working Group. The ongoing dialogue between transnational entrepreneurs and regional agents raised the general awareness of the benefits of regional OA production, processing, and marketing and allowed for the exchange of global norms and regional values. Key aspects of the debate involved the provision of food safety, the utilization of locally available renewable resources, the control of environmental pollution, and the propagation of healthy food (15). The discourse between transnational entrepreneurs and regional agents improved the mutual understanding of cultural traditions and context-specific environmental conditions, for example, regarding the high cultural importance of rice production and consumption and the need for farming systems adapted to tropical climate conditions. The exchange of ideas finally contributed to the common understanding of AROS as a regional benchmark for equivalence and for adoption by countries in the region that had not set their own national OAS (Kung Wai 2014, 165).

In East Africa, it took some time until governments conceived EAOPS as an appropriate and legitimate governance goal. Transnational entrepreneurs and nonstate regional agents promoted regional OAS setting “towards the governments in particular” (12). Especially UNEP and UNCTAD “managed to give that wider perspective” (11) by exercising legal and moral authority. In the Pacific, governmental actors engaged in multistakeholder OAS setting from the beginning. Their early commitment was key to the success of POS (12). In Asia, the governments’ commitment relied on the traditions of “non-interference and consensus-seeking” (15). Similar to East Africa, the legal authority sources of FAO and UNCTAD played a key role in getting the Asian governments involved. It would have been “difficult for IFOAM to manage this with its NGO partners alone” (12). FAO and UNCTAD had “much better access to the governments and their arguments were getting weight by coming from UN organizations” (15).

### *Norm Localization in Asia, the EU, and Central America*

The ASEAN Standard for Organic Agriculture (ASOA), EC 834/2007, and the Harmonized Organic Regulations for Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic (HORCA) provide empirical evidence of regional OAS that emerged

through classical norm localization. While transnational entrepreneurs did not participate in the setting of ASOA, they lobbied for a regional OAS within the EU and provided financial resources in Central America. In this regard, the three cases fundamentally differ from the multistakeholder OAS-setting approach of EAOPS, POS, and AROS.

In all cases, regional governmental actors gave the impetus for regional OAS setting. In Asia, regional governments initiated the development of a second regional OAS (ASOA) soon after AROS was completed. The successful multi-stakeholder cooperation in the context of AROS had opened a window of opportunity for the development of a new OAS in the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 2012, the Task Force on ASEAN Standards for Horticultural Produce and Other Food Crops discussed adopting AROS as an ASEAN standard. The discussion led to the establishment of the Special Task Force on the ASEAN Standards for Organic Agriculture for further consultation among ASEAN member states.<sup>6</sup> In the EU, the European Commission (EC) considered drafting a directive to define and control organic farming for the first time in the late 1980s.<sup>7</sup> The EC also initiated the review process of the European legal framework for OA in 2005. In June 2007, EC 834/2007 replaced (EEC)2092/91, setting out new principles, aims, and rules for European organic production and labeling.<sup>8</sup> In Central America, a group of governmental actors, the Competent Authorities on Organic Agriculture, gave the impetus for the development of HORCA in 2004.

In Asia, the Special Task Force agreed to use AROS as a working document to develop ASOA in the context of the ASEAN in April 2013 (Kung Wai 2014, 165). In doing so, governmental actors took advantage of the issue-specific normative infrastructure and the results of the multistakeholder OAS-setting process UNCTAD, FAO, and IFOAM had started three years earlier. In the EU, regional agents claimed an already existing normative infrastructure, including common agricultural policies, traditions, and a shared history (17). In Central America, almost all countries already had national OAS that had been developed “to service EU imports or exports to the EU” (18). The European legal framework served as the benchmark for regional OAS setting. For the Central American countries, “the easiest way to get approved by the EU as a trading partner is to have a standard that is identical with the EU standard” (17).

Although transnational entrepreneurs and nonstate regional agents were not involved in the development of ASOA, their preparatory work in developing AROS prepared the ground for the subsequent public OAS (Kung Wai 2015,

6. In 2015, the Special Task Force obtained a new mandate to develop certification and recognition arrangements between ASOA and the ASEAN member states’ national OAS.

7. Several European countries had started developing national organic regulations before the 1980s. These bottom-up processes also influenced the setting of (EEC)2092/91 (Schwindenhammer 2017, 1688).

8. In 2014, the EC proposed a complete revision of the EU organic legislation; it is still under negotiation.

159). With minor revisions, the ASOA basically reflects the content of AROS. In the EU, transnational entrepreneurs advocated regional OAS setting, but “the Ministries of Agriculture and the Commission developed the organic standard” (17). The EC turned to the IFOAM EU Group “as the primary source of organic expertise” (Schlüter and Blake 2009, 8). However, the formalized rules of policy making and a “strong agricultural lobby that is afraid of external intervention” (17) might explain why the EU did not cooperate with IFOAM on an equal footing. In Central America, transnational entrepreneurs defined their role as providing “the necessary resources to finish the process that the authorities started” (GOMA 2010, 12). GOMA’s financial support enabled regional agents to resume work on the regional OAS, which was started in 2004 but stalled by 2007 (GOMA 2010, 12). However, the multistakeholder approach to regional OAS setting promoted by GOMA did not match the existing set of regional expectations. “Lacking an early, comprehensive discussion of assumptions and expectations, the cooperating parties, including the government authorities, soon learned that they had different operating concepts” (Bowen 2013, 18). The Competent Authorities on Organic Agriculture aimed at facilitating intra-regional trade and enabling Central America to negotiate equivalence agreements “as a bloc” (UNCTAD et al. 2012b, 15). Regional OAS setting “was not about making a standard better adapted to local conditions” (18). Traditional OA values, knowledge, and practices were not as important as fostering intra-regional trade and “harmoniz[ing] a system that had already been harmonized with the EU regulation” (18).

All in all, the empirical findings yield mixed results. While the regional OAS in East Africa and the Pacific emerged from sponsored norm localization, the OAS in the EU and Central America evolved through classical norm localization. In Asia, one regional OAS emerged from sponsored norm localization (AROS) and the other from classical norm localization (ASOA) (Table 2). The key to success in all regions was the regional issue-specific normative infrastructure. In regions that initially lacked the regional issue-specific normative infrastructure (East Africa, the Pacific, Asia), transnational entrepreneurs engaged as active brokers stepped in and sponsored it. In the development of EAOPS, POS, and AROS, transnational entrepreneurs raised regional OA knowledge and awareness and helped define regional OAS as an appropriate governance goal. Transnational entrepreneurs engaged in regional network building and facilitated multistakeholder cooperation between state and nonstate actors from different regulatory levels. Regional agents and transnational entrepreneurs perceived and treated each other as equal and legitimate actors and collectively pooled legal, moral, and technical sources of political authority. In regions where the regional issue-specific normative infrastructure already existed (EU) or had been widely consolidated (Central America and, at a later stage, Asia), transnational entrepreneurship merely resembled the classical advocacy role Acharya accords to outsider norm proponents in norm localization (Acharya 2014, 108).



## Implications for OA Governance and Research

The structured focused comparison serves the need for more comparative REG research and provides new theoretical and empirical insights into OA governance through standards in East Africa, Europe, the Pacific, Asia, and Central America. The analysis locates regional OAS in the context of conceptual debates about norm and policy diffusion, critical norm research, comparative regionalism, and policy mobilities. Any analysis of regional OAS should take their normative and institutional embeddedness in the international system into account. The combination of norm diffusion and critical norm research is a valuable approach in this regard. The integrative framework for analysis broadens the perspective beyond single REG processes and avoids the pitfalls of generalized system-level explanations. The combinatorial design takes advantage of the different approaches' explanatory strengths while compensating for their weaknesses. The analysis has shown that exogenous conditions still provide the normative ground on which regional OA governance through standards takes place today. Endogenous conditions either enable or constrain regional OAS setting. The hypothesized causal mechanism of sponsored norm localization directs our attention to regional issue-specific normative infrastructures and the pooling of different sources of political authority by transnational entrepreneurs and regional agents. In the light of the empirical results, my answer to the open question in REG research—whether external actors can induce cooperative REG arrangements (Balsiger and Prys 2016)—is, yes, they can, but their commitment is highly contextual.

Critics might arguably state that the research design only allows for drawing conclusions on OA governance. Therefore the explanatory value of the detected causal mechanism cannot be easily transferred to other fields in REG. There is a need for more cross-sectoral comparative analysis. Moreover, it is open to dispute whether a continuum would be more adequate in depicting nuances between sponsored and classical norm localization. The empirical findings also indicate interregional effects. The European standard served as a benchmark for the HORCA, and the development approach to EAOPS provided a replicable model for OAS setting in the Pacific and Asia. The open question is how and under which conditions regional OAS exceed regional boundaries. Furthermore, the study does not assess the effectiveness of regional OA governance through standards. The unanswered question is still whether, and if so, to what extent, regional OAS “serve best to protect justified consumer expectations and producer interests” (Vogl et al. 2005, 22). Future research has to assess the conditions under which coalitions of state and nonstate entrepreneurs from different regulatory levels enable effective regional OA governance and mutual standard recognition in interregional trade. While some authors argue that especially IFOAM will play a key future role (Freyer et al. 2015), others, including this study, detect an overall transformation of private into public OAS (Arcuri 2015). The overall question to be tackled by future research is which type of

public–private cross-level interaction is needed in which field of REG to make it more effective and legitimate.

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