

Institutional Primacy vs. Transnational Segmentation: Transnational Networks of Regulatory Agencies and the Administrative Identifications of National Officials

Ole Andreas Danielsen*

Abstract

This article investigates the effects of embedding into transnational networks of regulatory agencies (TRNs) on the administrative identifications held by national agency officials. Drawing on an organisational-institutional approach, the article discusses two contending empirical expectations linked to the notion of *institutional primacy* and *transnational segmentation* respectively. Whereas the first suggests that agency officials' administrative identifications are primarily and predominantly oriented toward their domestic institutional surroundings, and that this feature is robust in the face of increased transnational collaboration, by contrast, the notion of transnational segmentation assumes that transnational identifications are likely to be present among national agency officials and particularly among those who maintain contacts and participate vis-à-vis TRNs. Employing survey data gathered among Norwegian agency officials, the article assesses the relative strength of different identifications and provides insights into the effects of transnational embedding vis-à-vis this behavioural property.

Introduction

The rise of transnational networks of regulatory agencies (TRNs)¹, joining up and coordinating organisations located on and across different levels of governance, marks a particularly significant institutional expression of the increasingly extra-territorial nature of regulation and regulatory governance (Levi-Faur 2011; Slaughter 2004). These entities have risen to prominence in parallel with, and partly as a consequence of, a general re-calibration of public administration involving, *inter alia*, considerable delegation to semi-independent regulatory agencies (Majone 1997a). The rise of TRNs consequently implicates how the state – as a political organisation – functions and, by extension, challenges conventional lines of accountability and control between regulatory agencies and democratic-representative institutions (Curtin and Egeberg 2008; van Osch et al. 2021; Verdier 2009).

In the context of European Union (EU) studies, research on TRNs has gradually come to constitute a research agenda in its own right, with two partly overlapping generations of research being distinguishable (for a more comprehensive review of the field, see Mastenbroek and Martinsen 2018). The first focused extensively on mapping and explaining the emergence of EU-level TRNs, drawing heavily on rational-instrumental theories of delegation as well as principal-agent theory when explaining their genesis (including why EU-level TRNs are chosen over alternative institutional configurations) and elaborating *inter alia* on the new vertical relationships that emerge between supranational and national regulatory regimes, on the one hand, and supranational executive institutions such as the Commission and/or EU-level agencies and their national counterparts on the other (e.g., Blauburger and Rittberger 2015; Coen and Thatcher 2008; Eberlein and Grande 2005; Eberlein and Newman 2008; Levi-

*Ole Andreas Danielsen is senior researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR). Before joining NIBR in 2018, Danielsen was a post-doc at the Department of Administration and Organization Theory, where he also completed his Ph.D. (2013)

Ole Andreas Danielsen,
Norwegian Institute for
Urban and Regional Research
Oslo Metropolitan University,
Norway
oleandr@oslomet.no

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Faur 2011; Thatcher and Coen 2008; Tarrant and Kelemen 2017; Thatcher 2011; Wilks 2005). The second stream in this research agenda has shifted focus toward the domestic institutional effects of TRNs, specifically how the embedding of national agencies into EU-level TRNs impacts on core organisational properties, such as their institutional powers and autonomy vis-à-vis domestic political principals (Bach and Ruffing 2013; Bach et al. 2015; Danielsen and Yesilkagit 2014; Maggetti 2014; Yesilkagit 2011).

This article addresses an important component linked to the second stream of research on EU-level TRNs identified above, but it extends the analysis to TRNs as a more general phenomenon (i.e. by looking beyond EU-level TRNs), namely how TRNs impact on the *administrative identifications* of those national actors who become embedded into their structures, that is, who and what agency officials feel a sense of allegiance towards, identify with or towards which they have a sense of responsibility (Egeberg 1999: 464) when conducting their day-to-day work. Assuming that the bureaucratic autonomy of a regulatory agency is not merely a function of its formal-legal mandates but also significantly shaped by the actual decision-making behaviour invoked by its personnel (Trondal and Veggeland 2014), who or what individual officials feel an allegiance to, or responsibility towards, can thus be expected to provide crucial cognitive frames shaping substantive decision-making processes (cf. Olsen 2010: 131). Tapping into the allegiances to which agency officials pay heed – national as well as transnational – when conducting their work is thus an important step towards assessing the *systemic* implications of TRNs.

While empirical-theoretical research focusing explicitly on this more ideational aspect of TRNs remains somewhat scant, the theme itself is clearly not without precedence in research on transnational administrative spaces as such where, again, the EU has served as a particularly fruitful laboratory for developing and testing theories of system integration. In this respect, how integration impacts on the loyalties of national bureaucrats has loomed large among students of European integration in general since Haas (1958) famously conceived of loyalty shifts (towards an emerging European centre) as part and parcel of system integration in itself. This proposition was taken up and further developed four decades later in (neo-)institutionalist research on EU committee governance, where the role- and identity-perceptions of national committee participants served as important dependent variables (Egeberg 1999; Egeberg et al. 2003; Trondal and Veggeland 2003). The possibility that networks of regulatory agencies could also serve as a locus for transnational loyalties was however noted early on by Majone (1997b) who, writing from a strategic-instrumental viewpoint (and focusing on EU-level agencies), argued that a transnational network could serve as a “bearer of reputation”. Central to this idea is that networks add a normative layer that insulates participants, implying that such networks develop and consolidate professional communities underpinned by their own distinct “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1989), which enables the participating agencies to withstand external pressure (Majone 1997b: 272). A related argument can be found in the idea that officials in regulatory agencies increasingly represent a new class of public servants, the “regulocrats” (Levi-Faur 2010). These officials are embodiments of a transformation whereby “regulation is emerging as a distinct profession and administrative identity.

Professional affiliation to global networks of experts becomes a major source of innovations, world views, accountability and legitimacy” (Levi-Faur 2010: 19). Against this backdrop, it is thus likely that TRNs are also capable of yielding transformative effects to the extent that they also shape the allegiances held by agency personnel on a day-to-day basis, that is, in their domestic setting.

In the remainder of this article, the idea that TRNs “matter” for the administrative identifications invoked by agency officials domestically will be investigated empirically. Theoretically, I draw on organizational and institutional theory in order to conceptualize the extent to which, and how, TRNs impact on how national agency officials rank the importance of different administrative identifications. Drawing on this framework, two alternative expectations are sketched out. First, the role of *institutional primacy* is considered. From this viewpoint, it is assumed that an actor’s primary institutional affiliation will be the most important predictor of their decision-making behavior, including how different administrative identifications are ranked (Egeberg 1999). To the extent that identifications towards TRNs can be observed at all, they will emerge as supplementary – and fundamentally secondary – compared to pre-existing “domestic” identifications. The embedding of individual officials into TRNs – here understood as a function of being frequently in contact with or participating in TRNs – will not be assumed to yield any effect on how officials rank different identifications domestically, as identifications developed in such secondary institutional affiliations are not assumed to be sustained and carried over to the officials’ primary organizations. This is contrasted with a *transnational segmentation* point of view, where it is assumed that the internationalization of state organizations – in which TRNs play a major part – results in the emergence of “pockets” in national central government organizations that are particularly affected by and oriented towards TRNs (Jacobsson et al. 2004). From this viewpoint, moreover, it is assumed that the distinction between different levels of governance becomes increasingly blurry, and these “transnational segments” are thus more likely to adhere to transnational identifications also in domestic decision-making processes (Jacobsson et al. 2004).

In order to assess the two contending expectations outlined above, survey data on the administrative identifications of Norwegian agency officials will be consulted. In line with the brief exposition of the two contending positions above, which will be further elaborated below, the article employs descriptive and bi-variate analyses in order to provide insights into the presence and strength of different administrative identifications among the surveyed officials, how different identifications are interrelated and, importantly, the extent to which and how the embedding of individual officials into TRNs impacts on the strength of different identifications.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, the theoretical argument is elaborated in further detail. Thereafter, I present and discuss the dataset that is utilized in the empirical analysis, before consulting data on the administrative identifications of Norwegian agency officials in general, and the effects of embedding into TRNs on this behavioral property in particular. By way of conclusion, the observations are linked to the theoretical departure point and I discuss the broader relevance of, as well as limitations to and relevant extensions of, the findings presented.

How Transnational Regulatory Networks Shape Administrative Identifications: Two Expectations from an Organizational-Institutional Perspective

The present study is based on the premise that TRNs represent attempts at structuring and managing regulatory interdependencies, and thus function as key components in an emerging post-territorial organizational infrastructure (Abbott and Faude 2020), akin to what Egeberg (1980) dubbed “the fourth level of government”. While TRNs constitute a secondary institutional affiliation for the participating national agencies, they are nonetheless exposing the affected actors to distinct behavioral expectations that must be attended to. Thus, the relationship between national agencies and TRNs can fruitfully be gauged through the analytical prisms of organizational and institutional theory.

From an organizational-institutional perspective, as it is elaborated here, it is assumed that central agencies are staffed by individuals who act under limitations of bounded rationality (Simon 1997), and the basic logic of action is that of rule-following (March and Olsen 1989). The embedding of individuals into an organizational structure implies that they assume a specific organizational role, defined by expectations as to how an organization member is supposed to behave (Egeberg and Trondal 2018). These expectations are prescribed and embedded into the organizational hierarchy, implying that they are underpinned by mechanisms for controlling and sanctioning behavior, but also by the manner in which individuals – as a function of organizational socialization – gradually come to internalize these expectations as the organization’s values form part of the individual decision-maker’s professional identity (Lægreid and Olsen 1978).

At the same time, however, actors have multiple identities, which implies that they are embedded into a multitude of different cognitive configurations that expose them to potentially contradictory expectations (cf. March and Olsen 1989: 24). Moreover, the repertoire of identifications held by an organization member can be expanded. Decision-making forums spanning across levels of governance, exposing the participants to new worldviews and providing them with new impulses, can as such be “sites for educating and (slightly) resocializing people” (Egeberg 1999: 460, brackets in original). In the literature on EU committee governance, from which the quotation above stems, it has furthermore been shown that committee-participation influences the basic “ideational outlook” of the attending national officials (Egeberg 1999; Trondal and Veggeland 2003; Radaelli and O’Connor 2009). The theoretical reasoning is that committee-participants may carry with them professional identifications that are largely re-affirmed and possibly strengthened in the committees due to the often expertise-intensive nature of the deliberations taking place within them (cf. Egeberg 1999: 462), but they may also – as indicated above – develop new identifications, such as towards the committees they attend or towards an assumed trans- og supranational “esprit de corps” (Trondal 2002). Yet, such extra-organizational identifications are fundamentally weaker than pre-existing domestic allegiances, as “(m)ost obligations, expectations, information networks, incentives and sanctions are connected to the institutions that employ them nationally” (Egeberg 1999: 461).

As TRNs join up highly specialized and (usually) formally autonomous organizations, conditions are favorable for the emergence of more enduring cross-national professional allegiances. The fact that they latch on to, and claim relevance for, domestic regulatory processes implies that such transnational “epistemic communities” (Haas 1992) may therefore spill over and implicate the administrative identifications held by national agency officials domestically as well. Whereas the view of TRNs as expertise-driven transnational communities of likeminded organizations networking for the purpose of exchanging experiences, policy learning and providing mutual assistance looms large in the literature (cf. Verdier 2009), the fundamentally secondary nature of transnational institutional affiliations has however also been noted as a factor that limits the cross-level implications of such transnational professional allegiances. Verdier (2009), for instance, takes issue with the assumption that TRNs are “in essence, technocratic forums where specialized regulators settle complex issues of international regulatory cooperation free from domestic politics” and points to the fact that “(f)ar from being removed from domestic politics, regulators are tied to them by multiple channels of accountability and incentives structures that generally outweigh their loyalty to global interests (Verdier 2009: 162).

In organizational-institutional terms, the arguments cited above on the limited transformative potential of transnational structures, can be linked to a baseline theory emphasizing the significance of institutional primacy, implying that actors are likely to transfer behavioral patterns associated with their domestic (primary) organizational role over to new settings (Egeberg 1999), but not the other way around. The implication is that while TRNs may indeed offer (officials in) national agencies supplementary frames of references and may also be capable of re-socializing the individual officials who are frequently in contact with and participate in them, the effect of such processes is assumed to be decisively *temporary*. From an orthodox structural point of view, at least, the idea that national agency officials display identifications vis-à-vis TRNs when conducting their day-to-day “domestic” work may thus seem implausible.

The aforementioned logic of institutional primacy can however be counterbalanced and potentially challenged by a logic of institutional *recency*, which implies that “recently evoked roles and behavior are likely to be evoked again” (Trondal et al. 2005: 242). In this respect, it is relevant to keep in mind that TRNs, despite being of a secondary nature, nonetheless constitute a more *permanent* institutional affiliation. That is, agency officials continue to be member of the collegial group they have met with after returning to their home context (Støle 2006) and, importantly, a crucial aspect of TRNs is, as noted, that they latch on to domestic decision-making processes by supplying contact-networks that the participating agencies can draw on in their day-to-day work (Martens 2010; Vantaggiato et al. 2021; Vestlund 2017). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that those officials that are comparatively more embedded into TRNs will be more prone to holding on to TRN-identifications also when conducting their day-to-day domestic work. This line of reasoning connotes with the observation in research on the Europeanization of national government institutions that transnational cooperation tends to result in the emergence of *transnational segments* in the central government, i.e. that parts of the national organization become particularly exposed to, and involved in, transnational administrative

collaboration, with significant implications for domestic decision-making processes (cf. Jacobsson et al. 2004). Specifically, it is assumed that these segments differ in a non-trivial manner with respect to what signals and considerations they pay heed to domestically (Jacobsson et al. 2004; Jacobsson and Sundström 2006). Indeed, the officials within these segments may “act to a great extent in accordance with regulations or beliefs that need not be linked to any national context but can well be European (or global)” (Jacobsson et al. 2004: 7, brackets in original).

In line with the discussion above, we are left with two contending expectations of whether and how TRNs are able to exert an impact on the identifications held by national agency officials and, in particular, whether transnational loyalties can be sustained across levels of governance and thus serve as a cognitive reference point for agency officials when conducting their day-to-day domestic work. To reiterate, the notion of institutional primacy suggests that transnational allegiances will be clearly secondary to pre-existing domestic ones and, furthermore, that the transnational embedding of individual officials will be of a correspondingly secondary nature and thus cannot be expected to yield much impact on how agency officials assess the strength of different identifications. The idea of transnational segmentation implies, by contrast, that those officials who maintain contacts with and participate in TRNs are more intimately exposed to the decision-making premises emanating from these “extra-organizational” arenas and are thus also more likely to hold on to transnational identifications at the domestic level. In what follows, I will present and discuss the data material and methods that will be employed in order to assess the two theoretical expectations empirically.

Research Design

The purpose of this article is to assess the extent to which, and how, TRNs impact on the administrative identifications held by national agency officials. It does so by utilizing survey-data gathered among officials in three Norwegian regulatory agencies: the Norwegian Post and Telecommunications Authority, the Norwegian Environmental Agency and the Norwegian Maritime Directorate. The survey was fielded in late 2014 and targeted all officials employed at a case-handler level or above, with at least one year’s tenure. After three rounds of reminders, 420 officials had provided answers to parts of, or the whole, questionnaire, yielding a general response rate of about 62 %.

The three agencies were selected for this study as they are all heavily exposed to international, and especially European, cooperation. Across all the domains covered by these agencies, EU-level TRNs have emerged as platforms wherein the Commission, often in liaison with EU-level agencies, has assumed a stronger coordinating role vis-à-vis the domestic practicing of shared legislation (Gulbrandsen 2012; Heims 2016; Levi-Faur 2011; Martens 2010; Mathieu 2016). At the same time, the three agencies are linked to, and affected by, other regional and international collaborative platforms, which necessitates departing from a broader perspective on TRNs which includes networks operative beyond the EU-level. To this end, the survey utilized in this article was explicitly designed for the purpose of tapping into the impact of different TRNs on key

features of domestic decision-making processes, of which the strength of different identifications among agency officials forms the explanandum in the present study. This was approximated in the survey by asking agency officials to report the extent to which they felt an *allegiance* or *responsibility* to different bodies, national as well as transnational. This question was adapted from a similar question in the so-called “administration survey” that has been fielded once every decade among officials in Norwegian ministries (since 1976) and agencies (since 1986), in which officials are asked to report their sense of allegiance to a number of domestic bodies (Christensen et al. 2018). A similar question has been employed in research on Scandinavian ministry- and agency-officials participating in EU-level committees, where allegiances towards the committees being attended and/or supranational institutions and the relationship between these extra-organizational and pre-established allegiances has been of key interest (e.g., for instance, Trondal 2002; Trondal and Veggeland 2003).

Thus far, however, few attempts have been made to link the two levels, which appears particularly relevant vis-à-vis the study of TRNs as these – in contrast to committees – form a more enduring extra-organizational affiliation (cf. Støle 2006) and it is therefore relevant to look closer into the extent to which they also form part of the repertoire of identifications that agency officials relate to in their daily work. Moreover, and also in part motivated by the extensive focus on the impact of the EU on national administrations that has informed previous and contemporary survey-based research on Norwegian ministries and agencies (e.g., Egeberg and Trondal 2009; Kühn and Trondal 2019; Trondal 2009, 2011; Trondal et al. 2021), the survey utilized in the present study aimed to include TRNs beyond those operating within the formal scope of EU institutions and thus adapted the original survey-item in the aforementioned “administration survey” by including identifications towards different categories of TRNs². Based on previous research and an investigation of the web-sites of the surveyed agencies, the survey distinguished between the following four categories of TRNs : (i) European networks of regulatory agencies coordinated by the Commission or EU-level agencies (“EU-level TRNs”); (ii) other European networks of regulatory agencies (“other European TRNs”); (iii) Nordic networks of regulatory agencies (“Nordic TRNs”) and, finally, (iv) other international networks of regulatory agencies (“other international TRNs”).

In order to operationalize the variable “transnational embedding”, the survey included questions on contact- and participation-patterns vis-à-vis a number of external bodies, including the four categories of TRNs outlined above. Inspired by previous research on the Europeanization of national central government bureaucracies (Jacobsson et al. 2004; Jacobsson and Sundström 2006), officials who (i) report to be in *contact with* and (ii) *have participated* in TRNs were singled out and linked to four “TRN-segments”, corresponding to the categories of TRNs presented above. These are then employed as the key independent variables in the following empirical analyses, in order to assess the extent to which transnational identifications is associated with the embedding of individual officials into TRNs, as emphasized by the notion of transnational segmentation discussed earlier.

The empirical analyses of this article rely on descriptive and bi-variate statistical techniques, due to the modest number of observations across the

variables of interest. Whereas the survey as a whole reached an acceptable response rate, a combination of design choices and the general length of the web-based questionnaire however implies that the actual number of observations vary considerably. First, the question battery on participation patterns contained a filter, which meant that only those respondents who reported to be affected by a given TRN were asked whether they had participated in network-meetings over the past year. As this information is utilized together with data on contact-patterns in order to delineate the TRN-segments, a large share of missing observations on the resulting variable thus has a substantive explanation. Second, the question tapping into the main variable of interest – administrative identifications – was placed at the very end of the survey, which has contributed to a drop in the number of observations. Furthermore, this question did not contain any filters, implying that officials who are entirely unaffected by TRNs have also been asked whether or not they identify with different TRNs, which may have led them to either provide no answer at all or make use of the “don’t know/not relevant” category. Such latter responses have been defined as missing values in the analyses as to not obscure the results, thus causing a further drop in the number of recorded observations³. Due in part to the drop in N following, especially, the use of contact- and participation-patterns as independent variables, but also due to the particular interest in the explanatory relevance of transnational segmentation as such, the following analyses do not distinguish between the different agencies included in the material. In sum, however, the data suffices to assess the presence of transnational identifications in the agencies surveyed and the extent to which and how the ranking of such identifications, as well as domestic ones, is correlated with individual agency-officials’ degree of transnational embedding.

A general caveat concerns the external validity of the findings presented in the following analyses, due to the fact that the empirical material is drawn from Norwegian agencies. On the one hand, it could be argued that Norway’s formal outsider-status in the EU would render alternative collaborative platforms more relevant for Norwegian regulatory agencies, which would also create biases in how individual agency officials rank their identifications vis-à-vis EU-level and alternative TRNs. Only a comparative design would allow to control for such potential biases. However, the distinction between membership and non-membership may be more subtle, especially seen in light of Norway’s associated membership to the EU via the EEA-agreement. The framework subjects Norwegian ministries and agencies to the same obligations as regards the implementation and practicing of EU-legislation pertaining to the internal market as central administrations in countries that are formal EU-members. Correspondingly, the Norwegian central government has served as an appropriate empirical laboratory for a number of studies seeking to unpack and assess the effects of EU institutions on domestic decision-making processes (e.g. Egeberg and Trondal 2009; Kühn and Trondal 2019; Trondal 2009, 2011; Trondal et al. 2021). Consequently, while the empirical coverage is, strictly speaking, limited to the agencies included in the survey, the analytical relevance of the findings presented need not be. With this in mind, the article now proceeds by looking further into the extent to which agency officials harbor transnational identifications, and how both transnational and pre-existing

domestic identifications may be shaped by agency officials' embedding into TRNs.

Institutional Primacy vs. Transnational Segmentation and the Administrative Identifications of Agency Officials: Empirical Analysis

Unpacking how TRNs impact on the administrative identifications of national agency officials is a crucial, yet understudied, step towards understanding their systemic effects. In order to gauge the potential impact of TRNs on this behavioral property, two contending expectations have been formulated on the basis of an organizational-institutional approach. In order to assess these expectations, I will in the following (i) provide observations on the strength of different identifications, as reported by Norwegian agency officials, before (ii) presenting descriptive information on the measures employed in order to tap into the phenomenon of transnational segmentation and, finally, (iii) investigate whether and how transnational segmentation yields an effect on the presence of different administrative identifications. As a starting point, then, table 1 below provides insights into the ranking of different administrative identifications among the surveyed agency officials.

Table 1: The strength of different administrative identifications (%)

	Very weak	Fairly weak	Both/ and	Fairly strong	Very strong	<i>N</i>
Own unit	2	6	15	26	52	281
Own organization	1	1	8	33	58	281
Parent ministry	2	7	27	45	19	279
Central government	4	18	44	27	7	266
Profession/education	2	7	13	37	41	275
Users/target-groups	0	5	29	43	22	265
EU-level TRNs	25	26	29	18	3	194
European TRNs	32	25	27	14	2	181
Nordic TRNs	25	21	37	14	3	203
International TRNs	31	26	30	9	3	186

Original question: "How strong or weak would you rate your sense of allegiance or identification towards the following bodies/actors?". Respondents answering "don't know/not relevant" are excluded from the analysis. Cell-counts are rounded and may not add up to an even 100.

As evidenced in the figures above, Norwegian agency officials can be seen as harboring multiple identifications. The key observation from these figures is nonetheless that identifications towards TRNs are clearly secondary to pre-existing domestic institutional and professional identities, providing initial support to the notion of institutional primacy as discussed above. As can be expected from the discussion of institutional primacy in the theoretical discussion above, agency officials display the strongest allegiance towards their own organization, followed by the organizational unit they work in and their professional backgrounds. That being said, while TRNs clearly emerge as

secondary affiliations in the figures above, identifications towards TRNs are not trivial. Rather, the figures illustrate that TRNs are indeed included into the repertoire of identifications that can be expected to inform how Norwegian agency officials approach substantive decision-making processes. Hence, a more orthodox understanding of institutional primacy – which would imply that extra-organizational allegiances are not sustained across levels of governance and thus able to penetrate domestic administrations – is not supported by this material.

Beyond the descriptive overview provided in table 1, it is relevant to look closer into whether and how identifications towards different bodies and actors are interrelated in a more systematic and/or patterned manner, as this provides some further indications on the (in-) compatibility between the different cognitive “orders” (cf. Olsen 2007) that inform day-to-day decision making in the surveyed agencies. In this respect, table 2 below illustrates, first of all, how identifications towards TRNs do not imply a weakening of pre-existing domestic institutional and professional identities. On the contrary, officials who identify more strongly with TRNs also tend to display stronger identifications towards key actors in the domestic “institutional order” as well as towards key constituencies, and vice-versa. Furthermore, transnational identifications appear highly compatible with pre-existing profession- and education-based allegiances, which is consistent with an “epistemic communities” (Haas 1992) view of TRNs. In this light, it is also interesting to note how TRN-allegiances constitute a cluster of strongly inter-correlated extra-organizational identifications.

Table 2: Inter-correlations between different administrative identifications

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Own unit	§	.47**	.22**	.20**	.17**	.18**	.13	.14	.17*	.10
2. Own agency		§	.51**	.30**	-.01	.19**	.12	.11	.03	.12
3. Parent ministry			§	.51**	-.00	.17**	.17*	.22**	.14*	.26**
4. Central gov.				§	.14*	.17**	.20**	.26**	.14	.23**
5. Profession					§	.15*	.16*	.22**	.17*	.15*
6. Users/clientele						§	.25**	.25**	.24**	.25**
7. EU-level TRNs							§	.81**	.74**	.60**
8. Other European TRNs								§	.75**	.79**
9. Nordic TRNs									§	.63**
10. Other international TRNs										§

Cell entries are Pearsons’ R coefficients. **: p <.01; *: p <.05. N: 174-279. The correlation analysis performed on the original five-point scale (cf. table 1 above).

The interconnectedness of transnational allegiances further illustrates the concept of transnational segments discussed earlier, as it is reasonable to assume that those parts of a national agency that invest time and energy devoted to

transnational cooperation tend to be more transnationally oriented in general. While this is a cognitive-cultural argument, segmentation – as understood here – is also a structural property, and one that we in light of the theoretical discussion earlier can expect to explain some of the variation observed in table 1 as regards the relative frequency of transnational identifications among Norwegian agency officials.

In previous literatures on the Europeanization of Nordic central governments, different measures have been proposed as proxies for transnational segmentation, ranging from time spent on EU work to contact with, or physical participation in, EU-level organizational bodies, such as expert committees or the comitology system (Jacobsson et al. 2004; Jacobsson and Sundström 2006). In the present study, as noted, this line of reasoning – originally based on organizational data – is adapted to the individual-level observations offered by our survey, in order to investigate actor-level materializations of segmentation and their behavioral effects. The theoretical assumption is that the combination of (comparatively higher) contact- and participation-rates towards either one of the four categories of TRNs under study is indicative of transnational segmentation, and that officials located within these segments, by way of being structurally coupled towards TRNs, will also be comparatively more prone to adopt extra-organizational identifications. In this respect, it is relevant to assess further how such organizational coupling impacts on their ranking of administrative identifications more generally. As a first step, however, table 3 below provides descriptive information on contact- and participation-patterns among officials in the surveyed agencies and the resulting TRN-segments.

Table 3: Contact- and participation vis-à-vis TRNs

<i>Contact and participation vis-à-vis TRNs</i>	EU-level TRNs	Other European TRNs	Nordic TRNs	Other international TRNs
% having been in contact with TRNs at least a few times during the past year ¹	26	25	37	21
% having participated in TRNs at least once during the past year ²	39	28	41	26
(Mean N: 100 %)	(236)	(233)	(242)	(230)
<i>TRN-segments</i>				
% having been in contact at least a few times <i>and</i> having participated at least once during the past year	30	22	38	19
(N: 100 %)	(156)	(152)	(169)	(141)

¹ Original question: “How often would you estimate that you were in contact with the following bodies the past year?”. Combines value 2, 3 and 4 on the following four-point scale: (1) never; (2) a few times; (3) mostly once a month; (4) mostly once a week. The category “don’t know/not relevant” is interpreted substantively and assigned the value “0” in the dichotomous variable presented in the table above.

² Original question: “Did you participate in forums attached to the following European and international bodies during the past year?”. Combines value 2 and 3 on the following three-point scale: (1) never, (2) one time; (3) multiple times. The question was only asked to respondents who reported to be affected by the TRNs in question.

As can be seen from the figures reported above, in terms of contact- and participation-patterns, the agency officials included in this study are more than trivially embedded across different TRNs. The last row of the table displays, moreover, how they are distributed across four distinct TRN-segments. The largest segments are those oriented towards Nordic and EU-level TRNs, which is to be expected in light of the formalized relationship towards the EU via the EEA-agreement and the ensuing organizational coupling towards especially the Commission and EU-level agencies (Egeberg and Trondal 2009, 2018), but also the long-standing traditions for sectoral collaboration within the Nordic region (Læg Reid and Rykkja 2020). Even though the distinction between four different TRN-segments is theoretically relevant, it is important to stress that segment-allocation in our material is not a mutually exclusive phenomenon. Rather, and corroborating the observations consulted earlier on interrelations between administrative identifications, it must be expected that the responsibility for maintaining transnational contacts in highly specialized regulatory agencies in general tends to be concentrated in the hands of a smaller group of officials. This is reflected in table 4 below, where we can observe how segment affiliations across the four categories of TRNs are all positively correlated.

Table 4: Inter-correlations between different transnational segments¹

	EU-level TRNs	Other European TRNs	Nordic TRNs	Other international TRNs
EU-level TRNs	§	.34**	.40**	.20*
Other European TRNs		§	.27**	.49**
Nordic TRNs			§	.28**
Other international TRNs				§

As the correlation is run on dichotomous variables, cell entries are phi-coefficients. **: p <.01; *: p <.05. N: 115-134.

More pertinent for our purposes is the question of whether, and the extent to which, transnational embedding is associated in any relevant manner with how agency officials rank different identifications when conducting their day-to-day tasks in their domestic settings. Bi-variate correlations offer insights into this question. While such analyses do not assume nor establish any direct causal effects of TRN-segmentation, they can nonetheless indicate theoretically relevant relationships, and as evidenced in table 5 below, the observed effects provide support for the idea that transnational segmentation is conducive to the sustainment of extra-organizational allegiances across levels of governance.

Table 5: The effects of transnational organizational segmentation on administrative identifications¹

<i>Transnational segment</i>	EU-level TRNs	Other European TRNs	Nordic TRNs	Other international TRNs
<i>Identity towards</i>				
Own unit	-.01	-.02	.14	-.20*
Own agency	-.04	-.04	.11	-.06
Parent ministry	.01	.05	.11	.22*
Central government	-.07	-.05	.03	.05
Own profession/education	.07	-.03	.13	-.02
Users/clientele	.02	-.05	.03	-.01
EU-level TRNs	.45**	.15	.28**	.04
Other European TRNs	.28**	.39**	.14	.24*
Nordic TRNs	.31**	.19*	.52**	.16
Other international TRNs	.11	.17	.10	.37**

Cell entries are Pearson's R-coefficients. **: p <.01; *: p <.05. N: 105-166. For the values on the "identity" and "segment" variables, consult table 1 and 3 respectively.

As can be seen from the bi-variate associations reported above, TRN-segmentation primarily affects the ranking of transnational allegiances among the surveyed agency officials. Corroborating the tendency noted earlier, it can also be observed that TRN-segmentation to some extent also renders agency officials more likely to emphasize such extra-organizational identifications in general, as we can observe several instances of embedding into one TRN being positively associated with the enactment of identifications *across* different TRNs. In terms of how TRN-segmentation impacts on variations in pre-existing domestic identities, only two significant effects emerge, related to identifications vis-à-vis one's own organizational unit and the parent ministry. The key observation to take home from the table above is however that extra-organizational exposure generally does not alter the "ideational repertoire" of agency officials very much, beyond making them more aligned towards the concrete TRNs they interact with, which is very much in line with the hypothesized effects of transnational segmentation.

The data consulted above thus reveal that TRN-identifications are clearly present among the agency officials covered in the material, and the notion of transnational segmentation does indeed offer a relevant reference point for explaining the enactment of such extra-organizational identifications domestically, indicating that officials linked to TRN-segments are more likely to sustain transnational allegiances across levels of governance. The documented associations moreover demonstrate that formal normative structure is a more elusive concept than what the notion of institutional primacy generally assumes. When studying the domestic impact of TRNs, their role as "intermediate" institutions (cf. also Blauberger and Rittberger 2015; Jordana 2017) challenges an orthodox distinction between primary and secondary institutional affiliations, seeing as these are structures that are operative, and can yield an effect on the individuals that are embedded within them, on a more or less permanent basis. Hence, the idea that the logic of institutional primacy may be mediated and potentially challenged due to intensified exposure to extra-organizational decision-making arenas (cf. Trondal et al. 2005) has thus been established as far

as the *activation* of transnational identifications goes, even though pre-existing identities and the relationship between them remain robust. As such, the findings further illustrate how actors indeed harbor multiple identities and are thus exposed to multiple, and possibly contradictory, behavioral cues that individual decision makers in one way or another must relate to and reconcile (March and Olsen 1989).

The findings reported above thus show that the behavioral basis for Majone's (1997b) idea of networks as bearers of reputation is clearly present, in as much as the findings point to the existence of an institutional infrastructure wherein loyalties towards transnational collaborative platforms have developed. In this respect, moreover, the analyses also show that transnational networks do indeed serve as an important external point of reference for the "regulocrats", i.e. those individuals employed in structurally disaggregated organizations and whose main responsibilities involve the implementation and enforcement of regulatory frameworks (Levi-Faur 2010).

Conclusion

This article has sought to make a contribution to the study of TRNs by addressing a crucial, yet understudied dimension, namely how they impact on the administrative identifications that national agency officials adhere to on a daily basis. Thus, the article has focused on how TRNs impact on the participating individuals in the domestic setting, which implied investigating the extent to which extra-organizational identifications can be sustained across levels of governance.

Drawing on an organizational-institutional perspective, two contending expectations were formulated with respect to the (im-)penetrability of TRNs vis-à-vis domestic organizational structures, emphasizing the explanatory significance of institutional primacy and transnational segmentation respectively. From an *institutional primacy* viewpoint, the domestic work context of national agency officials represents a hard case with respect to observing any ideational effects of TRNs, as such extra-organizational impulses are assumed to be significantly attenuated by the decision-making premises flowing from the officials' home organizations and organizational units, e.g. their primary institutional affiliations. From a *transnational segmentation* point of view, however, it is assumed that those parts of the national organizations that become increasingly engaged in maintaining transnational relations represent distinct and well-integrated administrative segments that are also likely to develop extra-organizational allegiances that are sustained and carried over into the domestic setting.

The empirical analysis reveals that identifications towards TRNs are indeed present among the officials surveyed in this study. Consistent with the notion of institutional primacy, these extra-organizational allegiances are clearly secondary to pre-existing domestic identifications. However, and in line with the idea of transnational segmentation, the analysis reveals that the embedding of individual officials into TRNs is positively associated with the presence of transnational identifications, implying that extra-organizational allegiances are sustained across levels of governance.

The findings reported in this study are important, as they demonstrate how transnational identifications are present among individual agency officials in their domestic work settings and thus can be expected to shape how they act and think. The use of survey data in order to delve into the ideational effects of TRNs has its limitations, however, as cross-sectional surveys merely provide a snapshot picture of general behavioral premises but do not suffice to provide evidence into how the relationship between different decision-making premises plays out at the level of, for example, individual cases of regulatory decision-making. The findings thus actualize a number of additional questions that the design of the present study has precluded us from engaging with. To what extent, for instance, does extra-organizational allegiances shape how individual officials evaluate different signals and concerns when conducting day-to-day tasks, which includes both drafting and practicing regulatory frameworks? Secondly, and related to the first, does the emergence of transnational segments within regulatory agencies create frictions between those parts of the organization that are heavily exposed to, and thus also privy to relevant knowledge emanating from, TRNs, and those that are not? Moreover, what is the effect of transnational allegiances if and when agency officials find themselves in situations where domestic signals and expectations contradict those emanating from the transnational level? This final point is particularly important, as it relates directly to the starting point for this article, wherein the study of administrative identifications was linked to the concept of bureaucratic autonomy.

The extent to which TRN-embedding renders agencies more prone to, and capable of, protecting their own professional turfs if and when conflicts arise with external (domestic) actors over what courses of action to follow (cf. Majone 1997b) requires a more in-depth empirical strategy in order to be fully accounted for. In this respect, it is also important to recognize that realignment towards TRNs does not necessarily imply that the “net” autonomy of the participating agencies increases, as a strengthening of national agencies vis-à-vis domestic institutions (cf., e.g. Bach and Ruffing 2013; Bach et al. 2015) may well be accompanied by the emergence of new dependencies at the transnational level (Egeberg and Trondal 2009; Martens 2010; Wilks 2005). That is, extra-organizational identifications may be a correlate of (transnational) capture. Consequently, there is a need to substantiate the “network effect”, where unpacking how transnational identifications influence what signals and considerations are being emphasized vis-à-vis concrete cases of regulatory decision-making emerges as a particularly relevant extension of the analyses and arguments developed in the present study.

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Notes

¹ This article employs “transnational regulatory networks” as opposed to the conventional understanding of “transgovernmental regulatory networks” or “transgovernmental networks” more generally. TRNs, as understood in this article, are transgovernmental in character in that they are composed of functionally equivalent organisations that form part of the state bureaucracy and that have some autonomy from domestic principals (e.g. ministries and political leadership) when engaging in such cooperation (cf. Keohane and Nye 1974; Slaughter 2004). Such cooperation is nonetheless transnational in *scope*, in the sense that it cuts across territorial borders, and can also be considered transnational in *form*, as national agencies are involved in networks that also include non-governmental actors (cf. Keohane and Nye 1974). In this respect, European Union executive institutions, such as the Commission, can also be considered as non-governmental actors in that they form a legal category separate and independent from the territorial state (Esmark 2001).

² It should, however, be noted that the latest incarnation of the “administration survey” did in fact include “EU networks of regulators” as an alternative on the question tapping into identifications. It did not, however, include items measuring contact- and participation-patterns vis-à-vis networks – as opposed to EU-level committees and working groups – directly, both of which is accounted for in the design utilized in this study.

³ Note, however, that the contact-variable counts “not relevant” as a substantive answer and the officials who have chosen this category have been grouped together with those who have never been in contact with the TRN in question.