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The brokers of globalization: Towards a history of business associations in the international arena

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ABSTRACT

This article is the introduction to the special issue looking at organised business in the international arena to gain better understanding of the role of this group of actors. The international strategies of national business interest associations and transnational business interest associations have largely been overlooked by business historians with a focus on multinational enterprise and global historians studying international organisations and international non-governmental organisations. The article explores in broad terms the historical development of these actors, their representation in the existing literature – historical as well as political and social scientific – before turning to some new research perspectives and the contributions of the articles in the special issue to this research agenda.

KEYWORDS

Globalization; business interest associations; transnational business

In the conclusion to *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, Charles Tilly claims that any sound analysis of ‘long-term structural change’ needs to take into account ‘the two interdependent master processes of the [contemporary] era: the creation of a system of national states and the formation of a worldwide capitalist system’ (Tilly, 1984, p. 147). Tilly was, of course, not the only one to study those ‘interdependent master processes’. From Giovanni Arrighi to Saskia Sassen and Charles S. Maier, the tension of territoriality and global capitalism are indeed at the heart of numerous great analyses of our contemporary world (Arrighi, 1994; Maier, 2000, 2012; Sassen, 2006). In order to provide a methodological solution to this tension and study capitalism, which, ‘even in its most nationalist variants, is always global and can be analysed only as such’, Sven Beckert recently called for historians to pay close attention to ‘the particular and ever-changing forms of spatiality’ (Beckert, 2017, p. 1170).

This special issue centres on a class of actors – international associations of businesspeople and organised business engaged in the global arena – who contribute to the tensions at the heart of capitalism’s spatiality. This is a very diverse category which includes the powerful, century-old International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), which has thousands of members in more than 120 countries; well-known clubs of iconic CEOs like the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT), created in 1983; but also a galaxy of more obscure, specialised branch

organisations such as the Ecological and Toxicological Association of Dyes and Organic Pigments Manufacturers, founded in the middle of the 1970s. We consider it crucial to better understand what historical role business interest associations (BIAs) with either a transnational membership or that are part of international networks played, as a particular group of social actors.

First, they provide an entry point into the analysis of the collective organisation of private economic actors and thus make the social and political embeddedness of business visible. Over the last few decades, scholars have taken interest in the study of BIAs and have demonstrated, as political scientist Luca Lanzalaco pointed out, their 'significant impact on the evolution of capitalism' (Lanzalaco, 2008, p. 294). Worldwide, BIAs – encompassing trade or employers' associations – take centre stage in the activities of industrial companies or banks. Thus, at the beginning of the 1960s, the British firm Imperial Chemical Industries participated in about eighty domestic and international trade associations, while the Swiss electrical firm Landis & Gyr was a member of no less than twenty such groups (Rollings, 2013, p. 191). 'Employers are social animals and, as such, develop their policy interests in packs' (Martin & Swank, 2012, p. 1) write political scientists Cathie Jo Martin and Duane Swank in their seminal book on the political construction of business interests. Historian Louis Galambos, for his part, shows that trade associations deeply shaped the different economic sectors (Galambos, 1966). He also called historians to 'bring politics and power back into business and economic history' (Galambos, 2014, p. 12), an endeavour dear to scholars of BIAs who have long been interested in enquiries into the question of business power (Rollings, 2021). It has to be noted, however, that the focal point of this literature has generally been on national case studies, while their international dimension is often neglected.

Second, the study of BIAs in the international arena allows one to focus on tensions between national and international spaces in the collective action of business. If BIAs were crucial in shaping national capitalisms, how did BIAs influence the process of globalisation? What role did the international activities of national business associations play? In this special issue, we are interested both in the international strategies of national BIAs, and in transnational business interest organisations. While the former is relatively straightforward, it is important to give further indications about the latter. In fact, this category consists of a broad range of business associations that were not only active in different countries or dealt with global issues but were actually organised on an international or regional level. For reasons of clarity, we will call this type of organisation 'transnational business interest associations'. Examples include the ICC, the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), now BusinessEurope, or the ERT. These organisations have been uniting business associations and companies from different countries for periods ranging from a few decades to a century and have been speaking in the name of global business. Transnational BIAs have somehow largely escaped thorough investigation by historians specialised in business or in international relations, even though the social group responsible for the single biggest share of private international associations has been and remains business. How important, however, are transnational BIAs for the functioning of global business networks? While existing literature in business history recognises the relevance of these associations, it is mainly in the field of political science that they have been investigated. As a consequence of this, the available general surveys on transnational BIAs mostly focus on questions of lobbying, often in the context of European

integration.¹ The historical research that does exist largely presents isolated case studies on specific firms, associations, or policy fields,² without offering more general overviews.

This special issue brings together several archive-driven case studies of the way chambers of commerce, trade associations, and companies joined efforts to promote their interests at the international level, thereby striking a balance between collaboration and problems of competition. The historical breadth of these case studies reaches from the foundation of the ICC after World War One to the mobilisation of highly politicised business associations in Europe and in the United States since the 1970s. Overall our aim is to contribute to the rich history of globalisation by investigating the way business is organised in the international arena, thus forming a central nexus of global power relations. This introduction first sketches the historical development of the international activities of organised business and of transnational BIAs. It then reviews existing literature. Subsequently, we highlight the main results of the contributions to this special issue and suggest some avenues historical approaches might open in the study of transnational BIAs and the international mobilisation of business.

Historical development

The history of contemporary business associations can be related to that of the guilds: organisations of merchants which from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries controlled trades and markets in many European cities. Their effect on the political economies of the Middle Ages has been subjected to intense debates, in particular as to whether guilds improved merchants' skills and the overall quality of the products (Greif, 2012; Greif et al., 1994). There are also diverging considerations over whether they facilitated technical innovations, or prevented them, given that they were tightly controlled by male insiders defending their power (Ogilvie, 2011, 2019). When guilds were abolished at the beginning of the modern period, chambers of commerce took over some of their activities in the regulation of markets. They also began to fill the void that the guilds' disappearance left in the arena of political economy, for example by representing business towards the political authorities. Accordingly, French historian Claire Lemerrier has called the Paris Chamber of Commerce 'indispensable' as a meeting point of different elites participating in the local political economy (Fischer, 1964; Lemerrier, 2003, p. 52). These local chambers of commerce established international contacts during the second half of the nineteenth century, which intensified after the 1880s, when recent technological innovations set the stage for the first economic globalisation to take shape. These contacts occurred in the context of intensifying international exchanges, with tradeshows, congresses and different types of organisations being set up with the aim of facilitating global economic exchanges (Dilley, 2013; Robins, 2015; Rodgers, 1998). Around 1900, strikes and international trade unions pushed employers' associations to create transnational exchanges (Eichenberger, 2021). The First World War only temporarily slowed down these international contacts. Furthermore, the war did not prevent an alignment between nationally organised business groups and national governments, as business associations were increasingly associated with the formulation of national economic policy (Lanzalaco, 2008, pp. 306–308). Specialised associations specifically designed to support international business – such as the American National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC) founded in 1914 (Gamble, 2014) – gained influence. This process of increasing organisation in associations, which has been labelled 'organised

capitalism' or 'corporatism', was a global development in the industrialised world, with national variations (Schmitter, 1974).

At the international level, in 1920, businesspeople created the ICC (Druelle-Korn, 2016; Rosengarten, 2001; Rosengarten & Holtfrerich, 2002) and the International Organisation of Industrial Employers (IOIE), subsequently the IOE (Eichenberger, 2021; Lespinet-Moret, 2014; Louis, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). These transnational BIAs were established in the same movement as other international organisations, and like them displayed the characteristics of a double-sided coin of 'Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism' as historian Glenda Sluga puts it (Sluga, 2013). While national organisations could build on their long experience of forming sectoral trade associations, transnational ones profited from the networks they had established during the past decades through informal transnational contacts and by organising international congresses of chambers of commerce. At a national level, central organisations were founded that brought together trade associations and chambers of commerce, such as the Chamber of Commerce of the United States in 1912, the Federation of British Industries in the United Kingdom in 1916 and, three years later, the *Confédération générale de la production française* in France (the predecessor organisation of the *Conseil national du patronat français*) and the *Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie* in Germany, the forerunner of the *Bundesverband der deutschen Industrie*. The same circles that had brought these centralised organisations into existence at a national level were also pulling strings to create transnational BIAs. It comes as no surprise that key individuals, firms, and families played a decisive role at all levels. One example is the French armaments industrialist Eugène Schneider who was among the patrons of the ICC's creation and had explained that the Chamber would become 'an international economic institution to carry out in the realm of business the idea of the League of Nations'.³ The Swedish Wallenberg family also played an important role and would provide three presidents of the ICC over the twentieth century. Another transnational association saw the light a few years after the creation of the ICC and the IOIE: from 1927 onwards, directors of national business associations met annually in the Council of Directors of European Industrial Federations (CDEIF) (Rollings & Kipping, 2008). The interwar period was also the heyday of international cartels: it is estimated that about one hundred international cartels existed in 1924. By the 1930s, more than 40 percent of world trade is believed to have been cartelised (Rollings & Moguen-Toursel, 2012, p. 109). In this context, it is hard to overemphasise the role transnational BIAs played for global business.

After the Second World War, while the importance of international cartels decreased, worldwide economic cooperation actually became more important and, in this spirit, numerous economic organisations were created. In Europe alone Daniel Speich identifies no less than twenty-two such international organisations related to economic expertise that were founded in the fifteen years after the war (Speich Chassé, 2014). Business influence in key events such as the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 and the different rounds of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations needs to be further investigated. The same holds true for the role of organised private economic actors in other developments during the *Trente Glorieuses*, such as the establishment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 1947, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964, or in the activities of global economic institutions such as the Bank of International Settlement (BIS), the World Bank, or the International Organisation for Standardisation.

During this period, there was also a Europeanization of business associations which, as we will see below, has been the object of a considerable amount of research. For instance, in 1949, European business federations created the Council of European Industrial Federations (CEIF), in relation to the activities of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, set up to organise the Marshall Plan. Later, with the establishment of the OECD in 1961, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) took over the CEIF's representative role, now also including representatives from Canadian and US business. UNICE was first formed in 1952 within the CEIF, then independently in 1958, to monitor European economic integration (Segreto, 2006). In parallel ways, the ICC created regional and specialised commissions to influence the work of the agencies of the United Nations, and business was all but absent from international monetary and trade debates.

In the 1970s, the rise of modern transnational corporations and increased impetus of economic globalisation went hand in hand with the development of new forms of international business activity. There were namely the creation of the World Economic Forum (WEF) of Davos in 1971 (Graz, 2003), the Business Roundtable in the United States in 1972 (Waterhouse, 2013, 2014) and the European Roundtable of Industrialists in 1983 (Pageaut, 2010). Both in Europe and the United States transnational corporations were pivotal in the rise of these new associations and forums, since they hoped to achieve a more direct international, or continental, representation through them. These associations did not replace but came as an addition to already existing national and transnational BIAs. The IOE kept on working in close connection to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), just as the ICC was still functioning as a 'World Parliament of Business',⁴ integrating emerging issues into its working program. Furthermore, the CDEIF continued to provide important channels of communication between national business federations. During this period, the number of officials working for transnational BIAs was also on the rise. In 1979 UNICE organised no fewer than seventy working groups and expert committees, a number roughly similar to those of the ICC (Morival, 2017 p. 36). At that time less than ten employees worked directly for UNICE, but already a vast number of officials employed by their national member sections participated in the working groups and committees it ran. Thus, the Italian Confindustria alone had more than ten officials working from its Brussels office. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, UNICE had about thirty permanent staff members but close to one-thousand officials of its member sections were involved in its Europe-wide activities (Schmedes, 2008, p. 169). Today, the ICC has the strongest secretariat, with around two-hundred employees, while the IOE and BIAC have between ten to twenty employees (Ronit, 2019). It can thus be said that during the last three decades of the twentieth century a true international bureaucracy of business interests developed, which has continued to mature until today.

Review of the literature

The international reach of business associations has been approached both by historians, which we will consider first, and by other social scientists, as we will then, more briefly, discuss.

Recently several historians investigating the political influence of economic actors, often related to the new subfield of the history of capitalism, have raised questions that certainly apply to the international activities of business associations, even if these scholars do not specifically study this global dimension of business mobilisation. For instance, they have

pointed to the consequence of organised business action on broader historical processes such as racism, inequalities and the political culture. Most importantly, this literature has highlighted that business is no less politically engaged than any other social group, and no less subjected to struggles to impose its political course (Phillips-Fein, 2017; Phillips-Fein & Zelizer, 2012). As a consequence, business associations – whether they are active on a national level or in the international arena – cannot be seen as simple reflections of business opinion; instead, they appear as a battlefield on which opposed interests and political views compete to speak in the name of the business community. Alongside history of capitalism studies, business history in particular offers interesting perspectives for a better understanding of international business mobilisation. As Geoffrey Jones and Jonathan Zeitlin argue in the *Oxford Handbook of Business History*, by studying ‘the historical evolution of business systems, entrepreneurs, and firms, as well as their interaction with their political, economic, and social environment’ (Jones & Zeitlin, 2008, p. 1. See also Da Silva et al. (2020)), business history can contribute a great deal to open the ‘black box’ that firms remain for mainstream history and most social sciences and shed light on their strategies of collectively defending their interests. As a case in point, business historian Patrick Fridenson has highlighted the role of business associations ‘as necessary relays’ between business and governments (Fridenson, 2008, p. 21). These guiding principles – to conceive business associations in the international arena as social actors fighting for diverging interests and to study them in their historical development and interacting with economic, political, and social contexts – have been followed by a series of historians in these last decades.

A first group of historical research has focussed on either a firm or a national peak business association and has demonstrated its connectedness with transnational BIAs or international policy making (Moguen-Toursel, 2007). In this regard Geoffrey Jones’ work on the British-Dutch company Unilever is especially instructive (Jones, 2005, pp. 334–339). He demonstrates Unilever’s involvement in both national and transnational BIAs. The company participated in industry associations in several countries regarding its different products: margarine, fat, cosmetics. In addition, Unilever was a member of European branch associations, such as the International Margarine Association of the Countries of Europe. It also participated in national BIAs in the UK that then were involved at the regional level in UNICE. Furthermore, Unilever was an important member of the ICC, through both the British and Dutch national committees. Jones underlines the importance of economic competition in these associations. In the European detergents association, the AIS, ‘Unilever’s concern had to be both to influence the association towards its views, and to counter the influence of Procter [and Gamble]; its main competitor (Jones, 2005, p. 335). Two books have just appeared which study a national peak business association – the National Association of Manufacturers – by including an investigation of its international reach. Jennifer Delton analyses this powerful US business association over the entire twentieth century and demonstrates how it used its participation in transnational associations, such as the ICC or the ILO, to promote its global trade agenda. Charlie Whitham’s study shares this approach but focuses on the period of the Second World War (Delton, 2020; Whitham, 2020; see also Delton, 2017 and Whitham, 2013).

The relations of a national peak business association with other business associations in the international arena is at the heart of Neil Rollings’s book of 2007. He analyses how the British Federation of British Industries developed a private European diplomacy using different channels: bilateral meetings with peak associations of other countries, negotiations within the ICC, going through European business federations like the CEIF and CDEIF, and,

finally, by participating in ad hoc industrial conferences. It was not rare for business federations to have access to information, through these private channels, that was unavailable to the government (Rollings, 2007, pp. 122–126). Rollings' work is part of a more general field of historical research on European-wide business mobilisation. In particular it is important to mention two edited books on business networks and European integration, that touch on the role of BIAs, that of Michel Dumoulin and that of Laurence Badel and H el ene Michel (Badel & Michel, 2011; Dumoulin, 2004). More recently, Dani  le Fraboulet, herself the author of a pioneering study on the French Union des Industries Mini eres et M etalurgiques, oversaw a research group which led to the publication of numerous cases studies on European employers and trade associations (Cassis, 2012; Fraboulet, 2007; Fraboulet & Vernus, 2012, 2013; Fraboulet et al., 2013, 2016). Werner B uhrer, Laurent Warlouzet and Sigfrido Ramirez P erez have investigated the way in which different peak business associations have helped shape European economic policy (B uhrer and Warlouzet (2013). See also Ramirez P erez (2010, 2019)). Focussing on the economic aspects of organised business, rather than merely on lobbying, Neil Rollings and Marine Moguen-Toursel have shown that the re-establishment of European cartels after the Second World War, information pooling during that uncertain period, the creation of social networks and the need to deal with standardisation, led firms to seek organisation at European-wide level (Rollings, 2013; Rollings & Moguen-Toursel, 2012).

The second category of historical research we will now discuss concerns the field of transnational BIAs. These organisations were first studied by business insiders, presenting a managerial point of view (Oechslin, 2001; Ridgeway, 1959). There is also some pioneering research on the part played by transnational BIAs in international markets at different historical moments, but in general it does not analyse their functioning in depth (Dejung & Petersson, 2013; Schneider, 2000). A growing amount of publications have dealt more thoroughly with the role of the ICC, CEIF, UNICE, or IOE.⁵ For instance, Rollings and Kipping demonstrate the importance of the economic and social identity-building functions alongside the political role of a transnational business association such as the CEIF (Rollings & Kipping, 2008). Formal and informal meetings often offered forums where ideas and information were multilaterally exchanged in uncertain times. This included, in part, the exchange of economic knowledge to reduce uncertainty and risks for firms. Quinn Slobodian shows how neoliberal thinkers belonging to what he calls the 'Geneva school' used international organisations – including the ICC – to insulate global markets from potential disturbances, including post-colonial democratic pressures (Slobodian, 2018). Finally, Paul Thurberg has analysed how the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations was created at the beginning of the 1970s as a reaction to an international movement to control drug prices (Thurberg, 2019).

After this historiographical review, let us at this point discuss how other disciplines of social sciences have analysed the international activities of BIAs. We will consider three different areas of such research conducted by sociologists and political scientists: first, works that deal with the question of the transnational capitalist class, then research focussed on lobbying, and finally authors that have studied different transnational BIAs.

The international role of BIAs has been discussed by sociological research on international elites and on the existence of a capitalist transnational class. Inspired by the classic research on corporate ties and the mobilisation of economic elites at national level (Wright Mills, 1969; Useem, 1984; Windolf, 2002), numerous scholars claim that in the last quarter of the twentieth century, economic globalisation has nurtured a class of businesspeople that have

emancipated themselves from their national contexts, giving birth to a transnational capitalist class. As William I. Robinson and Jerry Harris have for instance maintained, this capitalist class has a truly transnational 'organic composition, objective position and subjective constitution' (Robinson and Harris (2000, p. 14). See also Sklair (2001), Robinson (2004), as well as Carroll (2010) and Nollert (2005b)). Other authors question the existence of a transnational capitalist class and highlight national specificities in the composition of economic elites. They also underline that transnational networks are weaker than the national interests of firms (Hartmann, 2016; Panitch & Gindin, 2012; Panitch et al., 2016). In a comprehensive discussion of issues related to the emergence of a transnational capitalist class, Michael Nollert writes that 'until we can identify a social network whose members share a transnational identity and pursue common political interests, we cannot verify the existence of a transnational class' (Nollert, 2005a, p. 294).⁶ William K. Carroll and Collin Carson investigate different international BIAs and claim that they 'can be regarded as agencies of transnational capitalist class formation' and 'make a dramatic contribution to global corporate-elite integration' (Carroll & Carson, 2003, p. 37). International policy groups, they argue, constitute an 'additional layer of social structure, within which leading corporate capitalists step beyond their immediate economic interests to take up matters of global concern, pull the directorates of the world's major corporations much closer together, and collaterally integrate the lifeworld of the global corporate elite' (Carroll & Carson, 2003, pp. 52–53). This literature generally does not go into any historical depth and often postulates a sudden coming of a transnational capitalist class starting in the 1970s, in spite of the longer history of globalisation and internationally active corporations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Fitzgerald, 2015; Jones, 2008, 2014). One important exception is the work of Kees van der Pijl. In his pioneering historical study first published in 1984, he investigates the historical construction of an 'Atlantic ruling class' over the twentieth century. Although he identifies the role of the ICC and other international BIAs in different historical contexts, his book is not based on archival sources and therefore lacks empirical evidence (Van der Pijl, 2012).

There is furthermore a large field of political science and sociological research that has analysed the global reach of national or transnational BIAs from what can roughly be defined as the angle of lobbying. Much of this too lacks historical depth but has been influential in framing some of the historical debate and in providing case studies, particularly in relation to European integration (Coen et al., 2021). More generally, the political scientist Michel Offerlé has conducted innovative research in which he applies the analytical tools of political sociology to the analysis of BIAs and their international activities (Offerlé, 2009, 2013). Others, namely Yohann Morival, have followed in his footsteps (Morival, 2019). The European-wide lobbying strategies of different national BIAs are also at the centre of the social-science papers gathered in the 2006 book of Streeck et al. (2006). We furthermore need to mention the contributions in Justin Greenwood and Henry Jacek's book, especially those which deal with the role of business associations in regional trade agreements and regional integration in North America, Latin America or Europe Greenwood and Jacek, 2010, especially the contributions by Underhill, Wood and Gallant and Stubbs. Finally, the publications of H el ene Michel and Sylvain Laurens have brought much insight into the lobbying of business associations in Brussels (Laurens, 2018; Michel, 2013a, 2013b). This body of literature allows for a better understanding of the reasons that lead business leaders to organise internationally and sheds light on the fine-grained mechanisms of how, through BIAs, they attempt to influence regional or international institutions.

To conclude this review, we will now turn to political and social science research that has specifically dealt with the role of transnational BIAs. In his 2009 overview on BIAs, Luca Lanza-laco briefly mentions these BIAs which organised on an international level. He identifies two waves during which transnational BIAs were formed. The first, taking off after the two world wars, was in his eyes an attempt to create peaceful cross-border relationships among national capitalists, while the second – during the last quarter of the twentieth century – was due to the process of increased regionalisation and in some cases globalisation of the world economy (Lanzalaco, 2008, p. 309). Since the publication of Lanzalaco's paper, the most important political science work dealing with transnational business interest associations has come from the Danish author Karsten Ronit, who wrote the 2018 book entitled *Global Business Associations* (Ronit, 2016, 2018, 2019). Ronit distinguishes between a handful of peak associations addressing business' general concerns on the one hand and the associations representing specific industries on the other hand. In the first category, he places associations that specialised in collaboration with international organisations, such as the ICC with the UN ECOSOC, the IOE with the ILO, and the BIAC with OECD. The second category is much larger, and Ronit concludes that 'there is almost no industry without a global association' (Ronit, 2019, pp. 568–572, 569). In a paper with Volker Schneider, Ronit describes transnational BIAs as providers of 'global self-regulation' (Ronit & Schneider, 1999, p. 246). Lanzalaco, Ronit and Schneider have thus provided interesting lines of inquiry regarding the historical reasons for the emergence of such transnational business organisations, their special relationship with international organisations, and their particular functions, such as that of self-regulation. These relevant questions need to be further investigated by archive-driven historical research. The same can also be said about understanding the internal organisational dynamics of transnational BIAs, which many studies, like Ronit, touch on. However, only the works of Justin Greenwood, Göran Ahrne and Nils Brunsson stand out for focussing on this aspect (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Greenwood, 2002). Historians can add much to our understanding here.

New research perspectives and the contributions of this special issue

The different contributors to this special issue explore the dynamics of international business networks, the competition between them, the ways firms and associations entered them, the complex economic and political interests that competed within them, and the forms of collaboration they generated with states and other actors. The papers also investigate the contribution of transnational BIAs to globalisation during the twentieth century, as well as the role of specific industries or business sectors, such as that of banking. Overall, the authors investigate the diversity of national and transnational BIAs' activities and their contribution to trade wars, liberalisation and globalisation. This special issue therefore follows a particular approach in business history, which as Geoffrey Jones remarks has 'demonstrated the heterogeneity of firm strategies, organisations, and impact, and shown the frequency and variety of network and other collaborative arrangements in the past' (Jones, 2008, p. 161).

The special issue is composed of two general papers covering the entire twentieth century (#2 Rollings, #3 David and Eichenberger), five case studies (#4 Schaufelbuehl, #5 Ballor, #6 Waterhouse, #7 Pitteloud, and #8 Iberg), and one (#9 Sluga) concluding essay. Taken together, they contribute to at least three important and new enquiries.

The first concerns the lasting importance of national BIAs in the international collective action of business. Most of the contributions in this special issue highlight the role of national BIAs in the formation of international coalitions between governments and private business. Hence, rather than a crude vision of an increasingly globalised world in which national interests would vanish, our authors highlight that international BIAs remained firmly rooted in a blend of nationalism and internationalism that competed and coalesced on different scales. Grace Ballor's study of the European automobile industry is a particularly good example of the unexpected results such complex blends could produce in history, and Ludovic Iberg's essay highlights how national politics of business remained crucial in European business federations. Several of our case studies investigate how national associations took a stance on international issues, in particular Benjamin Waterhouse's and Janick Schaufelbuehl's articles. They draw a picture of multiscale, complex interactions of successes and failures of national strategies. Based on these articles, a new research avenue might investigate the debates that took place in the 1990s, when major challenges were posed to BIAs, and when business actors as well as scholars expected national BIAs to disappear (Coen, 1997). The way national BIAs faced the triumphant globalisation of the 1990s might help us understand how organised business adapted to new politics of neoliberalism, globalism, Europeanization, and globalisation. The many think tanks founded in the 1970s represented a new form of organisation that in many ways competed with existing BIAs. The specific role of multinational corporations should be investigated in this context, as lobbying activities of individual firms increased. In this regard, it seems important to answer the question to what extent transnational firms significantly changed the conditions of existence of transnational BIAs.

The second common theme in our case studies is the private diplomacy developed by business actors and its influence in international relations. Did transnational BIAs reveal the existence of a specific form of business internationalism? Neil Rollings' article, just like Thomas David's and Pierre Eichenberger's, suggests that the international organisation of business has developed alongside and in interaction with the global system of international organisations. It therefore seems important to further explore the role of business in the many international organisations of the twentieth century, starting with the League of Nations and the United Nations. It would also be valuable to investigate the place of business leaders and employers from the former colonies in Africa and Asia. The ICC provides a potential privileged entrance point into this question, as business representatives of former colonies joined the organisation from the late 1960s onwards. The influence of private business diplomacy for North-South political and economic relations requires better understanding. What bound business representatives from the North and the South together? Did specific forms of business internationalism – whether liberal or conservative – represent a kind of social glue in these relations as they did in other contexts, as Philippa Hetherington and Glenda Sluga show? (Eichenberger, 2021; Hetherington & Sluga, 2020).

Third, some of our contributions – Sabine Pitteloud's in particular – investigate the role of BIAs in the social construction of business interests and identity building. BIAs never lost their social function as dinner-club associations, which should not be underestimated in the study of BIAs. As Lyn Spillman argues, they 'make meaning for economic action, routinely reproducing actors' economic interests and sometimes providing sites for their creation, challenge, and change' (Spillman, 2012, p. 134). There are many possible avenues for investigations in this domain. One of them is the normative power of business identified by Spillman, which is deployed through all sorts of codes of conducts, ethical manifestos,

communication campaigns and philanthropic endeavours. Instead of treating such activities as odd and anecdotal aspects of the activities of BIAs, they should be considered as important factors which 'explain why and how self-interested, profit-oriented action can be sustained' (Spillman, 2012, p. 349; Carnevali, 2011). Let us now conclude this introduction with a brief overview of each contribution to this special issue.

#2 Neil Rollings' paper contributes to close an important research gap. While there have been many efforts to track the development of international non-governmental organisations, there has been surprisingly little focus on those specifically from business. Opening the special issue, Rollings argues that in part this reflects a general tendency to ignore business (explicitly or implicitly) in many transnational histories. His paper, based on an original exploitation of registers and dictionaries of international associations, offers a quantitative investigation into the development of transnational business associations. In so doing, it provides a macro-level overview which serves as a broad diachronic framework for the more detailed individual case studies presented in the SI. Among other things, Rollings argues that the creation of many transnational business associations after the Second World War reflected, among other trends, a sense of great uncertainty during this period. He suggests that there was a resulting desire to construct arenas for information exchange as a way of finding out what business in other countries were thinking and doing.

#3 Thomas David and Pierre Eichenberger investigate the contribution of the ICC to transnational business networks and communities, and offer a first global portrait of this elite of global business. It is based on a prosopographic study of the 43 presidents of the ICC from 1920 to 2000 and research in the archives of the ICC. The results presented in the paper suggest that the involvement of these businessmen in the ICC did not lessen their activities in national and local associations. The paper also shows that while the ICC presidents displayed heterogenous profiles, they spent an average of 10 years in the ICC before their election and remained active for many years after their tenure as presidents was over, allowing them to form a powerful transnational community. The study also provides an archive-based, qualitative investigation of the way the ICC presidents interacted to cement this transnational community. They met regularly over select events – such as the '*diner des sages*' – and bonded over a common project: defending free trade and international business.

#4 Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl sheds light on the history of the powerful but largely under-researched United States Council for International Business, the leading ambassador for the global interests of US-based transnational companies and banks. She investigates the history of this association, which is the US affiliate in the ICC, the IOE and the BIAC (today: Business at OECD). At its founding in 1945, the United States Council of the International Chamber of Commerce (as it was called until 1981) was intended to represent the specific interests of companies and banks in the United States striving to expand their international trade and investments. It gained prominence during the 1960s and 1970s, through a series of political campaigns aimed at defending the foreign operations of American companies. This process accompanied the ascent of the transnational corporation that was taking place during the same period.

#5 Grace Ballor questions how European business elites have influenced the European integration process since the late 1970s and shaped the region's single common market. The paper studies the processes by which corporate executives from the Committee for Common Market Automobile Constructors, later from the European Automobile Manufacturers Association shaped European external trade relations with Japan. Ballor

shows that the collective action of automakers was everything but easy and self-evident, as fault lines among the CCMC members frustrated its aims and led to its dissolution in 1990. Based on a careful examination of 30 years of archives, Ballor's article reconstructs the debates that eventually achieved a political economic consensus in the form of a Japan-European deal that satisfied both political and business elites. Doing that, she highlights the ability of European automobile producers to capture the Commission's support for protectionist quotas because a regional monitoring system offered the Commission something it desperately wanted: a means of ending disparate national restrictions and realising a common commercial policy. The paper thus reveals a complex and dynamic process of reciprocal influences.

#6 Benjamin Waterhouse investigates the US Business Roundtable, founded in 1973 to unite the political power of top American industrial, extractive and manufacturing corporations. Despite the global impact this organisation was about to have in the 1980s – the Business Roundtable established itself as a pioneer among politically mobilised employer associations and served as a model to organisations such as the European Round Table and Japan's Keidanren – Waterhouse shows that in the early 1970s, the CEOs who created the association were driven by a provincial vision of political economy and the immediate problems of American manufacturing. Rather than cultivate international networks or pursue global strategies, the Business Roundtable's leaders defined their policy agenda within the narrow limits of American domestic politics, both ideologically and in policy preferences. Waterhouse argues that the CEOs who formed this organisation were successful in the short-term in establishing themselves as the pre-eminent voice of American industry, but that they largely misunderstood the nature of the economic challenges that manufacturing faced. Because of their myopia, the Business Roundtable found itself less influential by the mid-1980s.

#7 Sabine Pitteloud investigates a series of informal meetings, the 'Interlaken Conferences', initiated by the Swiss Union of Commerce and Industry in 1978. These annual conferences, which took their name from the Swiss holiday resort where the first conference took place, assembled directors of industrial federations of the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands. Providing a thorough investigation of the representations and categorizations used during these meetings, the paper discusses how such informal gatherings strengthened liberal economic ideas among the business federations that participated. Pitteloud suggests that the 'Interlaken Conferences' consolidated the shared conceptions of a specific liberal 'variety of capitalism' some European business federations in France or in the Nordic Countries did not share. The author hence points out the importance of informal gatherings in the creation of a selective community of business association leaders sharing similar liberal views on economic and social issues and highlights the types of interpersonal relations these members of the European business elite developed and nurtured. Her article hence uncovers new stakes on the little explored issue of community building in internal business, which then advanced specific agendas in more formal and larger international BIAs.

#8 Ludovic Iberg's paper takes a national view on European business associations. He provides new evidence on the complex role organised business played in Swiss diplomacy, to the point that Swiss high civil servants pushed a business association to become more active in the UNICE to defend Switzerland's diplomatic interests. Providing a detailed investigation of the different visions and interests in the European integration – the divisions between French *dirigisme* and German ordoliberalism – among UNICE's and the CEIF's

members in the 1970s, he uncovers new dimensions of the role international business associations played in European politics. Focussing on the strategy of Swiss business federations, this paper shows that Swiss Vorort, in collaboration with representatives of their national state, developed intense bilateral and multilateral contacts with their European sister organisations during this decade. Although they were not members of UNICE, they managed to forge coalitions in order to promote their own interests within the European peak-level federation. The paper illustrates that Swiss business circles, in close collaboration with the economic leaders of the Federal Republic of Germany, played a crucial role in the gradual emergence of a core group of neoliberal business associations in Europe.

Finally, the conclusion, written by **#9 Glenda Sluga**, summarises the main findings of the different papers and provides fresh insight and provocative thoughts on the subject 'looking from the outside in'. The special issue thus closes with the formulation of new hypotheses and research perspectives, in particular with suggestions on a possible methodological cosmopolitanism, that might inspire much needed research by business historians.

Notes

1. A pioneering work is Greenwood (2003). See next section for a presentation of the current state of the art.
2. For a case study on a company, see for instance Jones (2005, pp. 334–239). For an example on a specific association, see Robins (2015); for a study of a specific policy field, see Bühler and Warloutzet (2013).
3. Quoted in David and Eichenberger. Originally from Princeton University, Fred I. Kent papers (MC#077), Box 30, folder 4, The Record of the International Chamber of Commerce, N°1, March 1, 1921, pp. 1–2 and p. 21.
4. Earlier works on the power of American business include Domhoff (1967, 2012), McQuaid (1994) and Vogel (1989) For 'A World Parliament of Business,' see Johnson (1968, p. 305).
5. See for instance the pioneering work by Monika Rosengarten: Rosengarten (2001), Rosengarten and Holtfrerich (2002), Spiliotis (2019), David and Eichenberger (2020), Slobodian (2018), Druelle-Korn (2016), Rollings and Kipping (2008), and Segreto (2006); Although written by a political scientist, the following work on the IEO also adopts a historical perspective: Louis (2018).
6. See also Carroll and Fennema (2002) who show the complex coexistence of national and international corporate ties.

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