

## **CORPORATE POWER IN WORLD POLITICS: THE CASE OF THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM**

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Although there is no shortage of scholarly literature on corporate power in world politics, surprisingly little attention has been given to the World Economic Forum (WEF).<sup>1</sup> While neo-Gramscian scholars often make reference to the WEF as the most comprehensive “planning body” of an emergent transnational capitalist class, they have yet to subject its specific practices to detailed analysis (van der Pijl, 1998:132-5; Rupert, 2005:222-7). Interestingly, the most elaborate study of the WEF’s power has focused on its limits. More specifically, Jean-Christophe Graz (2003:326) has argued that if the exclusive WEF meetings in Davos are to result in “more than mere managerial outcomes”, then an engagement with “the more formal processes of political institutionalization and the role of the state” is required. However, the necessity of such engagement points to the limits of the WEF’s power – partly because the visibility of the informal influence accompanying it will provoke reactions from social forces excluded from the WEF, and partly because attempts to incorporate broader elements of society in a wider bloc of social forces will undermine its collective will.

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<sup>1</sup> The WEF is “an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world... Incorporated as a foundation in 1971, and based in Geneva, Switzerland, (it) is impartial and not-for-profit. It is tied to no political, partisan or national interests”. (<http://www.weforum.org>; accessed 19 July 2007) Talk about independence, impartiality and non-partisanship aside, the WEF’s “members comprise in principle the foremost 1,000 global enterprises”. (ibid) Recent books on corporate power that pays scant attention to the WEF include May (2006) and Fuchs (2007). Incidentally, the most comprehensive study of the WEF has next to nothing to say about power (Pigman, 2006).

While there certainly are limits to the WEF's power, Graz's analysis contains its own limitations with respect to how we think about the WEF in relation to power in contemporary world politics. First, it contributes to the general tendency of reducing the WEF to its annual Davos meetings. While certainly important, there is more to the WEF than these meetings, and an analysis of its power must therefore take seriously also its other activities. Second, the importance ascribed to the need on the part of the WEF to engage directly with formal politics and the state seems to rule out how power can be effectively exercised at a distance. In part to move beyond such limitations, the present article provides an altogether different take on the whole issue of the WEF and its power in contemporary world politics.

Most importantly, the analysis to follow is based on a productive or discursive conception of power – that is, a type of power related to how discursive practices work to constitute the identities of actors, their capacities to act, and the contexts within which they act. Furthermore, the concern with the WEF's power is embedded in an analysis of a broader set of governmental practices central to contemporary world politics. More specifically, the article inquires into the WEF's exercise of productive power in relation to ongoing efforts to constitute a global marketplace, to govern states in accordance with a neoliberal rationality of government, and to solve global problems through new forms of governance. While the role played by the WEF varies across these practices, the main argument is that it exercises significant power in contemporary world politics. This, however, does not imply that its power exercise is beyond contestation, and the present politicization of both the WEF and the increasingly taken-for-granted modes of being, thinking and doing effected in and through the broader governmental practices that its exercise of power is internal to or plays into, is intended as a contribution towards both that end, and the opening up of spaces of imaginative possibility between contemporary and future world politics.

Since the present study's distinct take on the WEF and its power to a large extent follows from the conception of power employed, the article begins with a brief discussion on the analysis of power in world politics. Following this, it proceeds by considering the WEF and its exercise of productive power in relation to ongoing efforts to constitute a global marketplace, to govern states in accordance with a neoliberal rationality of government, and to solve global problems through new forms of governance. The article concludes with a discussion on what the present study implies for resistance to the governmental practices in question.

## II. ANALYZING POWER IN WORLD POLITICS

With power defined as “the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate”, Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (2005:42–3) have developed a four-fold taxonomy based on “the kinds of social relations through which power works” (interaction vs. constitution) and “the specificity of social relations through which effects on actors’ capacities are produced” (direct/specific vs. indirect/diffuse):

The first type is power as relations of interaction of direct control by one actor over another – Compulsory Power; the second is the control actors exercise indirectly over others through diffuse relations of interaction – Institutional Power; the third is the constitution of subjects’ capacities in direct structural relation to one another – Structural Power; and the fourth is the socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification – Productive Power.

While delineating four distinct types of power, Barnett and Duvall emphasize repeatedly that there are connections between them, and that analyses of power will benefit from considering how they interact and relate to each other. Although this might be so to some extent, a strong case can be made for conceptions of power being (meta)theory–

dependent in that “they make sense within their respective meta-theories, which are not always compatible”. (Guzzini, 2005:506) Undoubtedly, this places clear limits on the extent to which they can all be accommodated within a single analysis that wishes to be free of internal contradictions. At a minimum, (meta)theoretical commitments will lead different scholars to emphasize or prioritize one type of power over others.

Committed to a non-essentialist ontology and a non-foundationalist epistemology, the present study conceives of power in productive terms. As noted by Barnett and Duvall (2005:55–6), this implies a concern with “discourse, the social processes and systems of knowledge through which meaning is produced, fixed, lived, experienced, and transformed”, and how “discursive processes and practices produce social identities and capacities as they give meaning to them”.<sup>2</sup> Beyond being productive in relation to social identities, Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing (2001:225) have emphasized that such power exists only in its concrete exercises, and cannot be possessed by actors; that it has no center in the economic or political level of society, but rather comes from everywhere and is present in all social relations; and that it is “exercised by means of institutionalized technologies that discipline the body and normalize the mind”.

Within the context of this general conception productive power, the analysis draws more specifically on Michel Foucault’s (2007) work on “governmentality”. With government defined as the “conduct of conducts” or a form of practice deliberately aimed at shaping, guiding or influencing the actions of one or more persons through their capacity to regulate their own behavior, Foucault’s concern was with the mutually constitutive relationship between government and modes of thought (Foucault, 1982:221). In their outline of an analytics of government

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<sup>2</sup> The key reference point for their conception of such power is Michel Foucault, who argued that “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production”. (1977:194)

based on this work, Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller have distinguished between three governmental dimensions: *rationalities*, or regularities in political discourse understood as “a domain for the formation and justification of idealized schemata for representing reality, analyzing it and rectifying it” (1992:178); *programs*, or the multiple knowledge-based designs put forward with the aim of reforming reality; and *technologies*, or the heterogeneous mechanisms of “strategies, techniques and procedures through which different forces seek to render programmes operable, and by means of which a multitude of connections are established between the aspirations of authorities and the activities of individuals and groups”. (ibid:183)

Based on a conception of subjectivities as vehicles and effects of power strategies rather than as sources of power, the analysis that follows avoids treating the WEF as an actor that somehow possesses power, and focuses instead on its more specific exercises of power. In accordance with this, the focus is on how certain discursive practices on the part of the WEF work to constitute the identities of actors, their capacities to act, and the contexts within which they act. As mentioned earlier, this is done in the context of a broader set of governmental practices central to contemporary world politics, and the analysis draws on the distinction between governmental rationalities, programs and technologies in order to highlight the more specific roles played by the WEF in connection with ongoing efforts to constitute a global marketplace, to govern states in accordance with a neoliberal rationality of government, and to solve global problems through new forms of governance.

In his engagement with power analysis, Colin Hay (2002:182ff.) has argued that there is a need to distinguish clearly between an analytical dimension concerned with the identification of power on the one hand, and a normative dimension concerned with the critique of the distribution and exercise of power on the other. While correctly pointing out how power analysis as critique turns power into a purely negative concept, Hay’s suggestion that it is possible to separate the analytical

from the ethical–political is open to question. In this connection, Stefano Guzzini (2005:508) has convincingly argued that “attributing power is not innocent, but implies that things could have been done differently”. In other words, power analysis is performative in that “the definition/assignment of power is itself an exercise of power, or ‘political’, and hence part of the social construction of reality”. (ibid:513) Acknowledging this, the political thrust of the present study rests not on it telling the “truth” about and/or providing a critique of the power of the WEF, but rather on the constitutive force of its politicizing meaning production as it concerns both the WEF and the increasingly taken–for–granted modes of being, thinking and doing effected in and through the broader governmental practices that its exercise of power is internal to or plays into.

### III. THE CONSTITUTION OF A “GLOBAL MARKETPLACE”

While a strategic reorientation of governmental thought towards the global marketplace emerged in the 1970s, the dominant conception of the world economy was international prior to the late–1980s. Since then, however, key institutions involved in global economic policymaking have been fully committed to the constitution of a so–called global economy. It should be stressed, however, that there is no such thing as an “economy”, let alone a “global economy”, external to how something is represented or ascribed meaning as such. Rather, a conception of the economy as an objective reality is internal to a liberal conception of social reality. Prior to liberalism and its “art of separation” (Walzer, 1984), talk about the economy as a separate sphere of social reality would have made no sense. Moreover, the liberal separation between politics and economics was internal to yet another art – namely, the “art of government”. Most classical political economists conceived of their work in terms of both science and art, and Karl Polanyi (1957) has provided an excellent account of the government that went into nineteenth–century efforts to constitute a liberal economic order based on the notion of a self–regulating market.

Considered within the context of the art of government, Foucault (2008:27ff.) conceived of liberalism as a particular “rationality of government” or way of rationalizing government. Thus understood, it broke with the ambition of *raison d'état* to know and govern in detail everything related to human life, and re-directed government towards what was portrayed as extra-political spheres and processes populated and driven by free, self-interested and rational individuals. However, the autonomy of these spheres, processes and individuals should be considered part and parcel not of a pre-governmental reality-cum-nature, but rather of what at the time was a novel objectification of governed reality. In other words, they were constituted as autonomous in and through the very liberal discourses and practices seeking to govern them as such.

Against this background, the governmental issue at stake in connection with global economic policymaking is not merely to “conceptualise a set of processes and relations as an economy which is amendable to management” (Rose and Miller, 1992:192), but to do so at the global level. In ongoing efforts to govern the world economy in the name of economic efficiency and growth, “the market” is clearly constituted as the ideal in relation to which global economic policymaking is directed. In other words, the global economy to be achieved is what is commonly referred to as a “global marketplace”. Moreover, the global economy to be achieved is a capitalist one – that is, one in which the responsibility for production activities rests solely with a private business community. In consequence, global economic policymaking is implicitly or explicitly pegged to the rational-economic and competitive behavior of private individuals or the capitalist form of enterprise.

With regard to the status of the market and competition within these reflections on the management of the global economy, there is a clear neoliberal acknowledgment of neither market nor competitive behavior

being self-constitutive.<sup>3</sup> To the contrary, the realization of a global marketplace is considered to depend not only on state dismantling of “barriers” to the free flow of goods, services and capital, but also on the establishment of the basic political, legal and institutional framework in and through which a market is constituted (property and contract rights) and so-called market actors are made to compete (antitrust and competition policy). In addition to the central role ascribed to states and inter-state authorities in connection with the constitution and policing of a global marketplace, there remains as of today also an opening also for “interventions” in accordance with a theoretical argument based on the idea of “market failure”.

If the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations is treated as a milestone in connection with governmental efforts to constitute a global marketplace, then the WEF has often emphasized its “instigator” role and prided itself for having “had something to do with the creation of (the WTO)”. (Schwab, 1999a)<sup>4</sup> Overall, this is but one example of how the WEF has explicitly promoted and supported (inter)governmental programs aimed at constituting a global marketplace – such as “advancing macroeconomic and monetary policy coordination, promoting harmonization of commercial regulations, removing regulatory impediments to free flows of trade and investment, etc”. (Pigman, 2002:301) However, the role played by the WEF in connection with efforts to constitute a global marketplace goes beyond the promotion and support of specific programs of government. As noted by Geoffrey Allen Pigman:

Beyond pursuing a globalization agenda that has promoted particular convergence and market liberalization objectives (...) the World Economic Forum for over thirty years has promoted the development of the discourse of globalization

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<sup>3</sup> On neoliberalism understood as governmentality, see Foucault (2008:78ff.) and Lemke (2001).

<sup>4</sup> The basis for this is how the WEF brought trade ministers together for a series of informal talks in the early-1980s which, in time, led to the launching of the Uruguay Round in 1986.



that has now come to attract so much attention not only amongst scholars but amongst the media, governments, and civil society generally. (ibid; see Pigman, 2006:93ff.)

While Pigman points to the status of globalization as a theme at the WEF's annual Davos meetings, globalization has figured prominently also in its annual reports on competitiveness, as well as in newspaper and magazine articles written by its management team. Although the meetings and reports have limited participation and readership respectively, this does not make the WEF's articulation of the globalization discourse any less significant. For one thing, the participants and readers in question are "global leaders" of various kinds, and have great potential to contribute to both the discourse's wider circulation, and its translation into governmental practice. Moreover, the media has also played an important role in circulating the WEF's articulation of the globalization discourse to a wider audience. Overall, the Davos meetings and competitiveness reports receive a lot of media attention, and the latter tends to reproduce the discourses articulated by the WEF – leading one journalist to talk about "the media's cheerleading at Davos". (Schechter, 2000; see Bennet et al., 2004)<sup>5</sup>

Although multiple globalization discourses co-exist today, the one that dominated completely until the mid-1990s, and which the WEF played a central role in articulating, was but an extension of the economic and market-related one that originated in a business context in the late-1970s and early-1980s.<sup>6</sup> Within this discourse, globalization was represented as a process in and through which the world economy was becoming a borderless global marketplace, or an economy in which

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<sup>5</sup> For a relevant analysis of the media and corporate representations of globalization, see Fiss and Hirsch (2005).

<sup>6</sup> While the focus in this section is on the WEF articulating the globalization discourse beyond a business context, it can be argued that this discourse also worked to constitute the WEF as a more "global" subject – this, reflected in the extension of membership to corporations outside of Europe, a growing engagement with "global issues", and the change in name from the European Management Forum to the WEF in 1987.

flows of capital, goods, services, technology and labor occur more or less unimpeded across state borders. With such a global marketplace conceived as a product of technological developments and their exploitation by profit-seeking corporations, the dominant globalization discourse represented a globalizing world economy as a fact of reality that had evolved naturally and could not be reversed. Moreover, drawing on the ascendant (neo)liberal repertoire as it concerns the virtues of the market at the levels of both the individual (greater personal freedom, improved living standard, higher life expectancy) and society (more efficient resource allocation, higher economic growth, more pacific human relations), the dominant globalization discourse represented a globalizing world economy as a fact of reality that was not only natural and irreversible, but also a reason for celebration.

Regarding how this globalization discourse worked in relation to contemporaneous efforts to govern the world economy, two aspects should be emphasized. First, by representing a globalizing market economy as essentially benign, it contributed to constitute a global marketplace populated with private corporations as the ideal in relation to which global economic policymaking should be directed. Second, by representing a globalizing world economy as natural, inevitable and irreversible, the dominant globalization discourse contributed to incapacitate (inter)governmental agencies by locating the global marketplace beyond choice. By pointing to the limits of what global economic policymaking could possibly achieve, it narrowed down the space of possibility for governmental action to the options of leaving the global marketplace completely to itself, or trying to influence its operation at the margin. This globalization discourse was to a large extent re-articulated by the key agencies involved in global economic policymaking, and contributed to both guide and justify their governmental activities. Regardless of these agencies fully subscribing or not to a conception of the emerging global marketplace as natural and irreversible, this aspect of the discourse nonetheless played an important role in naturalizing and de-politicizing the efforts aimed at constituting

a global marketplace, as well as fending off or neutralizing opposition to them.

In contrast with how many proponents of economic globalization have come to accept that “the tide of ‘globalisation’, powerful as the engines driving it might be, can be turned back” (*Economist*, 2000), the WEF has not given up on its conception of globalization as both inevitable and irreversible. While Schwab and Smadja (1996) warned about a “backlash against globalization” in the mid-1990s – leading Schwab (2002a) to conceive of himself as “the first anti-globalizer” – they insisted that “the globalization process is not a passing aberration”, but rather something “irreversible”. When later asked if he ever doubted the inevitability of globalization, Schwab drew a parallel to the industrial revolution, and concluded that “history tells us that one cannot stop a revolution. You can only tame it” (2000; see Schwab, 1999b). With globalization treated as a given fact of life in the contemporary world political economy – that is, something “that will not go away because we don’t like some of its worrisome implications or destabilizing impacts” – WEF representatives have emphasized that “the real issue is how to manage the implications of the globalization process” (Smadja, 1999). In terms of the industrial revolution analogy, Schwab argued that “the whole 20th century was characterised by efforts to socialise the industrial or capitalist revolution”, and “we (now) have a new task: to humanise the globalisation revolution” (2000; see Schwab and Smadja, 1999).

While more will be said about the WEF’s efforts to “humanize” globalization below, another governmental dimension of the dominant globalization discourse should be mentioned here – namely, its contribution to guide efforts to govern not only the world economy, but also the behavior of states in their internal affairs. In this connection, Larner and Walters (2004:509) have stated that:

Globalization assumes particular “macrosubjects” (industries, states, regions, firms, networks) with particular attributes and capacities. These entities are exhorted to enter into the

pursuit for competitiveness through notions such as export orientation, self-management, good governance, and policy dialogue. They are encouraged to work on themselves to recreate themselves in very specific forms with particular capacities. ... Both people and places are encouraged to apply financial disciplines, demonstrate entrepreneurial capacities, and seek out new opportunities.

It is important to stress that the point here is not that “the imperatives of the global economy” (Smadja, 1996:31) have forced states and other actors to behave in particular ways, but rather that the dominant globalization discourse has worked to constitute states as subjects of a particular kind which, in turn, will conduct themselves in particular ways in order to benefit from and prosper within the global marketplace. In more general terms, the issue at stake concerns how states have increasingly become subjected to a form of neoliberal governance.

#### IV. NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE OF STATES

When talking about “governance of states”, the primary concern is not with governmental practices occurring within states, but rather with the rationalities, programs and technologies internal to efforts aimed at governing states from without. While the latter plays into the former, the distinction is nonetheless important. To argue that states have increasingly come to be subjected to a form of neoliberal governance implies that there is a growing tendency for them to be constituted and acted upon as flexible and manipulable subjects with a rationality derived from arranged forms of entrepreneurial and competitive behavior.<sup>7</sup> While the dominant discourse on globalization has played a role in this, states have more specifically been constituted as such market actors in and through the discourse on national competitiveness – a discourse, the contemporary significance cannot be exaggerated.

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<sup>7</sup> The next couple of paragraphs draw on Fougner (2006).

This discourse emerged around 1980, when the “problem of competitiveness” moved from being internal to reflections on how to manage a firm, to become internal to reflections on state governance. At the time, firms remained the primary subjects of the competition in relation to which the concept was used, and the constitution of *national* competitiveness as a governmental problem for state authorities primarily worked to gear their policies towards the perceived needs and well-being of national firms with an international orientation. More recently, globalization talk has transformed both the meaning of national competitiveness, and the terms of the so-called national competitiveness problem – this, to the extent that the discourse on national competitiveness now incorporates the one on globalization. More specifically, national competitiveness has come to refer not so much to the capacity of “national” firms to compete for shares of international product and service markets, as to the capacity of a state to compete for shares of mobile investment capital. In other words, the primary subjects of the competition in question have changed from firms to states, and the primary governmental problem on the part of state authorities is to make the state more competitive. Constituted as competitors and entrepreneurs operating in a global investment market, the state is commoditized and statesmanship is directed towards selling states as locations to mobile capital.

According to neoliberal public choice theory, the constitution of states as competitive and entrepreneurial entities approximates a normative ideal. The reason for this is that what Horst Siebert (2006) has called “locational competition” is considered “a substitute for more overt attempts to contain a government’s Leviathan tendencies such as constitutional amendments”. (Sinn, 1992:177). Assuming both that “countries can benefit economically from luring factors into their jurisdiction”, and that “(i)ndividuals may “vote by their feet” and move either themselves or capital to the most preferred jurisdiction”, state authorities “will, driven by their self interest, compete in offering favorable rules and institutions ... to mobile factors” (Lewisch, 1999). It

follows from this that the neoliberal ideal of governing states through locational competition is pegged to rational-economic behavior on the part of states – that is, a conception of the state as a form of the *homo economicus*.

While current conditions approximate their normative ideal, public choice theorists would be the first to identify the following problem related to locational competition of the kind discussed above — since competitive behavior is considered to be as unnatural for governments as it is for firms, “competition among governments, like competition among firms, cannot be left to itself” (Vaubel, 1999:327). Although there is currently no supranational authority in place to arrange and police the efficient operation of locational competition among states, there are plenty of actors that work to constitute and act on states as market actors on a continuous basis. Among these, the WEF plays an important role in and through *The Global Competitiveness Report* (GCR), which is promoted as “the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of the comparative strengths and weaknesses of national economies”.<sup>8</sup>

Produced as part of the WEF’s Global Competitiveness Programme (GCP; recently renamed Global Competitiveness Network), the GCR evaluates the potential for countries to raise productivity and achieve economic growth. From 2000 to 2005, it did this through the construction of two competitiveness rankings. First, a Growth Competitiveness Index developed by Jeffrey D. Sachs and John McArthur of Harvard University and, second, a Business Competitiveness Index developed by Michael E. Porter of Harvard Business School.<sup>9</sup> Assisted by Xavier Sala-i-Martin of Columbia University, the WEF has recently introduced a new Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) as its main indicator. Being a revised version of the Sachs–McArthur framework, the GCI assesses “the set of factors,

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<sup>8</sup> WEF, “Global Competitiveness Network”, <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/index.htm> (accessed 17 April 2007). While the focus here is on the GCR, it should be noted that the WEF produces also regional reports that are based on and meant to supplement it (WEF, 2006, 2007a, 2007b).

<sup>9</sup> See respectively Lopez-Claros et al. (2005) and Porter (2005).

policies and institutions that determine the level of productivity of a country”, and is composed on nine pillars: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomy, health and primary education, higher education and training, market efficiency, technological readiness, business sophistication, and innovation (Lopez-Claros et al., 2006:3). As was the case with the previous indices, each pillar consists of several variables, country scores are determined on the basis of “hard” and “soft” data, and sub-indices prepared for each pillar are combined in the construction of the overall country ranking.<sup>10</sup>

As an annual practice on the part of the WEF, the GCR is both enabled by and reproduces the discourse on national competitiveness. Prior to considering this in greater detail, it should be mentioned that the WEF’s forerunner, the European Management Forum (EMF), was central in bringing talk about competitiveness to bear on nation-states in the first place (EMF, 1979). Moreover, the WEF also played a key role in redefining competitiveness with reference to states as competitors. Based on both a conception of firms having become increasingly “homeless” and a conception of the nationality of investors being irrelevant for national economies, so-called “attractiveness rankings” were included in the World Competitiveness Report (WCR) of 1991 (Rauschenbach, 1991).<sup>11</sup> With “country competitiveness” defined as the “extent to which a national environment is conducive or detrimental to the domestic and global competitiveness of enterprises operating in (that country)“, the report evaluated it in a double perspective:

First, national environments are judged in terms of their *attractiveness* for business investment. Attractiveness describes the quality of resources available in a country from

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<sup>10</sup> The “hard” data is taken from publicly available sources such as the IMF, the World Bank and the UN, while the “soft” data is collected through the WEF’s Executive Opinion Survey (previously called the Business Confidence Survey).

<sup>11</sup> The WCR was jointly produced by the WEF and the International Institute for Management Development between 1989 and 1995. They parted roads in 1996, and began producing the GCR and the *World Competitiveness Yearbook* respectively.

the point of view of an entrepreneur. Second, *aggressiveness* indicates the competence of firms in transforming the available resources into value-added products and services (Vølikangas, 1991:8).

Although the WEF's post-1995 GCRs have been less explicitly concerned with "attractiveness", the locational-competitive logic in question is fully internal to them. Beyond the general constitution of states as competitive entities, the GCR should also be understood as a more specific governmental act on the part of the WEF – namely, as action on the actions of states. In this connection, it can initially be noted that the GCP explicitly "aims to act as a catalyst for economic policy change by assisting governments in identifying impediments to growth and in designing strategies to achieve sustained economic progress" (WEF, 2002a:11). In more specific terms, the GCR is promoted as "a benchmarking tool for policy-makers as they seek to improve the conditions of growth and competitiveness" (WEF, 2002b). With benchmarking understood as a way to improve performance in and through comparison with "best practice", the GCR facilitates it by identifying factors deemed critical for competitiveness, by measuring and comparing how countries perform with respect to the factors in question, and by contributing to the identification of both improvement opportunities (factors on which a country's performance is relatively poor) and sources of learning (countries performing well on the same factors).

With these benchmarking tasks undertaken by the WEF, it is left for governments to complete the process by studying the countries that are "best in class" and implementing learning-based changes aimed at improving performance. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to consider exactly how the GCR is used in various countries, it is clear that many governments do this either on their own or with the assistance of



others.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, they are guided further in that direction by the activities of the WEF's national Partner Institutes (some of which catalyzed into existence by the WEF), as well as WEF-sponsored regional and national workshops and competitiveness meetings arranged in the wake of the GCR's publication.<sup>13</sup> While some might consider the WEF's efforts to facilitate country benchmarking as a mere service provided to governments around the world, its promotion of and contribution to the installation and operation of benchmarking on the part of state actors should rather be conceived as an attempt to shape government conduct in accordance with a particular set of norms and standards.

As of today, benchmarking constitutes a neoliberal technology in and through which subjects and spaces of various kinds are not merely sought governed, but also constituted as governable objects of particular kinds. With regard to agency, country benchmarking does not operate on the basis of a set of essential state characteristics, but rather works to constitute states as entities with benchmarking characteristics. First, given its provision of "an external frame of reference explicitly linked to concerns about competitiveness" (Larner and Heron, 2004:217), benchmarking constitutes states as competitive entities driven not by internal socio-political processes, but rather by global standards of conduct. Second, given the importance ascribed to quantitative measures and comparisons of performance, benchmarking constitutes states as entities with a capacity to calculate and rank alternative courses of

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<sup>12</sup> There are many examples of governments doing this based wholly or partly on the GCR. "National competitiveness" has also become lucrative business for consultancy firms, and some governments engage them to help with benchmarking and policy development. A case in point that draws extensively on the GCR is J.E. Austin Associates, which has also been frequently engaged in national competitiveness initiatives supported by USAID. It is also noteworthy that some development banks use the system of GCR-indicators to measure the progress of their national competitiveness programs.

<sup>13</sup> An example of how the "hidden hand" of the WEF extends into regional/national settings concerns how the WEF-sponsored Arab Business Council of 2003 is "proactively supporting the creation of effective local constituencies of positive change through the creation of National Business Councils" (Gabr, 2005:3) – some of which are subsequently established as Partner Institutes of the WEF.

action. Third, given the overriding concern with identifying and implementing “best practice”, benchmarking constitutes states as technocratic agencies acting in accordance with “expert” determination of what works best. Fourth, given the centrality of change and continuous improvement, benchmarking constitutes states as transformative agencies engaged in a never-ending process of reinventing themselves.

As a governmental technology of performance, country benchmarking works through “normalization” understood in terms of “the procedures and processes through which a norm is brought into play and informs the practices that it seeks to regulate”. (Triantafillou, 2004:486; see Triantafillou, 2006) More specifically, it works through normalization in the sense that it encourages or stimulates self-governance through the production of normalizing knowledge of that which is sought governed. Through norms and standards established and visualized through processes of comparison, country benchmarking induces governments to relate to how they should act in order to achieve best practice. In other words, the normalizing comparison that informs country benchmarking constitutes states as subjects that begin to act in ways that conform to the established norms or standards. While country benchmarking can be done with reference to a variety of criteria and establish norms and standards that guide state action in different directions, GCR-based benchmarking induces states to act in accordance with norms and standards supportive of private sector economic activity.

In this connection, it should first be noted that the benchmarking in question concerns not countries *per se*, but rather countries conceived as “business environments”. Pillars and variables are included in the GCR primarily on the basis of their perceived relevance for corporate activity, and the norms and standards established through comparison concern how various factors, policies and institutions influence such activity. With a “context of unfettered free enterprise/private ownership” considered to be “conducive to superior level of competitiveness” (EMF, 1980:18–9),

the GCR works more specifically to normalize a neoliberal version of free-market capitalism.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the norms and standards established through comparison correspond to a model in which the market is constituted as the ideal in relation to which national policymaking should be directed, and governments should limit themselves to establishing the framework in and through which a market and competition are constituted, and providing so-called public goods in cases where the market is seen to fail. While these norms and standards are built into the theoretical model informing the GCR, they are to some extent also corporate products – this, due to the central role played by the Executive Opinion Survey (EOS) in assessing country performance.<sup>15</sup>

Although country benchmarking can be conceived as externally imposed by the WEF, it should be stressed that the latter does not force states to benchmark and seek to improve their performance according to the norms and standards established in the GCR. Rather, the WEF operates largely at a distance, from where it seeks to harness the capacity of states to govern themselves in a rational and calculated fashion. Even if one can talk about a strong degree of dependence in the sense that governments end up engaging in corporate calculation as part and parcel of their own calculation, the WEF's attempt to act on state conduct remains wedded to the free will and rational pursuit of self-interest on the part of state actors. In a world made meaningful in terms of interstate competition to attract mobile capital, a country wishing to improve its competitiveness and achieve higher economic growth can be

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<sup>14</sup> Although the quote is from a report published in the early period of what Adam Tickell and Jamie Peck (2003) refer to as “roll-back neoliberalism”, it remains the baseline position of the GCR also today. In this connection, the greater attention given to issues of “good governance” and the like in more recent reports indicates a move not so much away from neoliberalism, as towards the “deeper form of neoliberalization” characteristic of what Tickell and Peck refer to as “roll-out neoliberalism”.

<sup>15</sup> The EOS, which provides two thirds of the variables included in the GCI, is conducted annually among corporate executives, and “captures the perceptions of the leading business and investment decision-makers worldwide (many of whom represent the Forum's member companies)”. WEF, “Global Competitiveness Programme”, <http://www.weforum.org> (accessed 5 May 2005).

counted on to compare and seek to improve its relative performance on the criteria considered to matter the most to owners of mobile capital.

When it comes to action aimed at improving national competitive performance, the WEF does not necessarily conceive of this as being the task of governments alone. As noted by Pigman, “(t)he methodology of creating league tables of competitiveness by country is intended to generate global standards of best practice and aspirations for performance improvement by policy-makers across *all the stakeholders* in a given economy” (2006:103; emphasis added). While some would consider a situation in which “(a)ll distinctions and political cleavages within (a) country lose their meaning as the common (and expert-based) struggle for creating a competitive environment takes over and helps to reorganise the state along the logic of competition” to approach the ultimate form of post-political or technocratic governance (Kantola, 2006:20), the WEF considers such a “multi-stakeholder” approach to be central to solve not only the national competitiveness problem, but also various problems facing the world at large.

## V. GLOBAL PROBLEM-SOLVING THROUGH NEW FORMS OF GOVERNANCE

While talk about “global governance” emerged only in the early-1990s, its significance within contemporary reflections on the management of world affairs can hardly be exaggerated. Commonly, global governance is considered to be a response to globalization – this, in that the latter is seen to have produced a need or demand for governance at the global level. With globalization treated as something existing prior to, external to, and beyond the reach of global governance, the dominant discourse on global governance incorporates the dominant discourse on globalization discussed earlier, and guides governmental thought and action towards “market failures” or what is taken to be the negative consequences of globalization. In addition to this, globalization can be considered internal to the dominant discourse on global governance in two inter-related ways: First, it globalizes various issues and

developments by constituting them as “global problems” and, second, it globalizes governance by constituting “the global” as a key site of governance.

Much of what is done and proposed in the name of global governance concerns efforts to solve problems “dominated by their world-scale dimensions” in the sense that they “threaten ... all or most states and nations in the world” (Hakovirta et al., 2002:169). In parallel to the conventional understanding of the relationship between global economic policymaking and the economy to be governed, global governance tends to be seen as a response to “global problems” that exist external to or independent of governance, and for which solutions can be sought *or* not. Against this, it can be argued that nothing is inherently problematic, and that things are rather rendered problematic in and through the very practices that attend to them as such. In consequence, global governance can be conceived as a problematizing practice through which certain issues and developments are constituted as “global problems”. The ascription of global meaning to the problems in question is fundamentally important, as it moves them beyond effective solution at the state level, and constitutes “the global” as a key site of governance.

Problematization is crucial to all forms of governance, since the obligations, responsibilities and legitimacy of governmental actors tend to be posed in relation to the problems that they seek to address (Rose and Miller, 1992:181). In this connection, the dominant discourse on global governance works to incapacitate governments not only at the state level, but also at the global level. With reference to the complexity and fast-changing nature of world affairs, governments and intergovernmental institutions are taken to lack the knowledge, resources and tools to solve key problems facing the world. In consequence, effective problem-solving is made dependent on the active engagement of non-state actors like corporations and NGOs, and the dominant discourse on global governance thus works to constitute a “global public domain ... in which the very system of states is becoming

embedded in a broader ... institutionalized arena concerned with the production of global public goods” (Ruggie, 2004:500). In parallel to the neoliberal work done by the dominant discourse on governance within states, the dominant discourse on global governance responsabilizes non-state actors and, thereby, reconstitutes the relationship between “public” and “private” in world affairs.

The dominant discourse on global governance concerns not merely who should have governmental responsibility and authority, but also how they should manage world affairs. While the market remains the ultimate ideal in relation to which also global governance should be directed, the discourse in question supplements it with various voluntary, horizontal, cooperative, innovative and flexible forms of problem-solving. As these new forms of governance are idealized primarily with reference to their proclaimed efficiency and effectiveness in problem-solving, the dominant discourse on global governance works to constitute governmental activity at the global level as a largely apolitical or technocratic enterprise (Spæth, 2005:33ff). Moreover, the functionalism internal to this discourse has clear implications for who qualifies for participation. As noted by Konrad Spæth, “(p)rogress and efficiency seem to be the only ingredients acceptable to the delicate mixture of global governance. Whoever is able to contribute to this common endeavor belongs to the inside, while any disturbances that could slow down the progressive development have to stay outside” (ibid:35–6).

While challenging the conventional interstate conception of world politics, the dominant discourse on global governance naturalizes the ongoing efforts to re-scale or re-constitute capitalism at the global level. Although it is conceivable for a concern with global problem-solving to be transformative by rendering the prevailing socio-economic order problematic (Robbins, 2005), most talk about global governance is status-quo oriented in that it does not question the socio-economic context within which certain things are constituted as problems. Paraphrasing Robert Cox (1995:31–2), the dominant discourse on global

governance takes a globalizing free-market capitalism as “given (and on the whole as good) and provide guidance to correct dysfunctions or specific problems within (it)” – this, in the name of “globalization with a human face” or “sustainable globalization”. While often promoted as a progressive alternative to neoliberalism, global governance challenges neither neoliberal globalization, nor neoliberalism as a rationality of government (Joseph, 2006; Brand, 2005).

The WEF engaged with global governance only after “the backlash against globalization” in the late-1990s and, then, in relation to issues and developments already constituted as global problems. To a large extent, this engagement was enabled by the neoliberal re-articulation of the private-public separation internal to the dominant discourse on global governance. However, it cannot be concluded from this that the WEF has merely been “drawn into playing public roles” by civil society organizations (Ruggie, 2004:518), or successfully harnessed to the task of governing by governments.<sup>16</sup> Rather, the WEF has done much both to write itself and its members into governmental positions, and to harness others into the task of global problem-solving. While some conceive of the WEF’s legitimacy in connection with global governance as being based on “a new definition of the boundaries between public and private” (Schwab, 2006:16; see Pigman, 2006:55-7), the WEF has itself been actively involved in re-defining those boundaries.

In this connection, it can initially be mentioned that the WEF has articulated the dominant discourse on global governance by insisting that “the world’s system of governance is not functioning” (Smadja, 2001:5), that “many of today’s global and regional problems are too large and complex to be solved by governments alone”,<sup>17</sup> and that existing efforts to solve global problems through “government

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<sup>16</sup> The second interpretation parallels how NGO participation in global governance has been read as a product of NGOs being harnessed into the task of governing by governments (Sending and Neumann, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> WEF, “Global Institute for Partnership and Governance”, <http://www.weforum.org> (accessed 9 June 2005).

intervention or top-down regulation”<sup>18</sup> must be replaced by an innovative and flexible “system of global governance – not a global government” (Smadja, 2001:3). More specifically, the WEF has emphasized that “global decision-making will require the combined efforts of governments, business, and civil society” (WEF, 2002c:3), or that “there is a common global agenda that requires integrated problem-solving and forward-looking management by all stakeholders in the world economy” (Schwab, 2001a:3). Through such articulations of the dominant discourse on global governance, which also informs and is re-articulated in the annual reports of its Global Governance Initiative and Global Risk Network, the WEF has contributed to responsabilize both its own members and other non-state actors in relation to global problems.

With the so-called private sector constituted as an indispensable partner in global problem solving, the WEF and its members are constituted as part of the solution rather than the problem. Related to this, the WEF has also articulated the more specific discourse on corporate social responsibility by stressing that multinational corporations “must adopt a new role as global citizens and assume the responsibilities that role entails” (ibid:2). Towards this end, the WEF’s mission statement was redefined in 2001 to “emphasize the collaborative role of business in improving the state of the world” (Schwab, 2001b:1), and the Global Corporate Citizenship Initiative was launched in 2002 for the sake of “advancing the spirit and practice of global citizenship”.<sup>19</sup> While partly conceived as a necessary response to the growing distrust of and demands placed on firms, Schwab (2002b:2) emphasized that “it is in the enlightened interest of business to improve its understanding of political

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<sup>18</sup> WEF, “Annual Meeting Theme (2003): Global Governance”, <http://www.weforum.org> (accessed 20 June 2005).

<sup>19</sup> WEF, “Global Institute for Partnership and Governance”, <http://www.weforum.org> (accessed 9 June 2005). The WEF defines corporate citizenship as “the contribution a company makes to society and the environment through its core business activities, its social investment and philanthropy programmes, and its engagement in public policy”. WEF, “Global Corporate Citizenship Initiative”, <http://www.weforum.org/corporatecitizenship> (accessed 10 July 2007). See Schwab and Hartigan (2003) and Schwab (2008).



and social trends and make meaningful contributions to the creation and maintenance of public goods”.

In a more programmatic fashion, the WEF has placed great emphasis on “public-private partnerships to solve the world’s pressing problems”.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, it has promoted such partnerships or “multi-stakeholder networks” as being the “most efficient way to deal with global challenges”<sup>21</sup> and “the most legitimate form of global problem solving in the 21st century” (Schwab, 2002b:3). Moreover, the WEF has actively sought to engage both its own members and other actors in networking and partnering activities. In line with the prescription made for the UN in the final report of the UN Vision Project on Global Public Policy Networks (Reinicke and Deng, 2000), the WEF took it upon itself to play the role as “network entrepreneur” and/or “network manager”<sup>22</sup>. As noted by Schwab (2000): “to help meet the complex challenges the world faces today, we must ... have the capacity and the capability to look at issues on the global agenda in an integrated way, to stimulate collaborative action among all stakeholders of the global economy, and to act as a catalyst for responsible policy-making”.

Whether inspired by or paving the way for Kofi Annan’s proposal for a Global Compact between the UN and big business at the Davos meeting

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<sup>20</sup> WEF, “Global Institute for Partnership and Governance”, <http://www.weforum.org> (accessed 9 June 2005). WEF publications pushing the case for global public-private partnerships include WEF (2005a, 2005b, 2006b). Clearly, the WEF is not alone in pushing this case: “This discourse (on global partnerships) is driven by numerous leading UN officials, as well as by academic institutions such as the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, policy think tanks like AccountAbility or the Global Public Policy Institute, influential Foundations such as the Gates Foundation and the UN Foundation, and many private sector interest groups”. (Martens, 2007:32)

<sup>21</sup> WEF, “Annual Meeting Theme (2003): Global Governance”, <http://www.weforum.org> (accessed 20 June 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Schwab was on the Advisory Board of the UN Vision Project, and there is much to indicate that the WEF’s re-orientation was inspired by it and Reinicke’s (1998) earlier work on “global public policy networks”. In this connection, it can be noted that Reinicke is a WEF fellow, and has participated in several Davos meetings. He is Director of the Global Public Policy Institute, and remains involved in efforts to reform the UN through global partnerships (Witte and Reinicke, 2005).

in 1999, the WEF's annual meeting was transformed into a site for networking and partnering related to global problem-solving.<sup>23</sup> With the aim of integrating "other stakeholders in world society" into its activities, the WEF began inviting more civil society representatives to its meetings, established councils or communities for non-corporate stakeholders, and co-organized the Open Forum together with civil society groups. Furthermore, the Centre for the Global Agenda (CGA) was established for the sake of serving as "a catalyst in defining, monitoring and driving the global agenda" (Schwab, 1999c:2). Envisaged as a "hub for global policy networks", it was put in charge of "developing a number of projects and initiatives on issues of priority interest to Forum members and constituents" (ibid.) and "engaging the private sector in public-private partnerships"<sup>24</sup>. In order to "ensure that the Forum always remains on the top edge of the knowledge creation and integration process", the CGA was also meant to provide a "system of sustained contacts with the top academic experts and the major think tanks in the world" (Schwab, 1999c:4).

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to consider in detail the various "initiatives" launched by the WEF since 2000, some general aspects of its engagement with multi-stakeholder networks or partnerships should be emphasized<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> While the International Chamber of Commerce was Annan's main corporate partner in developing the Global Compact, Annan developed close ties with the WEF shortly after becoming UN Secretary General in 1997, and became a regular participant in the Davos meetings thereafter (Paine, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> WEF, "Global Institute for Partnership and Governance", <http://www.weforum.org> (accessed 9 June 2005).

<sup>25</sup> The initiatives, which were brought together under the roof of the Global Institute for Partnership and Governance in 2004 and the Centre for Public-Private Partnership more recently, include Disaster Resource Network, Global Health Initiative, Financing For Development Initiative, Global Education Initiative, Energy Challenges Initiative, Climate Change Initiative, International Monetary Convention Project, Information Technology Access For Everyone Initiative, Partnering Against Corruption Initiative, Water Initiative, West-Islamic World Dialogue, Business Alliance Against Chronic Hunger, Humanitarian Relief Initiative, and Working Towards Wellness Initiative (<http://www.weforum.org/initiatives/index.htm>).

First, the WEF has sought to responsabilize and activate corporations and other actors in global problem-solving. While internal to the dominant discourse on global governance, a more specific dimension of this concerns the WEF's contribution to the constitution of a particular type of agency in and through its articulation of a stakeholder discourse. Being constituted as a "stakeholder" in the context of global governance implies being ascribed not merely a stake in the issue/problem at hand, but also a responsibility towards its resolution. Such empowered and participatory agency is a precondition for the formation of policy partnerships, and the Davos meeting and the WEF's partnership guidelines can be conceived as technologies in and through which various actors are transformed into stakeholders. Moreover, while the practice of networking or partnering incorporates its own set of agency norms, it is also a practice in and through which stakeholder agency is re-produced on a continuous basis.

Second, the WEF has sought to guide the conduct of "stakeholders" towards a particular form of global problem-solving. As noted by Colin Hay (1998:41), "networks can be enlisted within two somewhat different discursive codes: one broadly positive, the other broadly pejorative". In the case of the discourse articulated by the WEF – informed, it can be noted, by knowledge produced by "experts" like Wolfgang Reinicke and Jane Nelson<sup>26</sup> – networks or partnerships are ascribed meaning in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, innovation, flexibility, community and consensus and, thereby, unambiguously enlisted within a positive discursive code. With "the network" or "the partnership" constituted as the ideal arrangement through which to solve global problems, responsible behavior on the part of responsabilized stakeholders is

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<sup>26</sup> Nelson is Director of the Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. As a fellow of the WEF, a member of the WEF's Global Governance Initiative working group and co-author of the WEF's Global Corporate Citizenship reports, she has played a key "expert" role in connection with the WEF's engagement with public-private partnerships. It can also be noted that she assisted Annan's push for greater cooperation between the UN and the private sector, and is the author of an important publication in that connection (Nelson, 2002).

defined in terms of networking or partnering. In contrast, freedom of action exercised differently – be that in the promotion of alternative forms of problem-solving, or in the mobilization of people in street protests – becomes irresponsible at best, and counter-productive at worst.

Third, the WEF and its members have sought to guide policy partnering towards a particular solution to global problems. In the WEF's reflections on global problem-solving, the market is constituted as the unambiguous ideal in relation to which such activity should be directed. The so-called "Forum approach" to global governance is defined in terms of "market-based instruments" (Figueres, 2003), and innovative problem-solving is for the main part confined to what the UN Vision Project referred to as "making new markets where they are lacking and deepening markets that are failing to fulfill their potential". (Reinicke and Deng, 2000:xiv) With global problems conceived as products of market-cum-governance failures, the provision of "the right incentives and institutional support" for self-interested and rational corporations holds out the promise of the market solving them (WEF, 2005c:3). This is of great significance, as the discursive construction of global problems as amenable to market-based solutions is central to how the WEF seeks to guide partnering in that direction. An additional way in which such partnering is guided by the WEF is through the assignment of stakeholder status. In this connection, the WEF is not only in complete control of who attends its annual meetings – with non-corporate inclusion based on acquiescence to the WEF's conception of global problem-solving within the confines of the existing socio-economic order<sup>27</sup> – but has also tended to develop its own network or partnership

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<sup>27</sup> Despite the WEF's proclaimed "philosophy of inclusiveness", NGO participation in Davos has always been limited and selective. There has been much talk about NGOs being excluded for being too critical, and some NGOs have come to see their participation as largely "cosmetic" (Khan, 2007). In spite of this, the WEF's attempt to incorporate NGOs has created some tension within the business community, with people like Digby Jones (Director General of the CGI) arguing that "Davos is becoming too politically correct" and "has been hijacked by those

projects with built-in solutions, and only subsequently invited friendly “stakeholders” to play pre-assigned roles within them.<sup>28</sup>

## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on a productive conception of power, this article has inquired into the WEF’s exercise of power in relation to a set of governmental practices central to contemporary world politics. With regard to efforts aimed at constituting a global marketplace, the WEF has not only actively promoted and supported (inter)governmental programs constitutive of such a marketplace, but also been central in articulating a globalization discourse that both induced many firms and states to adapt to the proclaimed reality of a globalized world economy, and worked to justify and depoliticize the constitution of a global marketplace. In the case of neoliberal efforts to govern states, the WEF has not only been central to their constitution as competitive market actors, but also guided their actions as such through the norms and standards established through GCR-based benchmarking. Lastly, with regard to efforts to solve global problems through new forms of governance, the WEF has contributed not only to problematize the conventional inter-state conception of world politics, but also to responsabilize its members and other non-state actors in relation to global problems, and guide global problem-solving efforts towards multi-stakeholder partnering and market-based solutions.

While the role played by the WEF have varied considerably across the governmental practices in question, they can nonetheless be considered as having worked towards the same end of providing favorable conditions for its member corporations. The WEF’s proactive contribution to the constitution of a global marketplace has worked to expand the

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who want business to apologise for itself”. (quoted in Elliott, 2005) Such tension is internal to the limits of the WEF’s power emphasized by Graz (2003).

<sup>28</sup> This contrasts sharply with Schwab’s procedural notion of multiple stakeholders coming together to “jointly define the problem, jointly propose innovative solutions and jointly engage in collaborative actions” – a procedure referred to as the three Bs of “bonding, binding, building”. (2005; see Schwab, 2006)

operational freedom for corporations at the global level. Its contributions to the governance of states in accordance with a neoliberal rationality of government have worked to improve the so-called framework conditions for corporations at the nation-state level. The WEF's more reactive contributions to humanize globalization in and through global problem-solving have worked to forestall more broad-based opposition to the ongoing efforts aimed at constituting a global marketplace, guide global problem-solving efforts in a direction that implies minimal constraints on corporations, and improve the public image of both the WEF and its members.

Although the WEF exercises significant productive power in contemporary world politics, neither it nor the broader governmental practices that it is internal to or plays into are beyond failure and contestation. In this connection, two points should be emphasized. First, government is an ongoing and always incomplete set of practices, tactics and discourses. With reality being "too unruly to be captured by any perfect knowledge", the governor's world cannot but be one of "constant experiment, invention, failure, critique and adjustment" (Miller and Rose, 1993:88). Second, government "is never a fixed and closed regime, but rather an endless and open strategic game" (Gordon, 1991:5). With government presupposing freedom of action on the part of the governed, resistance cannot be but endemic to it. While this article has focused on the broad picture as it concerns the WEF's power exercise related to a set of governmental practices that arguably are having significant reality effects, this implies neither that the governmental efforts will succeed, nor that they proceed without resistance and other challenges.

There is nothing natural or given about corporations competing in a so-called global marketplace, states striving to improve their so-called national competitiveness, or various actors networking or partnering to solve so-called global problems. Rather, these modes of conduct, as well as the modes of being and thinking internal to them, should be

conceived as effects of the operation of productive power in general and, at least to some extent, products of the exercise of such power on the part of the WEF. By both ascribing significant power to the WEF, and bringing out the power internal to the modes of being, thinking and doing in question, the present study contributes to the opening up of spaces of imaginative possibility between contemporary and future modes of being, thinking and doing in world politics. While this does not feed easily into one or another “great refusal”, which tend to prescribe or impose their own particular sets of such modes, it can play positively into a “plurality of resistances” internal to the governmental practices dealt with in the article.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The quoted expressions are from Foucault (1976:96; see Amoore, 2006).

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