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## **Moving Deckchairs Around the Titanic? Analyzing the Organizational Dynamics of UN Climate Conferences between 1995 and 2012**

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# Broad Theoretical Background

- > Neoinstitutional theory/organizational institutionalism (Powell, DiMaggio, et al.)
  - > Understanding institutional change/maintenance
  - > Understanding the dynamics of organizational fields as „communities of organizations“
  - > Recent interest in transnational fields (e.g. Djelic & Quack, 2003)
- > United Nations (UN) conferences have recently been described as field-configuring events (FCEs) that act as important “catalysts of change, especially as organizations and governments struggle to develop global solutions to complex problems” (Hardy & Maguire, 2010: 1365).
  - > "temporary social organizations" ( ) in which people from diverse organizations and with diverse purposes assemble periodically, or on a one-time basis, to announce new products, develop industry standards, construct social networks, recognize accomplishments, share and interpret information, and transact business" (Lampel & Meyer, 2008: 1026).
- „(...) scholars know relatively little about how such conferences produce institutional effects” (Hardy & Maguire, 2010: 1365)

# Research Setting: Climate Summits in the Field of Transnational Climate Policy

- > United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and ratified by 194 countries with the aim to stabilize “greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (UNFCCC, Article 2)
- > Annual Conference of the Parties (COP) is the highest decision-making body of the UNFCCC
  - > COP 3 (1997): Kyoto Protocol – commits industrialized countries to legally binding emission reduction targets
  - > COP 15 (2009) in Copenhagen, dubbed “Brokenhagen”
  - > Since then: “One step forward and two sideward” (Santarius et al., 2011, on COP 16)?
  - > Still hoping for a new global climate treaty by 2015

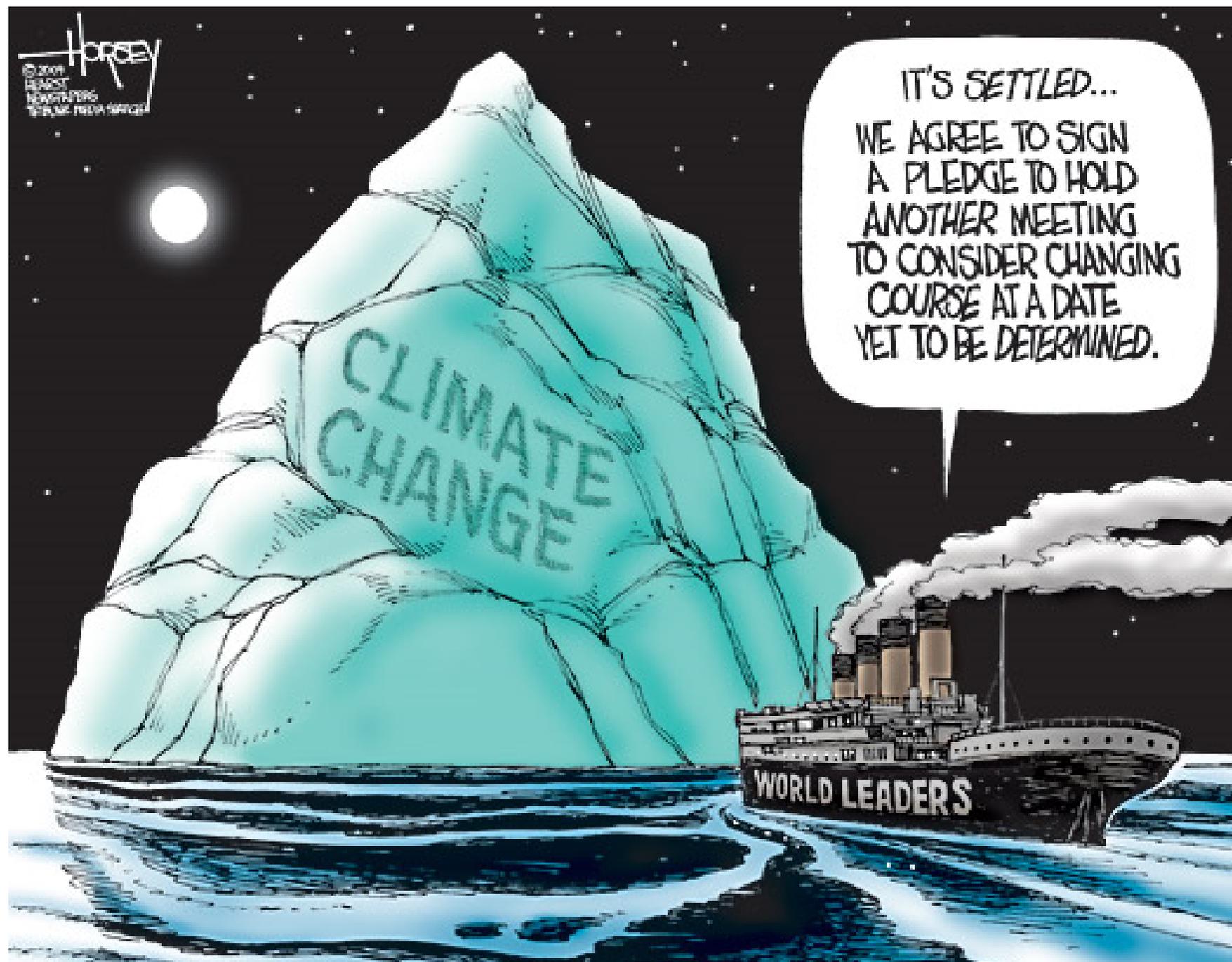
➤ *Interested in the process between 1995 and 2009*



**United Nations**  
Framework Convention on  
Climate Change

*“The worst-case scenario for me is that climate becomes a second World Trade Organization. Copenhagen, for me, is a very clear deadline that I think we need to meet. And I’m afraid that if we don’t, then the process will begin to slip. And like in the trade negotiations, one deadline after the other will not be met, and we sort of become the little orchestra on the Titanic.”*

*Yvo de Boer, UNFCCC executive secretary, 2008*



## General Research Question

*When and why do field-configuring events fail to act as “catalysts of change” (Hardy & Maguire, 2010)?*



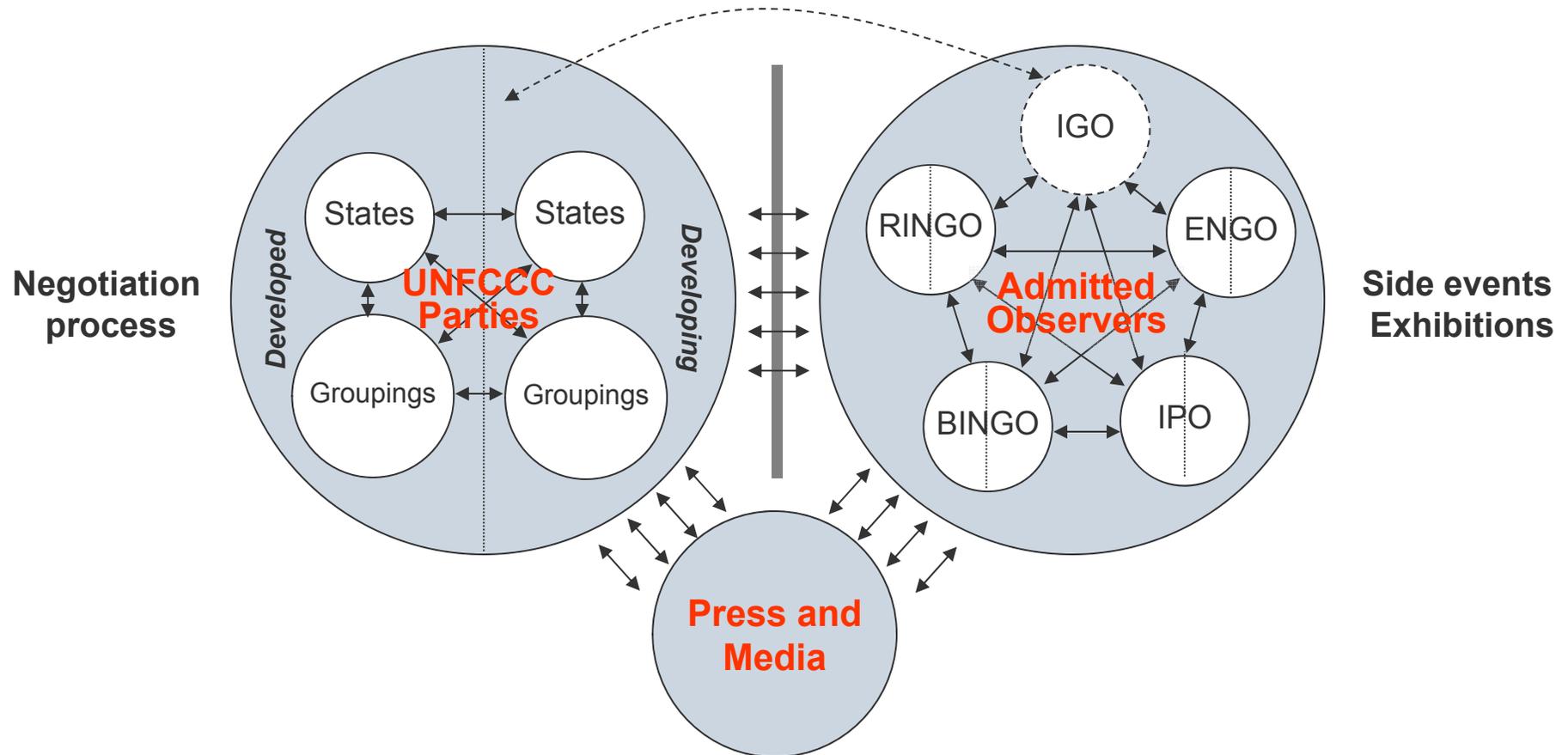
# Climate Policy as an Extreme Case

- > FCE research has studied unique events or short event series that have successfully brought about field-level changes (e.g. Oliver & Montgomery, 2008; Garud, 2008).
- > Climate policy requires that millions of organizations and individuals change their production and consumption patterns requiring a change of the economic system (Levy & Egan, 2003) and in underlying values (Hoffman, 2012) – the process is long-term.
- *This extreme case raises questions about the boundary conditions under which field-configuring events can act as catalysts of change.*
- *We study how a long-term FCE series has evolved over time to understand when and why events fail to produce field-level change.*

## Specific Research Questions

- > Hardy and Maguire (2010): FCEs act as catalysts of change because they provide open and bounded “discursive spaces” not normally available in a field.
  - > Open, because they bring actors together that do not normally interact
  - > Bounded, because field-configuring events only occur for a fixed duration and at particular intervals
  - > Peripheral actors gain unique access to decision-making arenas
- > We distinguish more formally between *temporal boundedness* and *interactional openness* to analyze
  - ...*how and why temporal boundedness and interactional openness vary across events in a field-configuring event series (long-term perspective)*
  - ...*how and why do field-configuring events change in the context of an evolving organizational field (embeddedness perspective)*

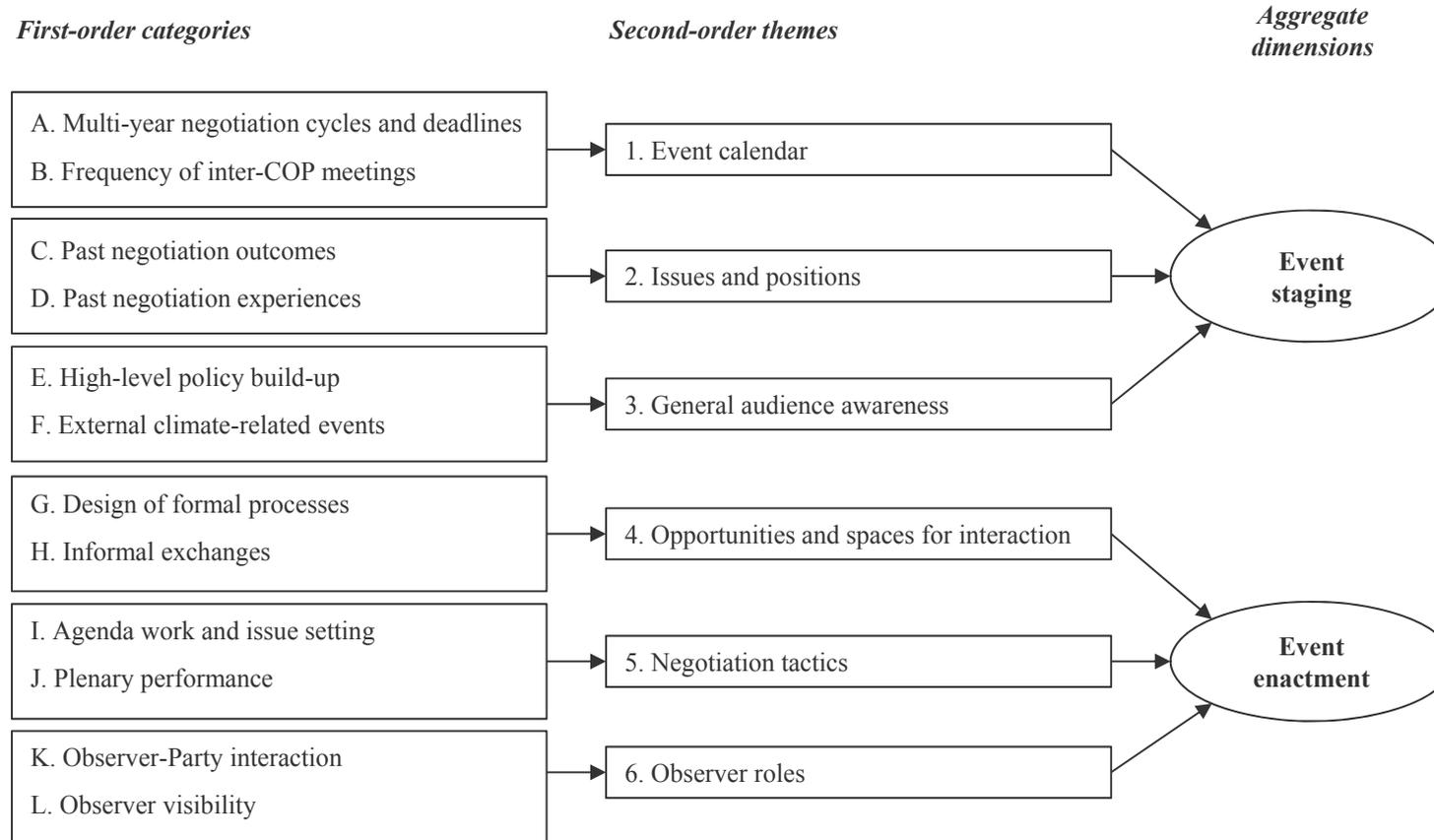
# Inside the COP: Discursive Spaces



# Methods: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study

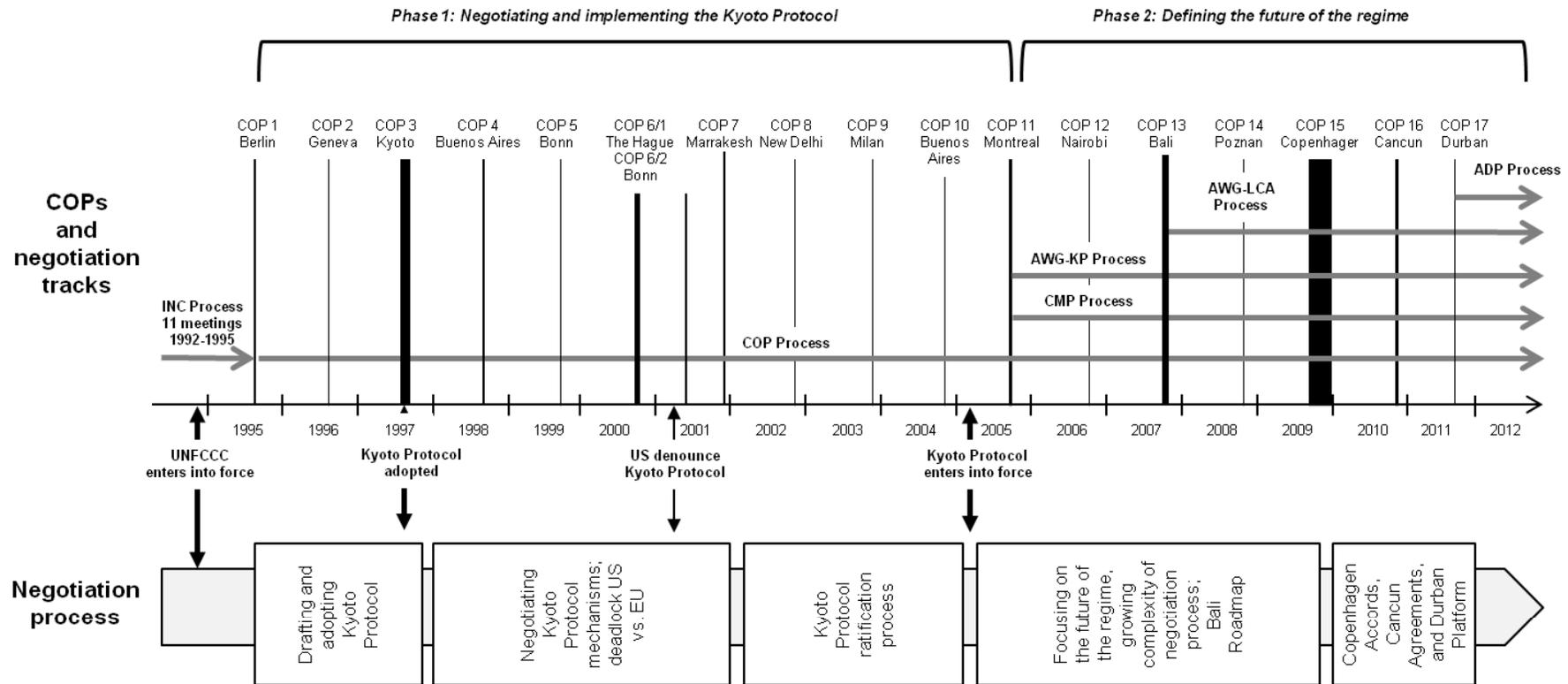
- > Interviews
  - > 28 interviews during COP 14, 2008 and SB 30, 2009
  - > 11 follow-up interviews with field experts
- > Participant observations at 13 major climate policy events since 2000
- > Document analysis
  - > 58 academic articles that analyzed the UNFCCC or commented on specific COPs
  - > All daily and summary issues of the Earth Negotiation Bulletin (ENB) related to the COP meetings from COP 1 in 1995 to COP 17 in 2011
  - > Documents from the UNFCCC Secretariat's electronic archives, e.g. official COP press releases and official speeches and statements of the UNFCCC Executive Secretary
  - > Selection of press articles from the New York Times
- > Analysis
  - > Establishing timeline of UNFCCC process and changes in “rules, positions, understandings” (Hardy & Maguire, 2010)
  - > Coding all 204 COP-related ENB issues as well as our interviews and observations

# Data Structure



## Two Main Findings

1. Variations in event staging and enactment between regular COPs and high-stake COPs (i.e., COP 3 in Kyoto, COP 13 in Bali and COP 15 in Copenhagen)
2. Increasing complexity and fragmentation after the entry into force of the KP (2005) were brought about by changes in field-level rules, positions and understandings



	1995-2005	2005-2012
<b>Field development</b>	<p><b>Rules</b> Shift from UNFCCC as a generally accepted overall framework to dual structure of the Kyoto Protocol under the Convention and US-led initiatives outside the UNFCCC. Implementation of the Kyoto Protocol necessitates specification of technical details and procedures.</p>	<p><b>Rules</b> Coexistence of different logics (legally binding targets [Kyoto Protocol] and voluntary pledges [Cancun Agreements]) inside the UNFCCC. Increasing complexity of instruments and rules.</p>
	<p><b>Positions</b> <u>Parties:</u> Growing division within industrialized and developing countries (e.g., U.S. vs. EU; China vs. Small Island States) as conflicts of interest become visible. <u>Observers:</u> Kyoto Protocol negotiations attract new groups of actors (consulting, finance, technology, research).</p>	<p><b>Positions</b> <u>Parties:</u> Development of new coalitions (e.g. EU and small developing countries); U.S. focus on Pacific region; growing influence of BASIC group. <u>Observers:</u> Diversity further increases (trade unions, indigenous people, gender, faith, ...).</p>
	<p><b>Understandings</b> From post cold-war euphoria to growing disenchantment about industrialized countries' ability to collectively assume leadership in climate change mitigation. Increasing emphasis on development, adaptation and market mechanisms complementing the initial focus on mitigation and regulation.</p>	<p><b>Understandings</b> Overall regime maintained at the price of <i>de facto</i> abandoning legally binding commitments. Acceptance of fragmented regime within UNFCCC.</p>

*Note:* The thickness of vertical lines in the timeline reflects New York Times press coverage of the COPs

# 1. Regular versus High-Stake Events

- > Differences in participation, event staging, event enactment and event outcomes
- > High-stake events display a higher sense of temporal boundedness and a decreased interactional boundedness (lower overlap across the different discursive spaces)

## ***Illustrative quotes***

Regular event: *“The fact that people believe Poznan to be less important, half-way between Bali and Copenhagen, is a great opportunity for us, because everyone is more relaxed, and there is more openness for our issues”.* (Observer interview, COP 14)

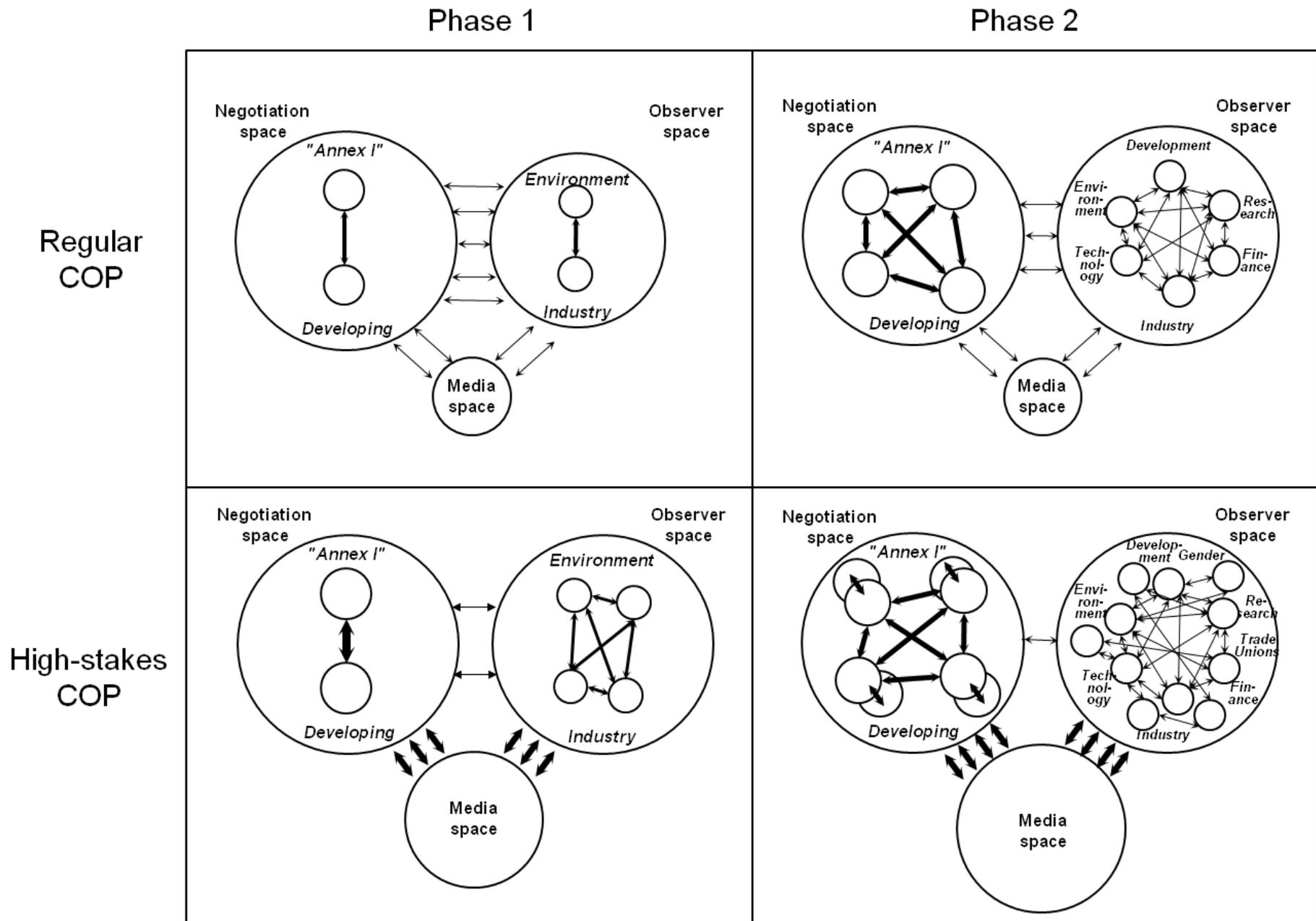
High-stake event: *“You have one year to go before Copenhagen, and the clock is ticking! Work needs to shift into higher gear!”* (COP 14 Opening statement by Y. de Boer UNFCCC Executive Secretary, 1 December 2008)

## 2. Fragmentation and Complexity

- > Temporal boundedness and interactional openness of the COPs decreased as the climate policy field entered into its second phase oriented towards defining the future of the regime:
  - > More and more diverse participants
  - > Multiplied issues
  - > More complex negotiations increasing need for internal coordination

### ***Illustrative quote***

*“(...) the welcome elevation of climate change on the priority list of national and international agendas went along with a proliferation of issues, concerns, and special interests” so that “no single individual [...] [could] follow, or even fully grasp, all agenda items negotiated under the UNFCCC” (Streck, 2012: 53)*



Note: The numbers and thickness of arrows symbolize the intensity of interaction.

# Explaining the Failure of Copenhagen

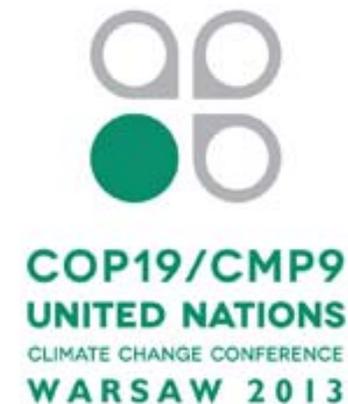
- > Intense staging-efforts to induce boundedness as the technical preparation meetings were unable to produce a convergence of positions among Parties
  - > Labelling as a “summit” by Danish organizers
  - > United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had approached the International Advertising Association to support the build-up of buzz and media coverage around the Copenhagen COP ("Hopenhagen" campaign)
  - > UN set up a second layer of high-level preparatory meetings resulting in highly publicized statements of participating heads of state
- > (Un)intended consequences
  - > Sense of disconnection between the technical and political negotiation processes before the Copenhagen conference had even started.
  - > Rumors about a parallel, informal process
  - > Unexpectedly high number attendees that caused a logistical breakdown
- *COP 15 was neither temporally bounded nor interactionally open.*

## Theoretical Conclusions

- > Events are products of a field, not just input to “field configuration”
- > Field configuration unfolds across a series of events
- > With growing field complexity and issue multiplication the field-configuring event series no longer provided temporally bounded and interactionally open discursive spaces; efforts to induce “boundedness” can further decrease openness
- > Field members’ interest in the survival of the regime turned the COPs into a site of field maintenance instead of a catalyst of institutional change
  
- *What Victor (2011) called the "global warming gridlock" may in organizational terms be described as "social deadlock" (Brunsson, 2007)—a steady state full of activity, but activity that stabilizes a situation rather than leading to institutional change.*

## What's next?

- > UNFCCC negotiations are gearing up for a new super-COP in 2015 in Paris
- > Will the recent streamlining of the negotiations and the results of the new IPCC Report manage to re-set temporal boundedness and interactional openness at a level conducive to progress?
- > But COP 19 in Warsaw: Unambitious as COP 14 in Poznań?



# Thank you!

- > Contact: [elke.schuessler@fu-berlin.de](mailto:elke.schuessler@fu-berlin.de)
- > Full paper found at *Academy of Management Journal*:  
<http://amj.aom.org/content/early/2013/03/14/amj.2011.0812.abstract>
- > Blog entry at *Organizations and Social Change*:  
<http://organizationsandsocialchange.wordpress.com/2013/07/09/moving-deckchairs-around-the-titanic-further-insights-on-the-worlds-failing-climate-regime/>
- > Wiki of the DFG-research group on „field-configuring events“:  
<http://wikis.fu-berlin.de/display/fce/About+the+Network>