

Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space

Transnationalizing bureaucracies through investment promotion: the case of Informest

Journal:	<i>Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space</i>
Manuscript ID	EPC-17/074.R1
Manuscript Type:	Article
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Abstract

This paper uses Bourdieu's notion of field to discuss the historical process of transnationalization in national and local-level bureaucracies, due to the promotion of firms' internationalization and value chains restructuring. By drawing on the case study of a single Italian state agency, *Informest*, analyzed within a larger field of public and private actors promoting Italian firms beyond borders, this paper makes the following contributions. A) it critiques the too narrow notion of the 'political' in political geography by claiming the need to include transnational firms and entrepreneurs among the actors shaping changes to the spatial reach of certain state bureaucracies, allowing them to operate across national borders to better serve firms; B) it argues that Bourdieu's notion of field is an effective theoretical tool to analyze synergies and mutual influences between bureaucracies and firms value chains; C) in so doing, it places firms alongside foreign policy and domestic political struggles to explain the emergence of outward investment promotion (IP) as a field of transnational bureaucratic practice; D) It highlights the need to not take bureaucratic organizations for granted; instead, it focuses on the broader (geo)political processes leading to the birth, growth, and occasional death of transnational bureaucracies. In so doing, it places the transnationalization of Italy's bureaucracy in a specific geo-historical context.

Keywords:

Political geography, economic geography, transnational bureaucracies, investment promotion, Pierre Bourdieu, value chains, Italy

Introduction

Far from being an integrative discipline focused on the 'reciprocity between the spatial and the social' (Massey et al., 1999: 7), human geography has developed into increasingly separated subfields. Most obviously, there is a subject matter differentiation between economic geography's focus on firms as pivotal actors in the modern economy, and political geography's attention to organizations involved in politics (Muller 2015: 302). Even though a growing scholarship is investigating the entanglement between states and markets (Birch and Siemiatycki, 2015; Jones and Clark, 2017: 1; Moio, 2018), boundaries between the sub-disciplines create obstacles to analyzing the direct and indirect political role played by firms in shaping and re-shaping the political geographies of the nation state (Agnew, 2010; Jessop, 2001). Lacking a disciplinary home, the efforts to develop conceptual tools to analyze firms as political actors may prove particularly difficult.

To shed additional light on the intertwinement between (geo)politics and firms, this paper engages geographers' work on transnational bureaucracies, arguing that the intensification of transnational bureaucratic practices since the late Twentieth Century is in part related to parallel processes of firms' internationalization and the related restructuring of value chains. Theoretically, it uses Bourdieu's notion of field (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993), precisely because this notion allows work across established conceptual boundaries, such as national/transnational,

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3 public/private, and political/economic thereby laying the ground for a broader notion of the
4 'political' that accounts for the actions of firms. In so doing, the author builds on Kuus' (2015)
5 use of field as a tool to study policy practice beyond the formal institutions of the state (Kuus,
6 2015: 439). Kuus understands field as a "social space created around ongoing struggles" (Kuus,
7 2015: 440). It can be a place, a profession, or a "networked sphere of practice such as a trade
8 negotiation" (Kuus, 2015). A field "brings together actors with similar interests," while
9 "individuals are legitimized to enter a particular field by possessing certain social resources"
10 (Kuus, 2015). The range of these resources varies according to the field: they may include
11 advanced degrees from specific schools and multilingual skills (such as in the Kuus' study of the
12 European Commission), but also a variety of tacit skills and/or titles and previous experiences.
13 Through the lens of field, bureaucracies cease to be constrained in a pre-given spatial scale;
14 instead, traditional dichotomies break down and the bureaucratic field can be analyzed
15 simultaneously as both national and transnational (Kuus, 2015). For example, an individual
16 employed in a national or subnational state agency can draw resources from transnational
17 professional networks; or an official of the European Commission in Brussels is part of a
18 professional culture that draws from multiple national bureaucracies.
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23 This paper focuses the multi-scalar factors leading to the emergence of a new transnational
24 bureaucratic field, breaking the established dichotomy of political vs. economic by factoring
25 firms in the analysis. Even though geographers are paying more attention to 'how bureaucracies
26 act on themselves (Kuus, 2015: 432)' – i.e. the reflexive processes shaping knowledge
27 production as well as rules of behavior within each agency - they tend to take the existence of
28 these organizations for granted. Few investigate why and how bureaucracies are established,
29 developed, and in some cases, disbanded. Similarly, there is a need to point out that large scale
30 geopolitical and/or domestic policy changes sometimes lead to deep restructuring – which may
31 include the emergence – or disappearance – of entire areas of bureaucratic practice. For example,
32 in the 1930s the United States witnessed the growth of national service programs around
33 Roosevelt's New Deal (Bass, 2013); on the other hand, five decades later, Russia witnessed the
34 death of a large number of organizations with the dissolution of the USSR and the end of
35 Communist Party rule. Thus, this paper asks two broad questions. **A) Who decides to start a
36 new agency and why? and B) How do firms contribute to broader (geo)political processes
37 affecting the decision to start new state agencies, and, more broadly, the birth of new fields
38 of bureaucratic practice?**
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43 In answering these questions, the paper departs from a traditional, Weberian notion of
44 bureaucracy as non-elected, hierarchically organized government body (Weber, 1922). While in
45 Weber jurisdictions are clearly distinguished (i.e. a police station has the monopoly of law
46 enforcement in a certain territory), this paper recognizes that contemporary bureaucracies can be
47 less hierarchical and more overlapping in function and territorial competence. In practice,
48 traditional state agencies persist, but their work can be integrated with semi-private organizations
49 and even private contractors extending their influence beyond the traditional functional and
50 territorial reach of the state (Birch and Siemiatycki, 2015). Thus, the theoretical section of this
51 paper contextualizes traditional definitions of bureaucracy within the most recent research on
52 transnational bureaucracies, bureaucratic practices, and public private partnerships. In so doing,
53 it argues that Bourdieu's notion of field is a useful tool in portraying bureaucracies as messy
54 social processes, at the same time constituting, and subject to, the symbolic power of the state.
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3 By divorcing bureaucratic work from views of the state as a monolithic actors it is possible to
4 include firms among the factors influencing, and in some cases participating in, the bureaucratic
5 field. Thus, relations are established between the economic geographies of firms' value chains
6 and the political geographies of transnationalizing bureaucracies. After a brief methodological
7 section, the empirical sections analyze Informest, an Italian regional agency aimed at promoting
8 foreign direct investments to Central and Eastern Europe showing the extent to which
9 geopolitical considerations as well as changes in firms value chains drove the establishment and
10 operation of the agency.
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14 The context of Informest is a bureaucratic field composed of traditional state agencies and
15 private actors providing consulting or financial services to manufacturing firms in both accessing
16 markets and sourcing beyond national borders. These actors come from different professional
17 backgrounds (lawyers, accountants, bankers, and public servants) as the goal of providing
18 services towards internationalization brings them together. As such, they receive input from and
19 provide resources to internationalizing firms. They inhabit a transnational space rooted in
20 national politics: for the most part, these actors work for public or private organizations, rooted
21 in the laws and policies of their homeland, but own offices in key locations abroad.
22 Distinguishing from the work of Phelps and others regarding agencies promoting inward flows
23 of investments (Drahokoupil, 2008; Phelps et al., 2007), this paper delves into the field of
24 "outward investment promotion" (*outward IP*), and the communities of Italian professionals
25 working in the field both within Italy and abroad in "investment promotion communities"
26 (*IPCs*). These communities reveal the connections between the transnational scale – namely,
27 through global events such as the end of the Cold War and the global financial crisis of 2008 –
28 and the national scale – i.e. reorganization of the State driven by internal politics, and changes in
29 business environments leading to large scale firms' internationalization. In brief, the end of the
30 Cold War created conditions pushing Italian firms – especially the small and medium sized
31 enterprises (SMEs) constituting the backbone of the Italian economy – to internationalize. SMEs
32 demands of services were one of the issues shaping Informest and the whole outward IP field,
33 together with foreign policy and domestic reforms.
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38 The presence of firms among the multi-scalar factors leading to the emergence of IPCs reveal
39 processes that both political and economic geography touch upon but do not fully develop. Even
40 though several studies under the rubric of geo-economics account for the role of markets in
41 larger political decisions (Cowen and Smith, 2009), these accounts omit discussions of how firm-
42 level decisions affect state agencies. On the other hand, economic geography suffers from a
43 similar bias: economic geographers are paying increasing attention to theorizing the changing
44 relations of state and firm production networks (Gereffi, 2014; Neilson et al., 2014; Pickles et al.,
45 2016); (Yeung, 2016); however, they tend to refrain from engaging political geographers'
46 findings about *structural changes* in bureaucracies leading to qualitative changes in the ways in
47 which states structure and project their power. By using Bourdieu, this paper expands on the
48 political geography notion of the 'political' to include firms, and more broadly, contributes to the
49 development of frameworks to systematically combine state-centered analyses in political
50 geography with the firms-centered analyses in economic geography.
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54 **Bureaucracies and bureaucratic practices in a transnational perspective**

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3 In Weber, the evolution of modern bureaucracies is the cornerstone of the emergence of the
4 territorial state, because modern bureaucratic organizations are inherently more efficient of their
5 medieval and late-antiquity counterparts (Weber, 1922: 969-970). In a similar fashion, current
6 scholarship on bureaucracy and bureaucratic practice is rooted in the analyses of the qualitative
7 transformations in state power since the late Twentieth Century. These discussions started with
8 analyses of changing patterns of sovereignty and territoriality, which first highlighted the
9 blurring of functional boundaries and jurisdictions across nation-states (Agnew, 1994, 2009;
10 Beck and Grande, 2007). Later critiques noticed that such literature rarely investigates state
11 institutions directly and called for a more careful ethnography of the State (Mountz, 2010, 2013).
12 A parallel discussion under the rubric of spatiality questions the centrality of the State in the
13 socio-spatial processes of our time and, in so doing, it studies transnational institutions that cross
14 national boundaries but do not derive their authority from the State (Sklair, 2001). Taken
15 together, these inquiries of spatiality and territoriality call into question treatments of the state as
16 a unitary actor (Müller, 2012). Instead, they encourage an investigation of the organizations
17 'producing' politics and geopolitics at a finer grain than the nation-state, emphasizing the
18 transnational processes that increasingly constitute bureaucracies and bureaucratic practices.
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23 Such micro-level analyses of the various parts constituting the state allow for differentiation
24 between its institutional role – as a stabilizer of strategic relations among social actors (Jessop,
25 2001), and the variety of bureaucratic organizations at multiple scales which allow states to
26 perform their roles as institutions. Even though this is a relatively recent area of enquiry, the
27 empirical evidence is enough to challenge the Weberian view of bureaucracies as a neatly and
28 hierarchically organized infrastructure of the state contained within national boundaries; instead,
29 they become a much messier set of interrelated social processes (Birch and Siemiatycki, 2015;
30 Jones and Clark, 2015; Kuus, 2013b, 2015; Morrissey, 2015), (Moisio and Paasi, 2013a, 2013b).
31 In particular, the focus on transnationalism highlights seldom considered activities of
32 bureaucratic organizations, against the common sense that “most agencies of the state focus their
33 activity on the inside, rather than outside of the state” (Kuus, 2015: 433). Second, this
34 scholarship broadens the study of bureaucracies beyond the agencies involved in day-to-day
35 service provisions (Kuus, 2015) to study less accessible agencies such as the European
36 Commission (Kuus, 2014) or the working of diplomacies (Clark and Jones, 2015). Third,
37 Morrissey suggests that changes in bureaucracies mark the contemporary evolution of the state
38 (2015); and fourth, Birch and Siemyaticki recognized the emergence of public-private
39 partnerships as key elements of bureaucratic work.
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44 Among the scholars mentioned above, Birch and Siemyaticki are particularly relevant to move
45 beyond the traditional Weberian notion of strict jurisdictional boundaries among bureaucracies,
46 because they lay the ground to include private firms in the analysis of state bureaucracies. They
47 do so by showing that traditional dichotomies between public sector organizations and private
48 enterprises are breaking. public-private partnerships are increasingly responsible for the
49 provision of public services; and at the same time managerial best practices imported from the
50 business world are increasingly used to hold public agencies accountable (2015). These new
51 developments in our understanding of bureaucracies require ad hoc theoretical frameworks to
52 better explain their role as both constitutive of the State and operating in a transnational space
53 simultaneously within and without its traditional boundaries. Thus far, scholarship on
54 transnationalism has drawn on a multiplicity of theoretical insights, including Deleuze's
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3 assemblage thinking in the most recent work on commercial diplomacies by Jones and Clark
4 (2017), but also Latour (Allen, 2011) and others. Among these theoretical possibilities, the
5 author of this paper chose the work of Pierre Bourdieu for three inter-related reasons. First,
6 following Hakli and Kallio (2014) Bourdieu's field theory "makes sense of the relationship
7 between the topological and the topographical" (2014: 7), by which they imply that field opens
8 up the relations between social structures and concrete behaviors of specific actors. Second, field
9 theory has already been used successfully to analyze transnational bureaucracies (Kuus, 2015).
10 Third and most importantly, Bourdieu highlights the awkward role of bureaucracies as being
11 both producers of, and subject to, state power. In fact, recent work by Alex Jeffrey points out that
12 the State "acquires legitimacy through seduction," (2013: 5) by which he means that the
13 continuous performance of material and spatial practices reinforces the idea of the state as a
14 stable truth. Field theory shows that bureaucracies are both instrumental in building the notion of
15 state as stable truth, as well as subjects to the state symbolic power. Such distinction opens up
16 possibilities to analyze bureaucracies in their own terms, as messy, subjective, and transnational
17 processes that may even include firms and their value chains in producing the formal hierarchical
18 structures of the state.
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23 **Bourdieu's field: a viewpoint to study transnational bureaucracies**

24 Although Hakli and Kallio emphasized the under-utilization of Bourdieu in studying
25 transnationalism (2014: 7), his work is far from marginal in Anglo-American social sciences,
26 thanks to three main notions: capital, habitus, and field. Together, they generate practice, or
27 social action (Bourdieu, 1984; Dumais, 2002: 22). In Bourdieu, capital means the various ways
28 in which groups remain dominant or gain resources. He distinguishes between economic, social,
29 and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1997). Habitus refer to 'one's disposition, which influences the
30 actions that one takes' (Dumais, 2002: 46). The position in the social structure determines
31 individuals' habiti – people internalize social expectations; in so doing, they develop a vision of
32 the world that shapes what is possible and what is not, and develop practices and expectations
33 accordingly. Fields tie together capital and habitus: each field is related to one or more types of
34 capital, which cannot exist without fields. In turn, field and capital shape habitus, which
35 guarantees social reproduction. Simply put, people use their capital in their struggles within
36 fields, which shape their vision of the world (habiti). They then pass along these visions to the
37 next generation, leading to social reproduction. Thus, 'practices or actions are results of one's
38 habitus and capital in a given field' (Dumais, 2002). In his own work, Bourdieu discussed the
39 school system as field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), in which homework and grades are
40 practices, cultural capital is the main mean to be rewarded by teachers, and students from middle
41 and upper classes tend to have the largest amount of it (Bourdieu, 1998). He also discussed the
42 fields of law (Bourdieu, 1987), and, most relevant to this research, the genesis and structure of
43 the bureaucratic field (Bourdieu and Farage, 1994).
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48 Bourdieu's research on the bureaucratic field is important because, first of all, it highlights the
49 difficulty of thinking about the state outside methodological nationalism – i.e. the use of the state
50 as container of social processes (Beck and Grande, 2007: 5). In his own work, Bourdieu linked
51 state power with methodological nationalism by arguing that "one of the major powers of the
52 state is to produce and impose (especially through the school system) categories of thought that
53 we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world-including the state itself" (Bourdieu and
54 Farage 1998: 2). One of the ways in which this power expresses itself is to make "unthinkable"
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possibilities discarded by the State. As an example, Bourdieu discusses the production of electricity: even though it would be possible to produce electricity at home, the French state favored electricity grids to the point that people stopped considering other possibilities (Bourdieu and Farage 1998: 2). In other words, one of the major powers of the state is to produce ideas and symbols that people then internalize as truths. Through its power to create symbols, the state is capable of concentrating symbolic economic and social capital, and to exercise symbolic violence that shapes fields (Bourdieu and Farage, 1998: 3-4). The bureaucracy is both instrumental to the diffusion of state power, and at the same time subject to its symbolic power: states choose to portray their bureaucracy as a “universal group,” a “rational instrument” capable of realizing “general interest” (Bourdieu and Farage, 1998: 2).

The work of Beck and Grande (2007), Kuus (2015), and Jones and Clark (2015) are important steps in thinking about bureaucracies outside the categories of thought imposed by the State. Beck and Grande’s ‘theory of reflexive modernization’ argues that the ‘either/or logic’ that formerly characterized the Europe of disparate nation-states has been eclipsed by a ‘both/and logic’ that allows for less distinction between spheres of action and institutional ascriptions of jurisdictions (Beck and Grande, 2007: 30; Beck and Levy, 2013). In their view, such shift enabled bureaucracies to become ‘transnational’ (working across territorial boundaries), and ‘fusions’ (joining their resources towards specific projects) (Beck and Grande, 2007: 154). Similarly, Jones and Clark (2015) argue there is a changing geography of diplomacy away from state-centered forms of organization towards an ‘integrative diplomacy’ that “recognizes the different stakeholders and ensembles of actions and things that constitute the state” (2015: 2). Taken together, these scholars assume the persistence of the nation-state, which, in Bourdieu’s terms, is still capable of maintaining its symbolic power and shape fields. At the same time, they detect a crisis in the ways in which the State deploys this power to represent itself. These self-representations oscillate from defending the old territorial framework in an attempt to maintain the “chimera of state permanence and solidity” (Jones and Clark, 2015: 2) to active efforts to promote new kinds of transnational regulatory frameworks by re-training their diplomats and high level officials (Kuus, 2015).

Kuus’ (2015) use of Bourdieu’s notion of field is part of the efforts to analyze transnational bureaucracies in an age of rapid functional transformations and symbolic instability of the state. In her view, Bourdieu is “noteworthy because of its focus on social practice beyond the formal institutions of the state” (Kuus, 2015: 439). Field is particularly useful to study transnational policies because it is not anchored to any spatial scale. Fields do not have to stop at any state’s boundary; instead, they bring to the fore the national and the transnational simultaneously (Kuus, 2015). As a result, “transnational regulatory institutions operate in part through power struggles among national groups, but those groups fight over specifically international capital. The reverse is true as well: the construction of a transnational bureaucratic space is inseparable from the promotion of national models of state, the individuals who move in these circles are aided by a kind of cosmopolitan capital” (Kuus, 2015: 440). In a nutshell, according to Kuus, the notion of field helps resolve the tensions between national and transnational scales in ways that contextualize the symbolic power of the state without being trapped by it.

By dissolving the formal structure of the state into its underlying social practices, the notion of field helps breaking *simultaneously* the dichotomies between national vs. international - as in

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3 Kuus' work - and public vs. private as in Birch and Siemyaticki (2015). It does so by first
4 focusing on the organizations carrying out those practices, their unstable boundaries, and their
5 changing relationships with other organizations and non-state actors. Fields can use the
6 interpretative lens to 'theorize the inside' of the state, its organizational components, and the
7 relations among them (Müller, 2015). Second, field allows researchers to discuss individual
8 actors social capital, highlighting that individuals participating in the organizations discussed in
9 this paper possess not only a "cosmopolitan capital" (Kuus, 2015: 440), but also a professional
10 capital that enable them to interact with *both* entrepreneurs and legislators, as shown in the
11 following empirical sections.
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14 **Methodology**

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16 The source of information for this case study consists of three semi-structured interviews with
17 Informest's first president, who led the agency from 1993 to 1996; the vice-president, who
18 worked for the agency from the early 1990s to 2007; and the head of business services of
19 Informest Consulting in 2014. The latter is a for-profit company established in 2007 to handle
20 Informest services to the private sector separately from public tenders. Besides the interviews,
21 the author collected around 70 unpublished internal documents, ranging from internal reports,
22 minutes of staff meetings, documents related to projects, and PowerPoint presentations delivered
23 by Informest employees at various meetings with project partners and at conferences.

24 Information about the field in outward investment promotion consist of in-depth key informant
25 interviews with senior officials (current and retired) in other Italian public agencies including
26 ICE, consulate officials in China, Slovakia and Romania, Italian business consultants operating
27 in Italy, China, and throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and leaders of Italian business
28 associations in China, Slovakia and Romania. We also collected and analyzed texts of Italian
29 laws, and official macroeconomic data, investment flows, and trade collected by ISTAT and
30 ICE. The analysis focuses on the historical processes leading to the emergence of the new
31 organizations supporting firms' internationalization, with particular attention to the stakeholders
32 involved. Laws are cited in the format used in Italian official documents: for example, Law
33 19/1991 means the 19th law approved by the Italian parliament in 1991. Such methodological
34 choices respond to some of the issues Kuus raises in her discussion of ethnographical methods in
35 the study of foreign policy (2013a). First, she pointed out the difficulty to access foreign policy
36 professionals (Kuus, 2013: 116); the issue was solved by focusing on a regional-level agency
37 with lower barriers to access. Second, this paper avoid claims to ethnographical work as "focus
38 on everyday lived experience, on finding in the little what eludes us in the large" (Kuus, 2013:
39 117). Instead, we took the documental evidence of birth and development of Informest and
40 similar organizations and used the interviews with its presidents and vice presidents to uncover
41 the strategies and motivations that cumulatively led to the establishment of the IP field, in order
42 to uncover the characteristics of this 'bounded community' (Kuus, 2013) placed between firms
43 value chains and the restructuring of the state.
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50 **Informest and its field: a historical perspective**

51 1 Informest's leadership social capital

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53 To begin the discussion of Informest and the surrounding field, it is worth noticing that fields
54 are, in large part, shaped by individuals' social capital. In this specific case, key informants in the
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3 agency have had long careers encompassing politics as elected officials, experience in the private
4 sector as business consultants, and, in some cases, work as career bureaucrats in traditional state
5 agencies. Thus, the intertwining between political and economic geographies – through the
6 actions of policy makers and business people – is a fundamental feature of Informest, built in the
7 social capital of its leadership. Following an agreement with the interviewees, this paper is
8 allowed to disclose only the biographical data of the actual founding president, Mr. Gianni
9 Bravo. Although we cannot disclose biographical details of other interviewees, his experience is
10 representative of the blend of public and private experiences oftentimes found not only in
11 Informest, but across the IPC field. He introduced himself as follows:
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15 I was a specialized worker in a large manufacturing firm here in [Italy's Eastern
16 border region called] Friuli. Then I became member of the Socialist party, and I
17 rose [sic] through the party ranks to become Secretary of the regional branch.
18 Then I became president of the Chamber of Commerce in Udine, vice-president
19 of the Union of Italian Chambers of Commerce and part of the board of directors
20 of several banks. I was the first president of Informest from 1993 to 1996. After
21 Informest, I managed a commercial broker company, then started my own: SCIC,
22 which sells Italian products abroad (Interview with founding President, Informest,
23 June 20, 2014)
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26 At the time of the interview, Mr. Bravo was in his eighties, working in the office of his brokering
27 firm, adorned with photos and memorabilia of his political career including a formal recognition
28 from the US State Department for “his work to establish relations to bring Albania out of China's
29 sphere of influence” at the end of the Cold War (interview). His biography shows the fluidity of
30 a social capital developed during the Cold War, which allowed him to shift from factory worker,
31 to regional politician, and then move to the banking sector to end his career as a commercial
32 broker. Through his political career, his social capital acquired a transnational dimension, crucial
33 in establishing Informest.
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36 2 The birth of Informest

37 Mr. Bravo's social capital shaped Informest through the interactions between his informal
38 professional network and the formal legislative process of the Italian state. Informest was
39 established by the Italian Parliament in 1991, through Law 19/1991. The title of the law was ‘for
40 the development of the Italian Eastern border regions’. The law appointed two organizations
41 within the Italian bureaucracy - the regional authorities of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* and of *Veneto*
42 and the national agency ‘*Istituto per il Commercio Estero* (Institute of Foreign Trade, ICE) - to
43 enact Informest in December 1992. Mr. Bravo was charged with the actual implementation
44 thanks to his policy-related and business experiences in a region bordering the just dissolved Iron
45 Curtain. From the start, he drew on inputs at a variety of scales, from the transnational, to the
46 national, to the local. He described the process of planning and establishing the agency as
47 follows:
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51 I was invited to be part of the team that wrote Law 19/1991 ... At the very
52 beginning, Informest was just a name I invented, meaning ‘to inform the East’
53 and [a provision of] social capital. Thus, I established a high-level scientific
54 committee to design the institution: it included a representative from OECD in
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3 Paris, a representative from Trento University, expert lawyers in international law,
4 the president of the Adenauer Foundation from Germany, and the former Italian
5 Ambassador in Moscow... The Adenauer Foundation inspired me greatly...
6 [following its example] we decided to give Informest the task of producing and
7 regularly updating business guides for each country in Central Eastern Europe and
8 Former Soviet Union– and selling them to Italian firms and consultants (Interview
9 founding President, Informest, June 20, 2014)
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12 This interview excerpt reveals both the role of individual initiative – the entrepreneurship –
13 involved in starting a new public agency, and also the extensive transnational networks of
14 experts involved in its development. It also shows that, at the micro-level, the functional
15 boundaries taken for granted in Weberian understanding of bureaucracy were already blurred:
16 constituting the agency involved an advisory board that drew from private associations
17 (Adenauer Foundation), universities (Trento) and international organizations (OECD).
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20 Informest’s original charter built the organization as a transnational entity. Informest was
21 constituted as an association, with membership open to “public agencies and other juridical
22 persons” interested in developing economic, social, and cultural relations between Italy’s North
23 Eastern regions and countries in the CEE and FSU (Statute, 1992, article 1). It also established
24 the Italian headquarters, stated the possibility of co-operating with other public as well as private
25 agencies, and allowed for the opening of subsidiary branches abroad (Statute, 1992, article 2).
26 The choice of headquarters in article 2 is also an example of the multi-scalar strategic relations
27 constituting the state (Jessop, 2001), that involves struggle and competition among bureaucratic
28 organizations. At the local level, Informest had to find its space among other organizations in
29 North Eastern Italy, as shown in this interview excerpt with the former Vice-president:
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33 Geographically, it was located in Gorizia, the smallest provincial capital in the
34 Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, where no other agency dealing with
35 internationalization was located. As such, the local Chamber of Commerce fully
36 supported its starting-up process, and Informest was enabled to grow, beyond
37 some local politically motivated jealousy (Interview former Vice president,
38 Informest, July 31, 2014).
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41 In short, the first two articles of the charter allowed the agency both the functional overlaps and
42 the cross-border activities implied in political geography (Agnew, 2009) and in discussions of
43 bureaucracy (Beck and Grande, 2007; Kuus, 2015). They also show the fragmented and
44 competitive organizational nature of the state (Müller, 2015), in which strategic relations at the
45 transnational, national, and local scales shape the effectiveness and work of each bureaucratic
46 organization (Jessop, 2001).
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49 3 The emergence of the IP field

50 The birth of Informest was part of a larger change in Italian bureaucracies, driven by geopolitics,
51 internal political debates, and – most important for this paper’s argument – changes in firms’
52 value chains. In particular, the emergence of a discernible outward IP field in the early 1990s
53 marks the transnationalization of a portion of the Italian bureaucracy at the same time in which
54 firms’ value chains also began expanding beyond borders (REF. SUPRPESSED, 2009 and
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3 Dunford, 2006). The specific way in which the two processes were inter-related connects –
4 through Bourdieu’s theoretical lens – the (political) geography of bureaucratic change with the
5 (economic) geography of firms’ value chains. In practice, firms’ transnational activities were
6 only one of three concurrent struggles that caused the IP field to emerge; the other two were a)
7 geopolitics, i.e. the redefinition of Italy’s foreign policy after the Cold War; and b) domestic
8 politics, i.e. the struggle to increase local autonomies.
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11 As for geopolitics, the end of the Cold War presented the Italian government with specific
12 geostrategic challenges as Italy’s Northeastern border coincided with the Iron Curtain.
13 Pacification challenged Italy to redefine its own role in the international community. At the
14 international level, Italy lost strategic importance for the US and NATO, thereby losing some
15 military investment. At the same time, it was a key participant in the debates leading to the
16 enlargement of the European Union to Central and Eastern Europe (EU, no date). As for
17 domestic policies, since 1992, Italy has gone through a series of reforms to give more autonomy
18 to its regions (Carbone, 2011), paving the way for the establishment of new regional agencies
19 abroad. New trade opportunities emerged in the Italian regions closer to the old Iron Curtain,
20 which were no longer heavily militarized. Together, these changes represented a geostrategic
21 storm that concurrently opened market opportunities for firms in CEE, and political opportunities
22 for tighter cooperation with Eastern neighbors (interview founding President, Informest, June 20,
23 2014).
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27 As for firms’ value chains, they shifted from a predominantly national system to a regionalized
28 one in an effort to contain cost and meet increased international competition. Before the 1990s,
29 ‘industrial districts’ of small firms in the Northeast and Eastern Coast supplied large Fordist
30 enterprises based in the Northwest (Becattini, 1979; Piore and Sabel, 1984). Sourcing was
31 primarily domestic. Starting in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, firms expanded abroad,
32 establishing new contracting relations and/or foreign direct investments (Amighini and
33 Rabellotti, 2006; Chiarvesio et al., 2006; Coro and Micelli, 2006). Working in the textile and
34 clothing industries, Dunford (2006) showed that the wave of international outsourcing in the
35 1990s was a phase of a consolidated strategy where Milan fashion industry leaders had pushed
36 suppliers to re-locate to lower wage areas as a cost-containment strategy (Dunford, 2006: 38).
37 Italian scholars identified a distinct geography of Italian commitment abroad, highlighting that,
38 between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, CEE emerged as a privileged location for Italian
39 sourcing investments (Corò and Volpe, 2006).
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43 Both the state and the private sector responded to the rapid changes of the 1990s with
44 innovations aimed at increasing the reach of both the bureaucracy and business services beyond
45 borders, constituting transnational public and private organizations aimed at the twin goals of
46 supporting firms value chains and asserting Italy’s foreign policy. In rapid succession, the Italian
47 Parliament approved three new laws establishing public agencies aimed at both political
48 cooperation and market expansion. Law 100/1990 established Simest, a state agency providing
49 financial services to internationalization. Law 19/1991 (the same law establishing Informest)
50 established Finest, a second agency providing financial services but with a more focused scope:
51 it served firms headquartered in the Northeastern regions close to the former Iron Curtain.
52 Moreover Finest financing was specific to projects in CEE and the former Soviet Union (FSU).
53 Law 212/1992 expanded both agencies and established grant programs, financed by the Italian
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3 government, managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign
4 Commerce, to provide assistance for economic development in CEE. Later, domestic political
5 debates on local autonomies contributed to the emerging field. In 2001, Italy reformed its
6 constitution, allowing regional governments to establish their own agencies supporting
7 internationalization. As a result, a large number of initiatives emerged, ranging from viable
8 agencies such as *Toscana Promozione* (internationalization agency of Tuscany) to less structured
9 promotional initiatives. Besides these regional agencies, after 2001, entrepreneurs and policy
10 makers established new private and public-private hybrid organizations aimed at promoting the
11 export of specific products. Additionally, there are business associations focusing on specific
12 countries, which may or may not have public financing. The two largest among these many
13 associations are the Italy-China Association and the Italy-Russia Association, both based in Italy.
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17 Meanwhile, Italian firms invested abroad began asking for better services, especially in the areas
18 of consulting, financing, and accounting because the earlier system of export support did not
19 meet their new needs. REF. SUPPRESSED, 2009 described the transition to the new services,
20 showing the initial resistance of banks and service providers to provide services to investments
21 perceived as 'dangerous adventures' (REF. SUPPRESSED, 2009: 335). Eventually, Italian
22 entrepreneurs in CEE lobbied their own banks and business consultants in Italy hard enough that
23 they began providing Italian-speaking legal, accounting, and financial services in the host
24 countries (REF SUPPRESSED, 2015). Second, these Italian firms constituted chambers of
25 commerce and business associations abroad. These associations have hybrid status because they
26 are private entities in the host country but enjoy special recognition and official partnership with
27 the Italian government (REF SUPPRESSED, 2009). As a result of the feedback from firms
28 abroad, chambers of commerce and business associations in Italy began to provide services to
29 internationalization, mostly in terms of organizing missions abroad, supporting firms'
30 participation in international trade fairs, and maintaining databases for consultancies (interview
31 Chief China Representative, Consorzio Camerale per l'Internazionalizzazione, 19 December
32 2013; and interview founding president, Informest 20 June 2014).
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37 The cumulative effect of these innovations in the public and private sectors led to the emergence
38 of an outward IP field. These agencies, associations, and consultants share a common social
39 space, especially in key locations abroad where key public actors and private consultants became
40 leaders of the community of Italian expatriates (see REF. SUPPRESSED, 2015 and REF.
41 SUPPRESSED, 2016 for the description of the IP community in Bratislava, Slovakia and
42 Shanghai, China). Their similar interests as well as their struggles are driven by the goal of
43 providing services to firms. Table 1 summarizes those services, by adopting the viewpoint of an
44 ideal-type manufacturing firm seeking to internationalize. It breaks down the various processes
45 involved in internationalization, identified throughout a decade of interviews with firms and
46 consultants. The table first lists the service providers, distinguishing between private for-profit,
47 non-profit, hybrid public-private, and public actors. Then, the first column identifies the services
48 firms need in progressive order, starting with a market survey and ending with implementation.
49 Most firms will undertake some or all of these steps, regardless of the type of investment. The
50 second column 'service provided' provides a brief description of what the consultants will
51 actually do. The third column 'actor providing service' identifies the direct service providers; the
52 column 'auxiliary support' identifies actors that service providers may choose to consult to
53 acquire specific expertise. The goal of the table is not to draw conclusions on the effects of
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3 services on firms' performances, or to invite comparison between areas with or without IPCs;
4 rather, it is to show that services to internationalization flow seamlessly from public to private
5 sector providers, and that there is a constant exchange of information among service providers
6 themselves. As a result, services oftentimes overlap, leading to conflicts between public and
7 private actors, and sometimes even between IP and clients (REF. SUPPRESSED, 2012). Thus,
8 outward IP can be described as a field, because it involves socialization and struggles among
9 service providers with similar and overlapping interests, even though it involves actors in
10 different professions in the public and private sectors. A common skillset allows individuals to
11 join the field, including training in accounting, law, and experiences in industrial organization, as
12 well as 'soft' skills in intercultural communication, that allow them to mediate between the
13 worldview of Italian entrepreneurs and local partners (Interview Head of International Desk,
14 Unicredit Bank Slovakia, June 26, 2012).
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26 4 The consolidation of Informest

27 As a part of a growing field, Informest soon began to grow and consolidate, expanding its
28 services to new areas and new functions beyond the core mission of informing businesspeople
29 about opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe. By 1996, it employed around ten people, who
30 scouted business opportunities (both for trading and investment), fostered transnational business
31 partnerships, and provided consultancy, training programs, and local assistance to the companies
32 for their ventures in CEE. Because of its institutional goals, Informest began to immediately
33 establish its own network of professionals in CEE. By so doing, it implemented the provision of
34 article 2 of its statute, actively contributing to the expansion of state functions beyond the border.
35 Funded by the Italian Government through the Ministry of Foreign Trade, with the active support
36 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the network of Italian Embassies in the relevant countries,
37 Informest carried out two major projects for the identification, selection and training of
38 consultants supporting Italian entrepreneurs. Recipients were two 'high-level experts' (state
39 officials or consultants) in each country of CEE, who became the actors of an Informest network
40 aimed at supporting Italian FDI in particular. By early 1998, the network was fully operational in
41 eighteen countries. The tasks of these 'investment promoters' included editing and updating
42 country business guides as well as providing local public relations and legal assistance.
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46 Along with this process, Informest developed its internal organization based on two departments:
47 Consulting & Assistance and Information, the latter based on the early choice of Informest to
48 enshrine all its information and documentation activity in the new web-based ICT, already
49 adopted in 1993. Informest's IT center quickly developed into one of the pilot internet platforms
50 for business purposes in Italy. In 1994 Informest also started to access the funding programs of
51 the European Union (EU), beginning its participation in the large transnational network of
52 bureaucracies that emerged around EU funding programs. The first EU project consisted of
53 organizing a large international event bringing together firms in five different sectors from four
54 regions of EU member states (North Eastern Italian Regions – Bavaria – Catalonia – Corsica)
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3 and from four CEE regions or small countries (Slovenia – Slovakia – Estonia – Hungarian South
4 Trans-Danubian Region). The event took place in January 1995 in Gorizia (I) with the
5 participation of over 120 SMEs. Meaningfully, the project was the first case of synergy between
6 the programs of the European Commission dedicated to support businesses, and the Phare
7 Program supporting the transition to market economy and the EU perspective of CEE countries.
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10 Following this first experience with EU funds, Informest established a new department, called
11 ‘Development Projects’ to work on EU and Italian national grants, which soon provided around
12 50% of Informest’s turnover. Projects focused for the most part on regional economic policies,
13 organizing meetings aimed at policy transfer between EU (mostly Italian, but also others) and
14 CEE regions, as well as financing business-to-business meetings and manager training programs.
15 The IPC expanded Italy’s institutions beyond national boundaries to support firms; thus the use
16 of EU funds is not in conflict with its role as an agency dedicated to a national development
17 strategy.
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20 In the following years, Informest kept expanding. In 2007, it incorporated the Institute for the
21 Studies on East Europe (ISDEE), a policy, geo-political and economic research center based in
22 Trieste since the end of the 1970s. In this way a fourth department was established, Studies &
23 Research, which provided demand-driven innovative approaches to the market analysis of the
24 target countries of the agency. Thus, by 2008 Informest was a flexible, well-established, regional
25 public agency with an extended network of consultants and institutional partners across CEE and
26 beyond. In terms of size and reach, it was smaller than ICE but larger than other regional
27 agencies and private consultancies. It articulated its operations to different layers of commercial
28 relations that included new member states of the European Union, still candidate or potential
29 candidate countries, mostly in the Balkans, and the New Independent States of the former Soviet
30 Union and Mongolia: additionally, China was later added. It served, across CEE, the needs of
31 both Italian firms pursuing internationalization projects as well as regional and governmental
32 institutional cooperation. The goal of supporting both firms and government bodies where
33 achieved through economic development and policy transfer projects. For the most part, these
34 involved Informest’s participation in EU-funded projects based on collaborations between
35 multiple state agencies across EU member states. As such, it acted both as infrastructure for
36 Italian GVCs in CEE, as an element of the changing geopolitics of the Italian State and its
37 projection to CEE, and as a part of the transnational fusion bureaucracy that connects the
38 supranational and national bureaucracies of the EU.
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43 5 Restructuring of Informest and the IP field after 2008

44 Our research in Shanghai (REF. SUPPRESSED, 2016) indicates that the Italian IP field
45 underwent considerable transformations after 2008. In short, the financial crisis, followed by an
46 incipient debt crisis in 2011 and years of recession forced IP actors, both in the public and
47 private sector, to operate with fewer resources. Several agencies closed, others restructured,
48 while reforms of the system of chambers of commerce was discussed but blocked politically. At
49 the same time, the Italian government gave high priority to supporting exporters, giving more
50 tasks to public agencies. As a result, IP actors were consolidated and had to find ways to increase
51 their synergies to provide better services.
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3 Due to changes in EU laws, Infomerst had begun restructuring even before the crisis. In 2007, a
4 new EU regulation on competition allowed only public agencies to compete for EU tenders
5 dedicated to the public sector and only private firms to compete for EU (or national) tenders
6 dedicated to the private sector. Informest had traditionally done both, and thus split in two:
7 Informest, a public agency competing for public tenders, and Informest Consulting, a private
8 firm dedicated to business services.
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11 Services provided to firms are also changing. The Head of Business Services at Informest
12 Consulting describes its work as follows:
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15 Informest Consulting is tailoring its services to help each individual firm to find
16 partners and establish operations abroad. Second, it connects firms with the
17 appropriate financial instruments. Third, it helps firms with group applications for
18 public (national or regional) tenders. Because of the crisis, these large tenders are
19 much rarer than it used to be. Fourth, it supports applications to international
20 tenders (Interview Head of Business Services, Informest Consulting, June 23,
21 2014).
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24 The keyword in this interview is tailoring. Like the rest of the IPC, Informest Consulting must
25 contend with an increased demand for its services, but fewer resources available to pay for them.
26 Thus, like other actors in the IPC, it is segmenting, tailoring, and rationalizing its consulting
27 services. More broadly, the establishment of Informest Consulting reflected the evolution of
28 Informest from the original goal of servicing internationalizing firms to a broader mission that
29 involves supporting both Italian firms and other public agencies involved in foreign and
30 development policies in CEE and FSU. These changes led to adopting a new charter in 2009
31 (Statute, 2009). Article 3 contains the following mission statement (emphasis added):
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34 [Informest] has the goal to develop economic relations between Italy and Central
35 and Eastern European Countries providing [private] enterprises and *public and*
36 *private institutions* with the following services:

- 37
38 - Information ... [about laws and markets]
39 - ... Assistance in specific... investment projects
40 - Training programs...
41 - Organization of meetings, conferences, symposia, seminars, and publications
42 (Statute 2009, art 3)
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45 In a nutshell, the evolution of Informest has been part of a larger IP field, which led to new
46 relationships between various organizations comprising the Italian State; it contributed to
47 blurring the functional boundary between public sector and private consultancies servicing
48 internationalization, and changed the territorial reach in which these relationships occur, from a
49 national to a transnational scale. Firms played a role in the emergence and development of IP,
50 showing the changes in value chains and bureaucratic structures are inter-related. However, the
51 mutual influence between transnational firms and bureaucracies is not exclusive, because firms
52 were not the only actors shaping the IP field. Politicians and high-level officials played an
53 equally important role by pursuing internal political reforms, foreign policy innovations after the
54 Cold War, and anti-crisis measures after 2008.
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Conclusion

This paper critiqued the sub-disciplinary distinction between political and economic geography, arguing that a too narrow understanding of the political by political geographers leads to omitting the role of firms and value chains in reshaping nation states. It particularly engaged Kuus' (2015) work on transnational bureaucracies and her use of Bourdieu's field to break away from the spatial and scalar constraints produced by the symbolic power of the state. In so doing, this paper participates in a larger scholarly trend that critiques the Weberian notion of bureaucracy in favor of less hierarchical and more overlapping in function and territorial competence. Such scholarship is becoming increasingly relevant at a time of symbolic instability of the state (Clark and Jones, 2017) in which bureaucracies' traditional role of both producers of, and subject to, the symbolism of sovereign territorial states conflate with the increasingly transnational and chaotic processes underlying the production of bureaucracies and bureaucratic practices. Within this larger debate, the author argued that Bourdieu's field theory is a useful tool to break *simultaneously* the established distinctions of political vs. economic and national vs. foreign; therefore Bourdieu a) provides a useful tool to discuss the political role of firms and value chains in reshaping bureaucracies, and b) understands firms' action in synergy with multiple actors belonging to a more traditional political realm, operating at a variety of scales.

Field theory allowed the paper to achieve two goals. The first was to connect two largely separated lines of scholarly enquiry – the already mentioned discussion of transnational bureaucracies and the analysis of the shift from traditional bureaucracies towards functional mixes of public and private actors (Birch and Siemiatycki, 2015). **Answering the first research question, Bourdieu's theory bridged these two areas of research by focusing on individual actions and motivations contributing to the emergence of bureaucratic fields**, highlighting the relations between key individuals' social capital and the formal legislative process of the state. **These relations then enabled to answer the second research question, including firms – and in particular the processes of restructuring value chains to expand firms networks beyond borders – among broader geopolitical processes shaping transnational bureaucracies.** In so doing, the paper gave more nuance to the geo-economics account of the role of markets in larger political decisions; moreover, it also showed that value chains are not passive recipients of state policies, but active contributors to qualitative changes in state structures.

Empirically, answers to the research questions focused on the relationship between the economic geographies of Italian firms' value chains stretching beyond Italy's borders since the early 1990s and the birth and growth of the agency Informest and its field, i.e. of outward IP. Field theory shows these connections at the micro-level by, first, taking into account, based on professional resumes, the social capital of Informest's actual founding president and other key figures that includes political activity, policy making, and private sector experiences based on networks in Italy and abroad. Second, it shows how Mr. Bravo's professional network interacted with the formal legislative processes of starting the agency, giving some nuances about the political role of transnational firms and expatriate entrepreneurs. It shows that their 'voice' did play a role in the establishment of the agency; however, such a role was not direct, but resulted from the interpretation of firms' needs by specific policy makers through the lens of their social capital.

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3 After discussing the birth of Informest, the paper described the development of the agency and
4 its field over time. In so doing, it departed from the current literature, which tends to take
5 bureaucracies for granted. Instead, it emphasized the dynamic evolution of fields (Bourdieu and
6 Farage, 1994), showing the processes that consolidated outward IP into a bureaucratic field in its
7 own right, involving a) the struggles involved in the provision of oftentimes overlapping services
8 to firms and b) the similar habits and social capital of both public servants, private consultants,
9 and employees of business associations. Because of such variety in professional backgrounds,
10 the outward IP field is consistent with a post-Weberian notion of bureaucracy as a blend of
11 public agency, semi-public actors, and private entities supporting them.
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15 In tracing the history of outward IP, the author discussed the influence played by firms' value
16 chains alongside geopolitics and internal political debates. Geopolitics – especially the
17 redefinition of Italy's role in the international community after the end of the Cold War – was
18 especially important. Opening up the Iron Curtain allowed firms' investments in CEE – a
19 geographically and culturally proximate space where even small firms had a chance of success. It
20 also caused the Italian State to redefine foreign policy to include outward IP as a mean to
21 establish political relations with CEE. Italy's domestic politics also played a major role,
22 especially with respect to debates favoring more autonomy of subnational governments, but also
23 with respect to the specific conditions of the border regions closest to the old Iron Curtain. On
24 the other hand, Italy's participation in the European Union allowed Informest to access grant
25 programs crucial to its growth. Finally, the financial crisis after 2008 led to a consolidation and
26 rationalization of Informest and outward IP as a whole. In brief, Bourdieu's field enabled the
27 author to synergistically analyze changes in firms' value chains, the foreign policy consequences
28 of the end of the Cold War, Italy's domestic politics, and the global financial crisis. These are all
29 contributing factors in the birth and growth of Informest and outward IP, understood as a new,
30 post-Weberian, transnational bureaucratic field positioned across political and economic
31 geographies.
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Table 1. Services to internationalization – viewpoint of firms *Source: author's elaboration of interviews*

Service providers: consultants (private for-profit), banks (private for-profit), Confindustria (private non-profit), chambers of commerce (hybrid), country-specific associations (hybrid), regional governments, ICE, SACE, Simest, Finest, Informest (public), foreign actors (vary)

Type of service	Service provided	Actor providing the service	Actors providing auxiliary support
Market survey	Information about market opportunities and financing	Consultant	ICE, chambers of commerce; sometimes Simest, Finest, SACE, and country specific associations
Participation in trade fairs and business missions	Contacts with possible partners, customers and suppliers	Fairs, Italian embassies and ICE offices, chambers of commerce, confindustria, foreign organizations	Regional governments, ICE may provide financial support to attend
Internationalization project	Advise about where, when, and how to invest; and what kind of investment to pursue and how to do it	<u>Large firms</u> : internally provided <u>Medium and small firms</u> : rely on consultants <u>Smallest firms</u> : Improvise, rely upon personal connections	Actors already present in the destination area: Local IPC
Financing	To provide financing in the host country	Banks, sometimes Simest and Finest	
Implementation	Technical, managerial, and legal advice in the start-up phase	Internal resources of the firm; some of the larger consultants with foreign networks; Italian expatriate consultants; local consultants and lawyers	IPC abroad, local institutions and partners