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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Moeran, B. (2011). Trade fairs, markets and fields: framing imagined as real communities. *Historical Social Research*, 36(3), 79-98. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.3.79-98>

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## Trade Fairs, Markets and Fields: Framing Imagined as Real Communities

*Brian Moeran* \*

**Abstract:** »*Messen, Märkte und Felder: Die Rahmung von imaginierten als reale Gemeinschaften von Marktteilnehmern*«. This article describes how trade fairs act as a framing mechanism that enables participants to come together for the exchange of goods and services and to perceive themselves as acting in a social field. This way, trade fairs make markets possible. Based on ongoing participant observation at book fairs in Frankfurt, Tokyo and London, the paper discusses central features of fairs in the light of theoretical categories like networks, institutions and cognitions that are commonly employed in economic sociology. In this context, it highlights that participants negotiate the technical/material, social, situational, content/appreciative, and the use value of goods, values which are then equated with a commodity exchange value in the form of price. Trade fairs frame order, but they are also events where the respective field might be re-configured. The contingency of personal interaction, the lightness of “talk” and the carnival-like setting of fairs make them a site where disorder might be created that in turn can lead to change of field and market.

**Keywords:** trade fairs; book fairs; evaluation; field-configuring event.

This article describes how trade fairs act as a framing mechanism that enables participants to come together for the exchange of goods and services and to perceive themselves as acting in a social field. Fairs frame the contacts people make and sustain as networks; the institutional rules and social norms guiding their behaviour there; and the values and cognitive frames that they bring to bear and negotiate with other participants. They make actors aware of a “mutual correspondence” in their interpretation of the goods in which they deal and of the social situations in which engage for the sake of such trade. In this respect, trade fairs make markets possible.

Let me be clear about one thing before I proceed. By “market” I am not referring to impersonal trade, where “people live from the competitive trade of goods, services and money that are separated or alienated from enduring relationships” (Gudeman 2008: 4). Nor do I envisage it as an abstract economic

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Strategic Research Council of Denmark for making possible the research for this paper under its grant for *creative Encounters*, the socio-economic organization of creative industries.

model that allows communication between individual buyers and sellers on the basis of a nexus of assumptions relating to choice, competition and efficiency (Carrier 1997: 2-3). Rather, as a social anthropologist who believes that social activity is often, but by no means always, economic and that economic activity is always profoundly social, even when seemingly impersonal, I see markets as being where „people also live from goods and services that make, mediate, and maintain social relationships” (Goodman 2008: 5). Markets are *frames*.

If we accept that market places, or markets in this concrete sense, act as “a social structure for the exchange of rights in which offers are evaluated and priced, and compete with one another” (Aspers 2010: 11), or, more simply, as “arenas of social interaction for the exchange of goods and services” (Beckert 2010a: 609), then we need to analyse how, and for what purposes, such a structure and concomitant social interaction are framed. This in itself calls for systematic micro- and macro-levels of research and analysis that can lead to a sociological understanding of economic processes and provide an alternative to the rational actor model of economic theory (Beckert 2003: 783). In other words, we need “to develop theoretical concepts and engage in empirical investigations as to how intentionally rational actors reach decisions under conditions when they do not know what is best to do” (Beckert 1996: 804).

So far, so good, but what seems anomalous to someone working outside the disciplines of both economics and economic sociology is that there is so little discussion of what *actually* goes on in markets or the market economy. This has long been a characteristic of economics (North 1977), but it should not be so in economic sociology (or in my understanding thereof) where analysis is occasionally abstracted to such a high level that we never quite know if markets are anything other than imagined. As a result, there is a danger that economic sociologists (as well as marketers) may perform, shape and format the market, rather than observe how it functions, in the same way that, in Callon’s opinion (1998: 2), economists perform, shape and format the economy. On the contrary, I see markets as real – and not just imagined – communities. The question that, as a social (business or economic) anthropologist, I find myself asking time and time again is: how do markets actually work in real life?

Clearly, in order to answer this question, we need to provide micro-level substance to macro-level abstraction (Beckert 2003: 770). One way to go about this is to refocus our attention and look at how a market is *framed*. Here, I refer to the work of Erving Goffman (1986: 345) who used the term “frame” in general to refer to basic elements of organization that govern social events, as well as to the organization of involvement and meaning. He then broke down frame activities into “strips”, “brackets”, “keying”, “fabrications” and so on to show how people behaved in frame situations (cf. Moeran 2005: 47-55). He also singled out primary frameworks as the mechanism that makes daily activities understandable. A primary framework is “one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that

is meaningful” (Goffman 1986: 21). Although varying in degree of organization, “each primary framework allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its own terms” (ibid.).

The argument here, then, is that a trade fair is a market’s framing mechanism, and that a fair of this kind is in fact a *primary* framework coordinating and making sense of the activities of numerous different actors in a market. More specifically, this article examines the skilled interactions of members of the publishing industry at book fairs, so that my focus is on the kind of trade fair in which cultural products are exhibited. The research material presented here is based on ongoing participant observation in the Frankfurt, London and Tokyo Book Fairs and adds some ethnographic detail to the theoretical analysis (Lie 1997: 348). In so doing, I have also felt a need to reflect upon some of the theoretical categories hitherto used by economic sociologists to analyse markets and the embeddedness of economic behaviour. I refer here to fields, social networks, institutions, and cognitive frameworks.

## Fields and Markets

In a recent thought-provoking article, Jens Beckert (2010a) argues that an important source of market dynamics is to be found in the interrelations between the three social forces of networks, institutions and cognitive frames. These, he says, should be considered as part of the more general notion of *field*, which “makes it possible to bring simultaneous attention to the different types of social structures relevant in markets and at the same time shift the theoretical focus on the relationship between structures and agency processes” (Beckert 2010a: 606). It is changes in one of the structures or forces that lead to changes in the social structuration of a market as a whole (p. 608), and it is the concept of field that allows us to pick out and plot those changes. By turning his attention to “relational topographies of networks, the institutional rules prevalent in the field, and cognitive frames structuring the perceptions of agents” (p. 609), Beckert claims to shift the analytical emphasis from the act of exchange *per se* to the structuring forces of the field.

This claim is, in some respects at least, problematic. My understanding of Bourdieu’s concept of field is that it includes not just the positions struggled over and taken up by individuals and organizations, but also those of the cultural products that they conceive, produce, circulate, exchange and use (Bourdieu 1993). In this respect, acts of exchange are *as* important as “the structuring forces of the field”. To ignore totally, as Beckert does, the commodities that are exchanged in a market merely undermines the social categories that he wishes to emphasize. After all, people and organizations form networks around the objects (books, cars, shampoos, or noodles) that they manufacture, promote, distribute and sell (Moeran 2005). The cognitive frames

that are seen to influence their market behaviour develop because of the goods, and related services, that bring them together in the first place. The same, too, can be said of institutions. Therefore, in analyzing markets, we need to take equal account of *both* social forces *and* the goods and services exchanged.

A second problem raised by Beckert's analysis is his conflation of market and field. Although the title of his article seems to draw a distinction between fields and "the dynamics of markets", in its text he equates the two as he advances his argument from "markets as fields" to "market fields" (2010a: 609-12). If we accept provisionally that the boundaries of a field are "culturally, politically, and socially established", then, surely, what distinguishes a field from a market is the fact that the latter is also established through the exchange of goods and money. In other words, the boundaries of a market are established in financial or economic, as well as in cultural, political and social, terms.

Given that the same can be said of fields, however, the question remains: how does a field differ from a market? For a start, a field is *more than* networks, institutions and cognitive frames combined. It is also more than the commodities exchanged. It contains positions that both individuals and organizations, together with the goods that they produce, struggle to occupy and thereby distinguish themselves. Although organizations, in the form of firms, trade associations, government bodies and so on, may involve themselves in activities to do with a single market, they are not necessarily limited thereto. A government ministry whose remit is to take care of things "cultural", for example, may also (as in the UK under the Labour government from 1997-2010) have media and sport under its governance. Similarly, a book retail chain (like Waterstone's) may be an important actor in the publishing market, but the group of which it is a part, and to whose overall strategy it must subscribe (HMV), generally has diverse dealings in other markets (music, film). Thus, not only may a field contain within it overlapping markets, but a market may embrace (parts of) overlapping fields. The two are not to be conflated into a single entity.

A third problem arises from Beckert's assertion (2010a: 619) that "the notion of fields provides a theoretical umbrella" that enables us to understand the embeddedness of actors' economic behaviour and market processes. The problem here is not in the general delineation. Analysis of a field certainly does permit us to see "agents as entangled in a grid of different social forces that position them in the social space, which provides resources for realizing their goals as well as limitations on their opportunities" (ibid.). Rather, the problem is one of detail. Where can we find actual examples of "agents" entangled in a "grid" of "social forces"? What kind of "social space" are we talking about? Who are these "agents"? And how do they get "entangled" in what sort of "grid"? It is all very well conceptualizing "field" at an abstract level, but how does it function in practice? Where, we may chant, can we find a "cryin', talkin', sleepin', walkin', livin'" field?

There are, in fact, rather few ethnographic situations in which we can observe fields at work. Industry conferences, and the industry awards ceremonies often associated with them, provide one instance in which different actors in a field gather, assert and (re)negotiate their positions vis-à-vis one another by means of the firms by which they are employed and the products that they trade. In this respect, they, too, can be classified as “primary frameworks”. However, such events tend to focus on one or another part of an industry’s activities and interests: witness the various annual conferences for the Publishing Association, Independent Publishers Guild (IPG), and Booksellers Association of England and Ireland, for example. In each of these, all kinds of players in the industry are usually represented (for example, libraries and other educational institutions, government bodies, and media). Although an industry conference may openly allude to these players (like the Eleventh IPG Independent Publishing Awards, “in partnership with The Bookseller and The London Book Fair”), its focus tends to be *either* on publishers *or* on booksellers, and so on.

The single most important primary framework, providing ethnographic opportunity for participating in and observing a field in action, is the industry trade fair. Fairs bring together “geographically dispersed, socially embedded, culturally diffuse sets of companies on a neutral ground on which they re-enact an internal structure that is abstract and relational” (Skov 2006: 768). Fairs attract *all* major players in an industry in a single, generally confined, place and over a limited period of time.<sup>1</sup> By means of various mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, they reveal how different actors go about the tasks at hand, what those tasks are, and how those actors take up positions, make use of connections, and put their cognitive frameworks to use in achieving their economic aims. In other words, fairs *frame*, or “configure” (Lampel and Mayer 2008), fields and enable us to see them in action. It is, therefore, the *frame*, and not the field, that acts as a “theoretical umbrella” with which to understand markets.

Framing is an operation used to define agents (an individual person or group of persons) who are clearly distinct and dissociated from one another. It also allows for the definition of objects, goods and merchandise which are perfectly identifiable and can be separated not only from other goods, but also from the actors involved, for example in their conception, production, circulation or use. It is owing to this framing that the market can exist and that distinct agents and distinct goods can be brought into play. Without this framing the states of the world can not be described and listed and, consequently, the

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<sup>1</sup> A major book fair like the London book Fair or *Frankfurter Buchmesse* attracts not only publishers, distributors, retailers, antiquarian booksellers, supply services, literary agents, scouts, libraries, and various publishing associations found in the field of publishing, but a variety of digital, media and entertainment industries (Google, film, television, computer games, animation), cultural institutions (English Heritage, the National Gallery, NESTA), and local, regional and national government bodies.

effects of the different conceivable actions can not be anticipated. (Callon 1998: 17)

Precisely because a field is *not* apparent in the day-to-day activities of those involved in a market, it needs a multiple framing mechanism like a trade fair (or industry conference, awards, publications, and so on) to bring it to light, to be configured (Moeran and Strandgaard Pedersen 2011). As Callon intimates, a fair also frames the cultural *products* on offer. At a book fair, this can be seen in publishers' *lists* laid out in their catalogues (which act as a basis for economic calculation when it comes to company purchases), and in the formal or informal separating out of book *categories* (trade or academic books, and, within the former, sub-categories like fiction and non-fiction, which are themselves further broken down into sub-sub-categories like children's, crime, and romance, on the one hand, and, on the other, cooking, history, and travel), all of which form the subject of participants' talk and negotiations.

## Trade Fairs

Trade fairs frame an intersection of institutional and individual actors, on the one hand, and of economic, social and symbolic activities relating to things, on the other.<sup>2</sup> Overtly, trade fairs are about exhibiting "the new", be it an idea in its initial state or a finalized product, showing one's capabilities, and trading in a particular commodity (that can range from aerospace to art). As we shall see, they provide opportunities for participants to enter into business negotiations with long-term partners, to observe competitors' exhibits, to gain knowledge through market information exchanges, and to initiate and sustain social relations (Anand and Watson 2004; Skov 2006; Lampel and Meyer 2008). In addition, they let participants observe competitors' exhibits. Despite appearances suggesting otherwise (no statistics are ever available for the volume of trade conducted at any book fair, for example), trade itself is by no means marginal (Skov 2006: 770). Indeed, in some industries, like international television programming, trade fairs are seen as "markets" (Havens 2011: 145), even though they are largely about social relationships, symbolic hierarchies, and cultural capital prized by the institutions and individuals attending them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This section is based on, but also departs from, Moeran and Strandgaard Pedersen (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Art fairs provide a useful indication of the economic importance of fairs, by means of a participant's expenditure and income. Booths at the Maastricht art fair, for example, may cost as much as €50,000, with total costs for a dealer wishing to exhibit there (including shipping, travel, accommodation, food and entertainment) reaching €80,000. In 2007, sales arranged at this venue for the 219 participating dealers had a value of €790 million, with dealers claiming that 40-70 per cent of their annual sales were made during the eleven days of the fair (Thompson 2008: 188-189).

Although many contemporary fairs differ from fairs of old in that they exhibit samples of merchandise and are thus “sample” fairs – unlike “commodity” fairs to which traders brought large quantities of certain goods (Allix 1922: 557-560) – there is a thread of continuity that links present-day fairs back to at least medieval times, and possibly much earlier. The fairs of Troyes, for example, are alleged to date back to Roman times, and those of Lyon to 172 A.D. (Braudel 1992: 82). It is known that from medieval times fairs, like those of Champagne (Face 1958), were extremely important elements in what was already an international economy. They developed where trade routes intersected (e.g. Leipzig), at crossing points over rivers, and at places where goods could be loaded onto, and unloaded from, ships (e.g. Frankfurt am Main) (Flood 2007: 4). They functioned to break the usual cycle of trade and “interrupt the tight circle of everyday exchanges” (Braudel 1992: 82). In short, while markets brought together local people for the buying and selling of goods, historically fairs have always been the essential tools of long-distance trade.

There are, then, a number of historical parallels between present-day sample and medieval commodity fairs – parallels that also trace the long-term similarities and differences between markets and fairs. These may be traced in terms of multiple framing devices within the primary framework. Firstly, both markets and trade fairs provide a bounded *spatial frame* for social interaction and the exchange of goods and services. Nowadays such a frame for a fair is on a grand scale – an indoor exhibition hall, stadium, or park – but it also applies to the location and size of participants’ stands as well as to the displays of goods therein. Generally speaking, fair – as opposed to market – settings have always taken on the appearance of temporary townships or cities (Skov 2006). Either they have been incorporated in a fixed town (like Leipzig), taking over everything in it and itself “becoming” the town – something we see at the Cannes Film Festival, for example. Or they are held in juxtaposition to a town, outside its limits, and becoming thereby an extension of the town (like the Frankfurt Book Fair held in the city’s Messe) (cf. Allix 1922: 542-544; Braudel 1992: 82-84). The fact that these spatial frames of a fair are often set apart from their surroundings reflects the liminal nature of the events that they house (Skov 2006: 768) – something that is not true of more regularly held markets.

Secondly, fairs provide a bounded *temporal frame* in which participants go about their business. Unlike markets, which are held on regular days of a week or month to enable immediate exchange, fairs were instituted to enable periodic forms of exchange for large-scale, especially international, commerce. Fairs are short-term events in which all related activities generally take place over a period of from three days to three weeks. They are also usually held at regular intervals – normally once a year, but sometimes, as with fashion weeks, more frequently.

Both the frequency and length of time with which fairs are held depended originally upon the itinerancy of traders and their merchandise (Allix 1922:



540). Precisely because merchants needed time to travel from town to town with their packhorses, carts and goods, fairs were timed to accommodate their movement. In this respect they formed *networks of fairs* that were mutually dependent and communicated with one another. This kind of *perpetuum mobile* is still true of trade fairs. Just as a merchant used to travel to the fairs centred on Linz along the Danube – from Krems to Vienna, and thence to Freistadt, Graz, Salzburg, and Bolzano, before heading back to Krems (Braudel 1992: 92) – so nowadays book publishers move (albeit by somewhat swifter means of transport) from Abu Dhabi to, in quick succession, the Leipzig Book Fair, Bologna Children’s Book Fair and Salon du Livre in Paris in March, before travelling on to the great spring fair in London in mid-April, and thence, if so inclined, to the Thessaloniki Book Fair at the end of the same month, and the Tehran International Book Fair and Book Expo America in May. Admittedly, not all publishers attend all fairs – mainly because of the costs involved – but the principle remains the same. History shows that there has been – and still is (Power and Jansson 2008: 439) – a hierarchy of fairs in each network, and clashes of fair schedules that might upset this hierarchy – as when Frankfurt decided to hold its fair at the same time as Leipzig’s in the early 1700s (Beachy 1999: 437-438)<sup>4</sup> – are frowned upon. This explains why a lesser fair, like the Tokyo International Book Fair, for example, had to adjust its timetable by rescheduling from April to July when the London Book Fair shifted *its* dates from March to April in 2005 because of a move to a new location (Moeran 2009: 3-4). Thus, while markets tend to be independent events for local merchants and people, fairs form an interlocking system, which attracts sellers from afar and only marginally addresses end users in any given locality.

This means, thirdly, that fairs are socially bounded and provide a *social frame* that is partly institutional. They have always brought, and continue to bring, together a large and diverse number of participants – industry manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, and retailers – who are directly involved in the production and distribution of the products and services exhibited, and who cultivate, develop, maintain and reinforce personal connections at every fair. At the same time, precisely because they represent “organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 143), participants constitute a field. It is in this sense that fairs can be categorized as “field configuring events” (Lampel and Meyer 2008) in which are found “a configuration of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu and Wac-

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<sup>4</sup> In the middle ages, the establishment of one fair could lead to the banning of smaller neighbouring fairs that posed a potential threat to the concentration of trading (Flood 2007: 8).

quant 1992: 97) and “a socially structured space in which agents struggle” (Wacquant 1992: 17).

Fourthly, fairs provide a *functional frame* for a wide range of activities. They are not simply places in which to conduct business, but serve multiple purposes for a large and diverse group of participants who have diverse agendas and reasons for going to such events. In this respect, trade fairs are functionally unbounded. Some industry participants may come to trade (to buy or to sell products exhibited); some to obtain financial support for projects; others to build or maintain social relations and networks; yet others to engage in some form of reputation-management by promoting a product, a company, themselves, or some kind of political agenda. Fairs also attract other kinds of participants – like media and officials – who are not closely linked to the industry concerned, but who attend to get “news”, to represent one government body or another, or to pick up trends (Skov 2006).

Fairs have always “meant noise, tumult, music, popular rejoicing, the world turned upside down” (Braudel 1992: 85). They were often centres of popular entertainment (Isherwood 1981) where celebration could become contestation (Rearick 1977: 437). Fair time, in other words, was carnival time. It was also spectacle time with its processions, competitions, bonfires, fireworks, juggling, miracle cures and tooth-pulling. Nowadays, perhaps, we may prefer to have our teeth examined (at worst, pulled) in the private comfort of a dentist’s chair, but industry fairs and festivals today still provide an entertaining array of spectacles for participants (Skov 2004: 173-183) – from boozy book fair parties to topless would-be actresses on the beach at Cannes, by way of the red carpet approach to the Academy Awards venue.

Finally, precisely because they are field configuring events, fairs also have symbolic functions and so provide a *symbolic frame*. For a start, they distinguish between “insiders” and “outsiders”, between the more and the less privileged (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006: 737-742). This is revealed in terms of the disposition of space – of who is placed where in an exhibition hall (Moeran 2010: 145-148), and of who may go where, when and for what purpose (Havens 2011: 154-163). In the past this was also revealed in clothing and accessories distinguishing buyers from sellers, as well as among different professional specializations (Gueusquin-Barbichon 1980: 328). Nowadays, such distinctions are made most obviously in the different (often colour-coded) accreditation badges worn by participants. These not only permit entry to contemporary fairs, but also give special advantages (like free travel on city transport) for their duration, in the same way that the medieval “passport”, or “conduct of the fair”, assured travelling merchants of free passage to a fair on certain defined routes during a prescribed time (cf. Allix 1922: 540, 560).

Although it is in their concentrations of goods (books, toys, cars, computers, planes), people and entertainment that fairs retain their importance and make their mark, their symbolic function is to be seen more generally in activities

that are carried on *outside*, or in parallel to, the normal course of trade exchange. Food and drink are shared, parties held, relationships between male and female participants formed and occasionally cemented, and all the time information is exchanged. In contemporary fairs, as in traditional town markets, it is in the cafés and watering holes surrounding the marketplace of commodities that the main exchanges often occur. In the old days, everything from the trade of goods to the arrangement of marriages took place there, so that the fair has been an opportunity for the renewal of community and “mutuality” among participants, and an occasion to reinforce in-group boundaries (Maho 1980: 66).

## Networks and Institutions

The remaining part of this article focuses on the three social forces of networks, institutions, and cognitive frames which, Beckert rightly argues, act as a source of market dynamics and which are framed by the market activities taking place in trade fairs. From participant observation in a number of book fairs, however, I think it necessary to clarify terminology and partially revise one or two theoretical points in terms of actual practices.

Let us start with networks. Like fields, networks are a useful analytical category for the observer, but are less so for practitioners on the ground. Those who make use of a lot of connections may be seen to possess “networks”, but for the most part neither they, nor scholars analyzing them, are able to map precisely the forms taken by these networks. What ethnographic research reveals is the importance of opportunities, not for making use of networks as such, but for *face-to-face interaction* among trade fair participants (see also Skov and Meier 2011: 274). In other words, it is not networks, but *contacts* that count in the lives of economic actors as they go about their everyday activities. Not surprisingly, the top two reasons cited by people for attending the Frankfurt Book Fair are: to “refresh existing customer contacts” (55%), and to “make new contacts” (54%) (Frankfurt Book Fair 2010). Fairs are places “where you put faces to names”, where “you build up friendships”, and where “you need to *speak* about things with people because talking isn’t as heavy as the written word” (Moeran 2010: 143). In another informant’s words, “(f)airs are *talk*. 70 per cent of it is totally useless, but something often comes of the remaining 30 per cent.”

This is where trade fairs are of material use to theoretical analysis. On the one hand, their spatial frames reveal formal hierarchies, networks, and tensions within a field by means of the layout of participants’ stands: which actors are given the “best” locations; which companies are linked with which to form business networks; and, through the discrete distance between their stands, who are whose competitors. Visibility and invisibility thus become markers of how the field is configured (Moeran 2010: 146-7). On the other hand, by following individual participants (a rights manager, foreign distributor, or editor pub-

lisher), it is possible for the observer to sketch, albeit in rough form, their informal networks through the numerous connections made over a short space of time (temporal frame). These contacts themselves partially reveal the overall field of publishing.

Fairs frame face-to-face interaction and participants' understandings of networks. For example, during the course of his rounds at the London or Frankfurt Book Fair, a distributor of academic books in Japan initiates or renews contacts with a number of UK and US-based academic publishers. In these meetings, he will outline the business environment in Japan, remarking in particular on the current situation with regard to university library purchases, falling student populations, the role of academic staff in the selection of materials, the effect of exchange rates on purchasing volume, and so on and so forth. In this way, he reveals his web of connections and knowledge of the field of publishing in Japan, which then helps a foreign publisher gauge which of her own individual titles or subject areas might be suited to the Japanese market, as well as what might be the optimal time of year for publication, the optimal length for a book, and how best it might be titled for marketing purposes. A discussion of overall Japanese sales by the publisher may also elicit an explanation of the organizational restructuring that has affected her distributor during the past year and how this may affect future sales. Alternatively, it may lead into a discussion on the role of Amazon and internet sales, the consequent necessity for publishers to offer discounts on certain titles, and the idea of using digital technology to print on demand in Japan itself, rather than ship books back and forth across the world.

It is such exchanges of information, together with accompanying gossip and rumour (constituting social and functional frames), which make it absolutely essential for those in the publishing industry to be present or represented at a book fair. The biggest and best book fairs, like Frankfurt, London, and Bologna, are marked by "*buzz*". This is what makes them the "biggest" and the "best". What kind of information is made available, as well as the divulging of information itself, is often guided by participants' perception of buzz. Buzz opens up all kinds of opportunities which can be taken up on the spot or developed later through e-mail, before being discussed face-to-face at the next major book fair six months "down the line". By their very periodicity and regularity, as well as by their exchanges of information and opportunities for a renewal of contacts, *and* by creating what Skov (2006) has termed "conditions of comparability", trade fairs create order in a market (Aspers 2010).

Such order is supported by the social or institutional frame of the fair. The very fact that a book fair brings together *all* participants in the value chain, large and small, immediately circumscribes behaviour, laying down written and unwritten rules. Precisely because it is a *trade* fair, participants get down to serious business and act accordingly. But because it is also a *fair*, they know that they can behave in more informal ways as appropriate. This is most obvi-

ous in the carnival-like stand parties that take place among publishers, distributors and others from late-afternoon on each day of the fair. But it can also be seen in the framing of a business meeting (ostensibly for the buying and selling of rights, for example), where participants will not engage in a discussion of business itself until personal exchanges about their children, shared friends or acquaintances, new building plans, and so on, have been thoroughly covered to the satisfaction of all concerned. The personal side of these business transactions may take up to one third of the time allotted to the meeting as a whole, but it is considered an essential prerequisite to conducting the business at hand.

Within the overall frame of the trade fair, then, there are other social and institutional frames which, like Russian dolls, can be opened up to reveal yet more implicit instructions and tacit knowledge on how, and how not, to behave. These unavoidably link with cognitive frames, but are more concrete than, and go far beyond, the kinds of legal norms discussed by Beckert (2010a: 610). While antitrust law, import customs, subsidies, intellectual property rights, and labour laws certainly have an influence on actors' economic behaviour, as well as on market competition, other non-legal norms, like trust, malfeasance and personal relations or contacts (Granovetter 1985), may be said to be equally influential. It is to these cognitive frames that we should now turn.

### Cognitive Frames and Values

In his discussion, Jens Beckert does not make clear what “cognitive frames” are in practice. All we learn are vague generalities: cognitive frames consist of “the mental organization of the social environment”; “taken-for-granted scripts” (Beckert 2010a: 610); “social belief systems”; “prevailing ideas”; “shared understandings” (p. 616); “value orientations” and “world views” (p. 618). Exactly of what those scripts, belief systems, ideas, understandings, value orientations and world views consist, it seems, should be “taken for granted” by others who, with Beckert, share a particular “mental organization of the social environment” deemed appropriate to analyze markets. We need, therefore, something more substantial to support, and perhaps refine, the analytical framework because, until we are more specific about their content, cognitive frames become little more than an empty signifier.

One way to redress this lacuna, perhaps, is to give some examples of these shared understandings. In the book trade, there is an almost unanimous concept of what the work of different people in the publishing industry should be. For publishers, for example, a certain “mindset” is expected. A Japanese editor-publisher described this as “the publisher’s soul” (*shuppansha damashi*). Similarly, there is unanimous agreement among sales people that their job is to *listen* – in particular to what people are *not* saying.

More general cognitive frames surround expected behaviour. *Independence* is one: the ability to sniff out a good book, to anticipate a trend, and “get in

there” ahead of competitors. A fondness for eccentricity, too, illustrates the frame of independence. *Informality* is another. A majority of people in the publishing business are there through serendipity, rather than by intention. They tend to follow their hunches and not to stand on ceremony or be “stuck up”. These cognitive frames come to the fore when those in the trade talk about the latest acquisition of a previously independent publishing house. As one informant remarked of a publishing conglomerate, “(i)t’s like the Civil Service these days. All suits and no smiles.”

Publishers are expected to look after their staff, to know them personally if at all possible, to instill in them a sense of *loyalty* to their authors (and in authors a loyalty to their publisher [Bradley 2008: 104]), as well as to their employers and the industry as a whole. Loyalty engenders *trust*. In this frame, the establishment of *credentials* plays a crucial role. Credentials are most readily seen in the history of past successes of a particular individual: “Absolutely first class editor, you know. It was she who spotted...” and a best-selling book or author is then named. They may also be used to trace corporate growth, as in the case of a publisher (C) introducing an investor (B) to his former Korean distributor (SY) at a publisher’s reception at the Frankfurt Book Fair:

SY, B’s an investor who didn’t want to be bothered with board meetings, voting rights, things like that. And yet he was prepared to invest in an inherently risky business when I was running C a few years back and couldn’t get any bank to loan me money.

B, SY took C to a whole new platform, not only by placing an enormous order for a 150 volume set on Ural-Altaic languages that I published, but by paying cash in advance. That money paved the way for C’s vital expansion in the mid-1990s and ultimate sale.

Independence, informality, loyalty, trust and credentials all frame personal contacts and institutional behaviour, serving to establish and maintain the kinds of economic, human, intellectual, social, and symbolic capital discussed by John Thompson (2010: 6-8). But what of the products in whose manufacture, promotion, distribution and sale members of the publishing industry engage? These, too, serve to frame relationships and understandings during the course of a fair.

It is here that the notion of cognitive frames can be usefully supplemented by a discussion of values – something to which Beckert (2010b) himself has recently turned his attention. Values are the criteria by which people judge what is meaningful (Aspers 2010: 16), legitimate (Suchman 1995: 574), and worthwhile in their everyday lives (Graeber 2001: 3). Although they often embrace concepts or beliefs about desirable end states or behaviour, my concern here is with the products negotiated and exchanged at trade fairs. Following earlier work (Moeran 1997, 2004; Moeran and Strandgaard Pedersen 2011), I wish to suggest that what constitutes Value (that is, economic value) in the kinds of *products* (as opposed to agents or social processes) that are the focus

of trade fairs are technical/material, social, situational, content/appreciative, and use values. Together these amount to a qualitative symbolic exchange value which is then equated with a quantitative economic value (or what I prefer to call commodity exchange value) in the form of price. In other words, the economic value of a cultural product like a book is framed by its overall symbolic value, and vice versa.

Not all these values are immediately apparent in the day-to-day dealings of book fair participants, but some certainly come into play. For example, in publishing, a production manager, in consultation with an editor, will select paper thickness, quality and size, font, chapter headings, and so on as they feel appropriate for the style of writing, length of manuscript, and projected price of final book. These kinds of technical values are based on the craft knowledge and skills developed by a professional during the course of his work, and are not necessarily known or shared by others involved further up or down the value chain. Nevertheless, from time to time I heard salesmen, distributors, and retail buyers commenting on paper quality, typeface, and overall layout of a new title shown them by a publishing house sales representative. These often shaded into appreciative or aesthetic values when the discussion turned to a title's cover, colour printing, and other aspects of design. Both material and appreciative values definitely influenced business transactions since they affected a buyer's decision to buy a title in the first place, and then how many copies of that title to purchase.

Publishers tend to publish books that they believe in (Bradley 2008: 208): in other words, books whose contents they appreciate. It is the fact that a title is seen to have an intellectual content or appreciative value, which inspires an editor or independent publisher, and which should, but may not entirely, be transmitted in a sales pitch at a book fair. At this point, social values often come into play, in terms of an author's name, as well as of personal contacts. A rights manager will sell a title to a preferred client, who (like a small Polish publisher in Krakow) had shown that she is prepared to take a risk (by buying translation rights for Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* well before it became a bestseller); or with whom s/he has developed a close personal relationship over a long period of time. At the same time, an author's name, once established, is often sufficient to sell a new title, regardless of its perceived quality (Dan Brown illustrates this point well). There is a continuous two-way slippage between persons and things in the construction and maintenance of social values in the book trade, as in other cultural industries.

Other values – situational and use – are not attributed particular importance at book fairs, although a particular title may be “timely” if it anticipates or closely follows a major mediated event. Nevertheless, the combination of these different values vis-à-vis books contributes to some extent to the (re)framing of participants' overall cognitive frames during a trade fair. At the same time, however, for deals to be closed, these values must in the end be dissociated and

detached from the objects being bought and sold. Otherwise participants' framing activities will never come to an end (Callon 1998: 19).

In general, these different values constitute different criteria for valuation and form a field that influences our selection of various cultural products. Sometimes we are influenced by the beauty of a thing, at other times by its utility, craftsmanship, content, or brand association, and at yet others by the person selling it. We weigh up the different aspects of technical/material, social, situational, content/appreciative, and use values in every product, and try to calculate their combined *symbolic-exchange* value, which we then test against an economic criterion – money or price. Does this piece of sculpture that we like have one too many zeros on its price tag? Is this book all that it is made out to be, or is there something better in the same category and price range? If the price established for a product meets our symbolic exchange evaluation, and we decide to purchase a sculpture by Barbara Hepworth or a coffee table art book, then we have engaged in what might be termed *commodity-exchange* value. Although, some values tend to be given more emphasis than others, it is here that quality meets quantity, culture meets economy, and symbolic value is exchanged for economic Value.

The approach to the study of values proposed here examines the *things* produced by people making use of different forms of capital. It suggests that a car is not “luxurious” in itself, nor an artwork “beautiful”, nor a stamp “valuable”. Rather each becomes so because of the different values that are brought to bear in its equation between symbolic and commodity exchange. Such an approach stresses their ongoing social construction and negotiation as we go about our everyday lives.<sup>5</sup> Different people in an industry or social field will tend to stress different kinds of values: a production manager is more likely to stress technical/material, and a sales executive economic, values than – say – an editor for whom social networks and appreciation are more important, while for the consumer both the name of an author, a book's content and its readability are decisive factors in the symbolic-commodity exchange equation. Similar considerations come into play in the art, film, music, and other forms of cultural production, and they tend to take centre stage in events like art fairs and exhibitions, film festivals, and so on, where cultural products are on display and exchanges of symbolic values regularly take place (Anand and Jones 2008: 1049-1051).

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<sup>5</sup> The approach's weakness, perhaps, is that it ignores individual or affective values (stemming from what Bourdieu would term *habitus*). My provisional counter-argument is that the latter are in fact socially constructed and therefore an integral part of social values.



## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that, through their framing of contacts, social norms and values, together with associated social interaction among participants, trade fairs not only make fields visible, but contribute to predictability and order in the markets of which they are a part. In this sense, values are “central social constructions for understanding order” (Aspers 2010: 15). Certainly, in that they are used to determine price (or commodity exchange value) and in that price itself is used to compare and equate different goods and services on offer in a market, we may see material, appreciative, social, content and use values as contributing to the order of things, people and organizations.

In this conclusion, however, I want to add a few words of caution. Not all is predictable in the framing of things, people and organizations. Precisely because *people* interact with one another in very large numbers at trade fairs, and precisely because these fairs provide the *only* occasions and venues where *all* the major players in a particular field of production come together to engage in intensive interaction over a limited period of time, an element of *un*predictability is always present. Trade fairs can also frame *disorder*.

For example, this potential for disruption of the “orderly market” is to be seen first and foremost in the fact that fair time is *carnival* time. As we all know, carnivals provide occasions for the subversion of order and the deconstruction of everyday beliefs. Established structures and modes of behaviour are threatened, as social roles and practices are reversed. Although fairs are not carnivals in themselves, they are liminal events during which participants can “let their hair down” and allow the structure of their normal everyday lives to be loosened.

This threat to the established order of people, organizations and things becomes most apparent at the parties that take place regularly in and around the fair’s venue. It is here that new contacts are made and unstructured conversations take place. Established values can be criticized and new variations negotiated with other participants at an informal level, then “leaked” to the trade press to gauge levels of support, and finally proposed for formal adoption at some other appropriate industry event (such as a trade association’s annual general meeting).

We have noted that *talk* is the main activity framing trade. Talk communicates. It is through talk that deals are done, information is exchanged, contacts are transformed into friendships, and rumour surfaces. Talk is also dangerous. It is heard, overheard, and misheard. It takes on a force of its own. A distributor in a hotel bar may talk in too loud a voice about his desire to move on and try something new. By the next afternoon, word is out that the company is for sale. This in itself makes the distributor think twice and start to take seriously his alcohol-induced musings of the night before. In another context, merely by raising the possibility of a company sale, directors of an independent publish-

ing house – first by talking among themselves, then by talking with a broker – somehow transform a vague idea into reality. Once the broker asks for company details and puts together an information memorandum, it becomes virtually impossible for the vendor to back out.<sup>6</sup> The “heaviness” of the written word has taken over from the unbearable “lightness” of the spoken word, and made the intangible tangible.

Precisely because *different* kinds of values are brought to bear in different proportions by different individuals and organizations in a particular field of production, and precisely because the weighting given to those values is never constant, but varied, values do two other things. Firstly, they redirect the attention of players in the market and the things that they buy and sell, so that they instigate gradual *change* in the social order. Secondly, they *can* promote more abrupt changes and thereby give rise to and sustain market *disorder* – as the breakaway of the Impressionists from the traditional *Salon* to exhibit their work in the *Salon des Refusées* neatly epitomizes (Delacour and Leca 2011).

Although I have argued that trade fairs provide multiple framing mechanisms that contribute to, and reinforce, market order, they do not *necessarily* do so. Precisely because they direct social interaction so effectively, frames *can* be used for unanticipated forms of communication and behaviour – like the cases of “frame breaking” and “out of frame behaviour” described by Goffman (1986: 201-2, 352). Generally speaking, these are of a minor nature and are intended merely to leave an impression with a (potential) business partner. In many ways, this is a necessary ploy, given the intensity of participant engagement where meetings with people take place every half hour throughout a nine-hour day over five days. At the end of a fair it is virtually impossible to remember who was who among the many new faces met and conversed with.

Finally, networks are particular problematic when it comes to the ordering of things and people. As I mentioned earlier, contacts are the fundamental building blocks of networks. But we need to recognize that they lead to two complementary, but not necessarily mutually supporting, forms of network. On the one hand, a participant’s network is built on *organizational* ties. A rights manager working in a particular organization (publishing house, film distributor, or television programmer, for example) develops a network with other rights managers working in other similar organizations. On the other hand, while it is organizations that formally sell and buy rights (the BBC and Paramount Films, for example, or Kodansha and Random House), it is individuals who enter into negotiations and complete the transactions. During the course of ongoing and different negotiations that take place at a succession of fairs in different countries, a rights manager is likely to develop closer *personal* ties

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<sup>6</sup> Six months down the line, at the London Book Fair in 2011, the company in question had been sold and its half dozen former members of staff were discussing no less than five possible new publishing ventures!

with some buyers than with others. This can lead to rupture in a formal organizational network when, for example, a rights manager is lured by the offer of promotion and/or salary increase to another company, and takes her clients with her to her new employer. We thus need to recognize that personal connections can create *disorder*, and not just order, in organizational networks.

Fairs, then, are predictable events at which the unpredictable may occur. Markets, too, are characterized by their predictable unpredictability.

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