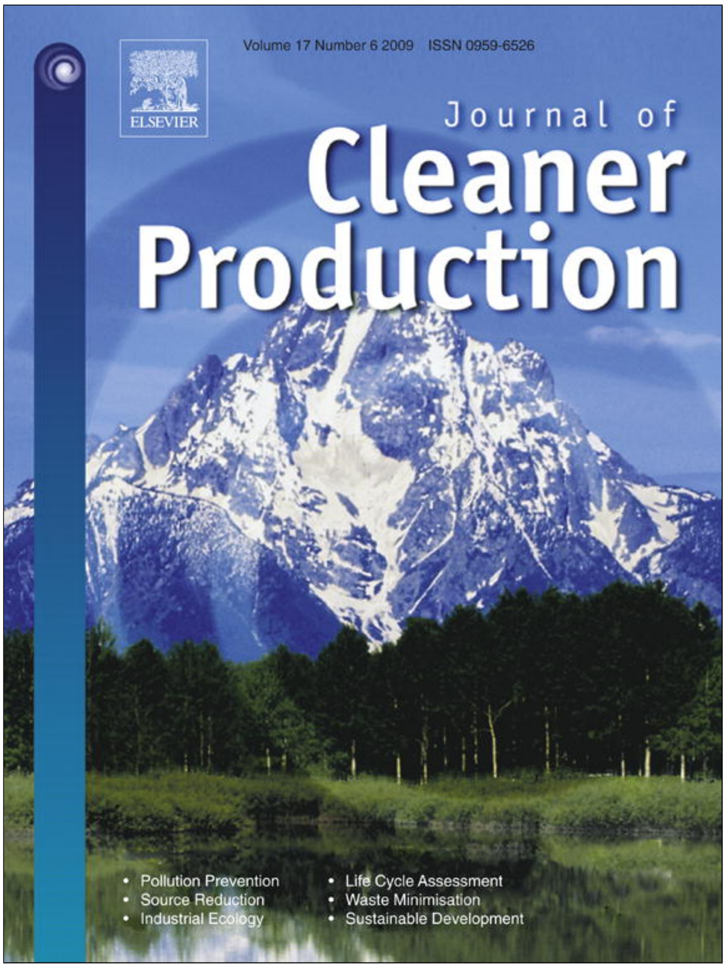
Volume 17 Number 6 2009 ISSN 0959-6526
ELSEVIER
Journal of
Cleaner
Production
• Pollution Prevention
• Source Reduction
• Industrial Ecology
• Life Cycle Assessment
• Waste Minimisation
• Sustainable Development

Journal of Cleaner Production 17 (2009) 571–580

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Cleaner Production

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jclepro

Building institutions based on information disclosure: lessons from GRI's sustainability reporting

Halina Szejnwald Brown [a,*], Martin de Jong [b], David L. Levy [c]

[a] Department of International Development, Community and Environment, Clark University, 950 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610, USA
[b] Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management, Delft University of Technology, 2628 BX Delft, the Netherlands
[c] College of Management, University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA 02125, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 13 August 2008
Received in revised form
19 December 2008
Accepted 19 December 2008
Available online 30 January 2009

Keywords:
GRI
Sustainability reporting
Information disclosure
Civil regulation
CSR

ABSTRACT

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is the best-known framework for voluntary reporting of environmental and social performance by business worldwide. Using extensive empirical data, including interviews and documentary analysis, we examine GRI's organizational field and conclude that since its modest beginnings in 1999 GRI has been by several measures a successful institutionalization project. But the institutional logic of this new entity, as an instrument for corporate sustainability management, leaves out one of the central elements of the initial vision for GRI: as a mobilizing agent for many societal actors. This emergent logic reflects GRI's dominant constituency – large global companies and financial institutions and international business management consultancies – and not the less active civil society organizations and organized labor. We attribute these developments to factors such as building GRI within the existing institutional structures; the highly inclusive multistakeholder process; and the underdeveloped base of information users. From the institutional theory perspective, this case shows how the process of institutionalization is deeply affected by initial strategies of the founders, and how it reproduces existing power relations. From the governance perspective, this case leads us to question the power of commodified information to mobilize civil society and to strengthen governance based on partnerships.

1. Introduction

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is the best-known framework for voluntary reporting of environmental and social performance by business and other organizations worldwide. If measured by rate of uptake, comprehensiveness, visibility, and prestige, GRI has been amazingly successful since its modest inception in 1999. We previously attributed this success to both timing and the institutional entrepreneurial tactics of its founders [1,2].

The explicit goal of the GRI undertaking was to harmonize numerous reporting systems used at the time. Its model was the well-established US financial reporting system (FASBI), which GRI sought to expand in reach (global), scope (social, economic and environmental performance indicators), flexibility (descriptive and quantitative indicators), and stakeholder base (industry, the financial sector, the accounting profession, civil society, environmental and human rights NGOs, organized labor, and others). The founders also boldly envisioned that GRI would become a platform for a broadly participative societal dialogue on what constitutes sustainability performance by companies and other organizations.

The founders' strategy was to (i) mobilize a broad coalition of actors who had not previously thought of themselves as members of the same political or policy network, and to engage them in a discussion around a set of rules and practices embodied by GRI Reporting Guidelines; (ii) to create a mechanism for maintaining the discussion well into the future and for building a sense of shared ownership of the new rules and practices; and (iii) to create an organization which would serve as steward of the Guidelines and of the evolutionary process (GRI Secretariat). The case for enlisting the support and participation of diverse actors was framed as that of "win–win." Specifically, it was asserted that it would benefit each stakeholder by producing efficiency gains, empowering, and creating an opportunity to influence an emerging influential set of rules. A built-in process for producing successive generations of the Guidelines, Sector Supplements and country-specific Annexes would assure future broadly based participation and support. Modeling GRI on the familiar financial reporting system reduced uncertainty and increased legitimacy. In short,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 508 793 7172.
E-mail address: hbrown@clarku.edu (H.S. Brown).

0959-6526/$ – see front matter © 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2008.12.009

working *within* the existing structures and power relations the GRI founders sought to build a new institution around standardized sustainability reporting.

The vision, strategy and entrepreneurial tactics of the GRI founders grew out of then widely shared assumptions about the socially beneficial forms of engagement among business, markets, civil society and labor. One assumption was that information empowers and mobilizes societal actors to demand accountability and certain performance from companies, and as such is an instrument of civil–private regulation. In particular, standardized information that could be used for benchmarking, ranking and cross-comparisons was presumed to be a powerful tool by way of political action and market-based mechanisms [3–5]. Support for this view came partly from the early success of the 1987 Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) in reducing toxic emissions from industrial plants in the US ([6] www.epa.gov/tri), and from the emergence of "information brokers" who used the nascent internet to communicate to the civil society the raw TRI data in the language of health risks (see, for example, www.scorecard.org). The information-based approach to regulation thus offered the much sought after addition to the traditional regulation-enforcement based environmental policies of the 1970s and 80s [5,7–9] and for some portended a new era of environmental politics [10–13].

Another assumption was that GRI would serve the interests of progressive companies with public claims to being socially responsible, transparent and accountable. These organizations would take up the GRI system and become its strong supporters in order to gain competitive advantage and pre-empty formal regulations. Over time, the middle-of-the road and laggard companies would follow. Furthermore, it was hoped that the inclusivity and broad base of the GRI multistakeholder process would facilitate the diffusion of the GRI principles and practices into the broader field of CSR [14–18].

A third assumption underlying GRI was that multistakeholder partnerships were an effective new form of so-called collaborative governance for sustainability or civil regulations, a view increasingly promoted during the 1990s by the policy, academic and global business communities alike ([8,12,19–29] for more recent writings). The broadly based multistakeholder collaboration envisioned for GRI fits the partnership idea well. Moreover, standardized reporting was the answer to a new set of legitimacy problems brought about by partnerships, such as the lack of accountability, inadequate enforcement sanctions, and imbalance of power among participants.

In short, the combined effect of a sustained dialogue over the evolution of the Guidelines and of highly engaged and interconnected users of GRI reports had a potential to simultaneously strengthen three vital domains: civil–private regulation, corporate social responsibility, and collaborative governance. In this paper, we ask whether GRI has achieved these goals: How does GRI and more generally non-financial reporting contribute to the forms of governance based on civil–private regulation? What are the limits to information-based reporting as a regulatory instrument?

Our earlier papers focused on the emergence of GRI; drawing on the concept of institutional entrepreneurship we showed how GRI founders achieved success in creating, in a span of a few years, a vibrant alliance of diverse and active participants who invested large resources in building GRI as a broadly based institution [1,2]. The present article focuses on the GRI as a maturing institution: its identity, mission and institutional logic, and its effectiveness as an agent of private–civil regulation.

Data for this analysis have been collected by way of extensive documentary analysis in the GRI archives as well as open academic and professional literature, observations at annual GRI conferences, and semi-structured interviews with individuals who participated in the development of Global Reporting Initiative and who currently use it or have opinions about its functioning. These included two GRI co-founders; three former members of GRI's first Steering Committee; two former members of Ceres Board of Directors; and representatives of 14 companies (6 SMEs among them, in US, Netherlands, Canada), 14 civil society organizations and international NGOs (both local, national and international), one US organized labor organization, 8 investment organizations and investment research organizations, 3 international consultancies, and one from US EPA; in the US, UK, Canada, and the Netherlands (for names and other details, see [1]). We used these materials to construct the organizational field of GRI – first the types of activities (Section 2), then the key actors (Section 3) – and from that to identify the dominant actors, their mutual relationships and interests, common channels of communication, and their collective influence on GRI. Section 4 draws on Powell and DiMagio's [30] and Scott's [31,32] work on institutional theory to analyze the degree of institutionalization of GRI, its emerging identity and institutional logic. Section 5 returns to the original research questions and presents the main findings, followed by Conclusions in Section 6.

We find that GRI has been a successful institutionalization project by many measures but its emerging institutional logic reflects only some of its intended constituencies, namely multinational companies and financial institutions, and international business management consultancies and accountancies. That logic is much narrower than the initial vision for GRI as an instrument of empowerment for civil society and other actors. The case of GRI shows how the process of institutionalization is deeply affected by initial strategies of the founders, and how it reproduces existing power relations. From the governance perspective, this case leads us to question the power of commodified information to mobilize civil society and to strengthen governance based on partnerships.

2. Activities in GRI organizational field

Fig. 1 depicts the lifecycle of GRI guidelines. The figure emphasizes feedback loops among users of GRI reports, preparers of reports and developers of GRI guidelines. It also highlights the links between the stages of the GRI lifecycle and other activities that can be broadly subsumed under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility. We describe these activities below as the GRI's organizational field, drawing on Scott's conception of organizational field as " a community of organizations with disparate purposes and interests that forms around an issue important to them, and partake of a common meaning system through dialogue, debate, conflict, and generation of new information; a power center

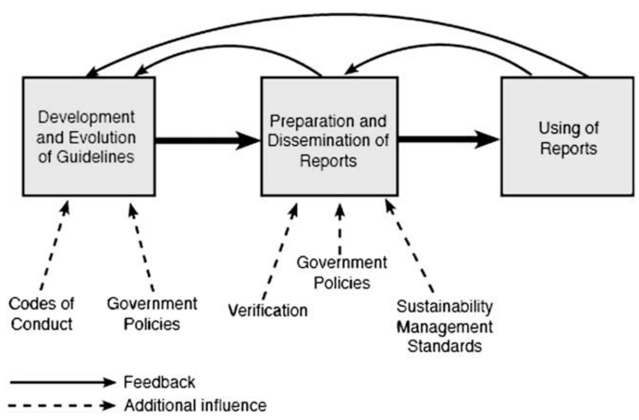

Fig. 1. GRI reporting lifecycle.

where multiple constituencies compete over definition of issues, and which eventually provides the impetus for an emergence of a new institution or changing an existing one" [32].

2.1. Developing and applying codes of conduct

Ever since the introduction of Ceres Principles in 1989, sustainability reporting has been the central instrument by which companies who adopt sustainability codes of conduct show accountability to the outside world. During the past two decades the number and popularity of codes of conduct has surged, including those produced by individual companies, business associations, intergovernmental organizations, such as OECD and ILO, and through collaboration of diverse interests (e.g. UN Global Compact, Ceres Principles, UK Ethical Trade Initiative Base Code, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises) [33–37]. So has the number and popularity of sustainability reporting frameworks. In some instances the two are part of the same initiative (e.g. the codes of conduct and GRI Sector Supplement for the mining and metal sector). The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and UN Global Compact, both representing multilateral intergovernmental organizations, are most closely aligned with GRI in their guiding principles, scope, language, reach, and participating companies. In 2006 Global Compact and GRI tightened these links by articulating how the G3 indicators can be used to communicate progress on the UN GC's principles and by requiring the GC signatories to use GRI [38]. The most visible participants in these activities have been multinational corporations (MNCs), international consultancies and think tanks, and a handful of international NGOs and business associations, such as WBCSD, BSR, CSR Europe and others.

2.2. Developing guidelines for sustainability reporting

GRI's major contribution to the field of reporting, and its own source of legitimacy, has been to popularize a multistakeholder process. As described elsewhere [2,39], this inclusive process, unlimited in size and composition, is built into the GRI system by way of evolution of successive generations of GRI Guidelines (three versions by 2006), and by way of newly emerging Sector Supplements and country-specific Annexes (e.g. France and Brazil). The multistakeholder process allows participants to articulate their principal concerns with regard to sustainability performance and incorporate emerging new issues, facilitates a broadly based societal dialogue and indirectly contributes to the policy agenda. For example, our interviews revealed that the debate over the GRI Metal and Mining Supplement was the most heated around the question of reporting free and informed consent by indigenous communities; the work on the Sector Supplement for Public Authorities in 2004 introduced the idea of reporting triple bottom line by local and regional governments; and the ongoing (at the time of this writing) work on Sector Supplement for NGOs aims at fostering such a dialogue among NGOs and their own support base. The emphasis on "materiality" in the third generation of GRI Guidelines (G3) is the institutional effort to strengthen the wide and diverse participation [40]. The organizational structure of GRI is designed to enhance the multistakeholder process: in addition to the 60-member Stakeholder Council, its parliamentary body, it has an unlimited number of Organizational Stakeholders.

By the end of 2007, about three and a half thousand organizations and individuals have participated in the development of GRI Guidelines and sector supplements. But the representation is uneven. Since the initial years, participation of organized labor and NGOs has declined, partly owing to resource constraints (for NGOs) and partly because of limited interest [2,41]. Currently, large companies, banks, accountancies, and certain think tanks that double up as consultancies for business, dominate the Organizational Stakeholders group. NGOs such as Forum for the Future, which has been a very active participants, are the exceptions in their class. For example, among the over 1000 participants from 76 countries who came to the 2008 GRI annual meeting, we counted a handful representing labor and 60 representing NGOs. Small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) have never been visible in the GRI field. This was partly the result of the tactical decision made by GRI founders, who put all their energies to secure participation by large international business, who understood and/or practiced reporting and whose initial support was crucial, leaving SMEs for future outreach. They represented less than 1% of participants at the 2008 GRI meeting.

GRI is one of a multitude of frameworks for voluntary reporting performance. Their estimated number varies, from over 30 that address all three areas of sustainability [42–44] to over 100 that address some areas [45,50]. One of the promises of GRI was to harmonize this confusing field. This has not happened, however, and GRI appears to have contributed to the competition among the guidelines for legitimacy and visibility. On the other hand, aspects of GRI thinking and process, especially the concepts of materiality and stakeholder engagement in the development of guidelines and reports, have diffused to other reporting frameworks and into the wider business community, for instance through Business in the Community, the UK-based CSR business network [46], the Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting, ISAR [47], or to the International Standards Organization (in the process of developing ISO 26,000 Social Responsibility Guidance Standard [48]).

2.3. Reporting sustainability performance

The most significant trends in sustainability reporting in recent years include: widening the scope to include social impact indicators and information on governance; broadening target audience beyond shareholders and employees, to include capital providers; integration of sustainability with financial reporting; regional differences in reporting and verification practices; persistent problems with data quality; and dominance of large multinational enterprises among the reporters [34,49,50]. These authors have also found that the most important reason for taking up reporting by companies is reputation management and brand protection. Depending on the source, the estimated number of global non-financial reporters, GRI and non-GRI, at the end of 2006 was

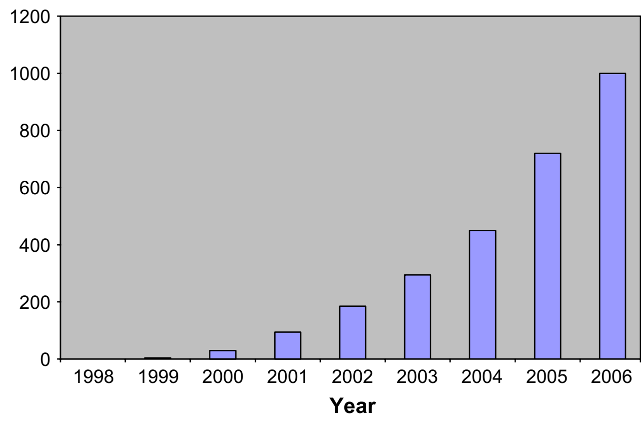

Fig. 2. Uptake of GRI reporting guidelines worldwide.

between 1800 and 3000, although the pace of growth seems to be slowing down [51–54].

Fig. 2 shows that in mid 2006 the number of companies that referenced GRI in their reports reached about 1000 (in 65 countries).[1] After initial leadership in growth, Europe, the US and Japan have leveled off, and during the past three years Brazil, South Africa, and the new EU member states have shown growth in adoption rates [54]. Most of the GRI reporters are large multinational corporations, typically in such sectors as utilities, oil and gas, banking, automotive industry, mining, chemicals and synthetics, forestry and paper. Small and medium size companies (SMEs) are barely represented.

Many reporters rely on fast growing international consultancies (e.g. SustainAbility and AccountAbility), the Big4 accountancy firms (KPMG, PwC, Ernst & Young and Deloitte & Touche), and members of the CSR Network (www.scrnetwork.com). In mid 2007, we identified on the web over 50 software companies in Europe and the US offering data management services for sustainability reporting. This industry plays an important role in framing the case for sustainability reporting.

Companies who choose to prepare the reports themselves find the initial experience both resource intense and transforming. ABN-AMRO noted that their first report engaged 150 employees, took 16 months, and drew a lot of interest among employees and top management, while Green Mountain Coffee Roasters took 4 years to produce an initial report. Noted an executive from Office Depot: "For the first time we put down everything we do…there was a strong emotional involvement. Employees were proud", while one from Nike said: "The report…created…massive change in the company". But over time, a "report fatigue" seems to set in. Although the effort of preparing it declines (down to 5 months at ABN-AMRO), so does the internal interest in its content. Companies we interviewed complained that shareholders, investors and employees – their primary target audiences – show little interest in the reports, and the civil society organizations even less.

We also discovered that companies do not compete on sustainability performance and generally do not read each other's reports. One of the reasons may be that reports are not easily cross-comparable, even within the same sector (i.e. DuPont and Dow, as noted by the former), but the primary reason is the universally low readership by, and feedback from, the stakeholders. Current efforts to create awards for best reports[2] had so far minor impact. Some companies we interviewed have, or are considering, a shift to reporting every other year, or to producing shorter reports while using the web for posting more detailed information (ABN-AMRO, DuPont, Seventh Generation). Although we heard about companies considering dropping the practice altogether, none of our interviewees has done so. Some of their comments: "Writing of a report makes you much sharper" (Teijin Twaron); "It enables us to track progress… and people are attracted to work with [committed] companies" (Baxter Int.); "It is a learning tool…part of the responsibility of a company…imposes discipline… (Seventh Generation)"; "We want to be listed on the DJ Sustainability Index.. and recognized as sustainability company (Office Depot)" and "We need to be transparent to our stakeholders (DuPont)".

[1] The number of "in accordance" reporters who receive an official approval for fully following the Guidelines is considerably lower: less than 400.

[2] Among award-sponsoring organizations are: UNEP-AccountAbility, Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, The European Sustainability Reporting Association, and Ceres-ACCA.

2.4. Developing, applying and standardizing sustainability management practices

Internally to an organization, sustainability reporting and sustainability management build on a similar philosophy, strategy, skills and resources [53]. Formal voluntary management standards related to CSR emerged over the past two decades as a form of accreditation and self-regulation by business. They are generally developed by independent standard-setting bodies, which draw credibility from the process, participants, reputation of the accrediting organization, and acceptance by the users. Some are national in nature and scope (AFNOR SD 21 00, Guidelines on Sustainable Development in France, or SIGMA, the Sustainability-Integrated Guidelines for Management in the UK), others are sector-specific (FORGE, Guidelines on Environmental Management and Reporting for the financial services sector in the UK), or impact area-specific (EMAS or ISO 14,001, focuses on the environment; SA 8000 focuses on working conditions and human rights).

There is a considerable overlap among developers of management standards and GRI. For example, the non-profit consultancies/think tanks AccountAbility and Forum for the Future, both closely connected to GRI, participated in the development of SIGMA Guidelines; among the two dozen activist groups, consultants, and companies who participated in developing Social Accountability SA 8000, several are members of the GRI Stakeholder Council (the standard, which has so far certified over 600 facilities worldwide, builds on several ILO and United Nations conventions); The ISO Social Responsibility Guidance Standard, ISO 26,000, which is currently under development, draws on some of the more active participants in the GRI network as well as on its leading ideas (especially the multistakeholder process), and will include CSR reporting requirements modeled on GRI [48].

2.5. Verifying sustainability reports

Some reporters use external verification for their sustainability reports, with estimates ranging from 30% in 2003 [55] to 40% in 2004 [50,51], although marked regional differences exist (3% in the US compared to 45% in Europe) [34,49]. One unresolved question with regard to verification (also referred to as "assurance") is what should be the object of verification: the report or sustainability performance. Traditional accountancy firms, with PwC and KPMG competing for most of the market, conduct the first type of verification, while the CSR consultancies (e.g. members of CSR Network and especially AccountAbilility) specialize in the second type. Both groups have been active participants in the GRI development process.

Another open question is whether external verification should be made a requirement, and who should conduct it: traditional accountancy firms (as is the case of financial reporting), or experts in sustainability, environment and social impacts. Other open questions pertain to the need for a stakeholder engagement in a verification process, and the criteria for standardizing and *verifying* verification reports. Large accounting firms provide assurance statements in accordance with their own criteria, which are modeled on financial reporting standards. A minority of reporters, especially in Australia, Germany, Japan, Sweden, and the Netherlands, rely on standards issued by national professional accountancy associations [51].

2.6. Developing standards for verification of sustainability reports

Unsurprisingly, efforts have emerged to standardize the procedures and criteria for verification. Most prominent are the AA1000 Standard, developed by AccountAbility [56], and ISAE 3000, developed by the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board [57], but there are numerous other competitors. The overlap of ideas between GRI sustainability standards and these emerging verification/assurance standards, and the overlap of participating individuals and organizations is substantial. AA1000, for example, calls for a multistakeholder engagement in the verification process and offers a separate standard (AA1010) for how such engagement should be conducted.

The G3 version of GRI Guidelines attempts to facilitate the standardization process by offering criteria for verification of GRI reports: accuracy, completeness, reliability, balance, and fairness. But the large number of verification providers is an obstacle to standardization.

2.7. Making public policy on sustainability reporting and CSR

For the most part, governments have maintained a distance from the reporting and CSR movements, considering them voluntary private initiatives. France[3] and the Netherlands[4] have been the most notable exceptions to the general absence of public mandates for reporting, and have recently been joined by the UK.[5] There are other country-specific policies on disclosure [34,45].

The French experience illustrates that mandatory reporting has a significant impact on uptake: the number of French sustainability reporters has more than doubled in the three years after its parliamentary approval [58]. But the idea of mandatory sustainability reporting (GRI or otherwise) remains contested because of the lack of enforcement mechanisms and the need for credible report assurance practices and standards. In addition, it is feared that this may lead to a loss of the sense of ownership by reporters, the "buy-in" power, and to a loss in innovative potential [51,59]. While the majority of respondents to one survey favored making reporting mandatory, the preference for voluntary systems has grown since 2002 [60]. Several of our interviewees were concerned that a legal requirement would turn reporting into a routinized check-list activity. In a joint publication, UNEP and KPMG recommend mandatory minimum requirements for sustainability reporting augmented with incentives for more extensive reporting [45].

2.8. Using sustainability reports

2.8.1. Investors, shareholders and capital markets

The financial sector was from the start a great hope of the GRI founders as a potential powerful user of data on sustainability performance. This hope has been realized to some degree by the socially responsible investment community, SRI, which however represents only a few percent of all investment funds [61]. We found that the mainstream institutional investors have so far shown little interest in the non-financial performance data, which is consistent with other findings [50,62].

SRI research organizations, such as KLD, SAM Sustainability Group, Innovest, Calvert, Investor Responsibility Research Center (IRRC), as well as rating and ranking services, such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, FTSE4Good, the Domini Social 400 Index, and others, serve as 'information brokers'. They apply often proprietary techniques and algorithms to translate the sustainability performance data into decision tools, including scenario building (used by SAM Sustainability Group to generate evaluation criteria), various weighing formulas, so-called "best in class" screens, and others. The ranks of professionals conducting SRI research have grown in recent years, including formation of a new professional organization: Social Investment Research Analyst Network, SIRAN.

But the individuals we interviewed within this intermediary sector told us that GRI only augments other, more dominant, sources of information, such as: direct inquiries, mandatory compliance data, media reports, company documents and websites, and industry publications. The reason appears to be partly a wide range of inconsistent needs. For instance, while ICCR finds the descriptive component for social impacts useful for opening an inquiry about governance, it also finds the quantitative indicators and low emphasis in GRI on supply chain performance inadequate for organizing issue-specific shareholder actions. On the other hand, qualitative performance indicators and the small number of reporting companies are barriers to benchmarking, rating and ranking (IRRC, KLD, Calvert, ICCR).

Other reasons include uneven data quality, selective reporting by companies, and selective choosing of reporting frameworks [50,62]. One commenter observed that adding GRI to a crowded field of reporting frameworks served to enlarge that loophole: "for reluctant companies the best possible situation is no reporting at all; absent that, the next best thing is to have the greatest possible number of reporting systems." All interviewees agreed that GRI's greatest contribution for the financial sector has been to raise expectations of their clients for disclosure of information and making companies more receptive to requests for information. In many cases GRI reports provide a starting point for further inquiry and dialogue with companies.

2.8.2. By social activists

The low use of GRI reports by civil society organizations and other NGOs, consumer organizations, organized labor, and the media has been a long standing concern to GRI Secretariat. While a web-based survey by German consulting firm Pleon reports that more than half of the responding NGOs use CSR reports (not specifically GRI) at least occasionally [60],[6] extensive study by Palenberg et al. [50], employing a survey and 49 personal interviews, concludes that the use of non-financial reports, including GRI, is insignificant. Our observations at the 2008 annual GRI conference and our interviews are consistent with the latter findings.[7] Some interviewees complained of inadequate outreach by GRI Secretariat, which in their opinion has focused on the financial sector and companies, and of uneven quality and trustworthiness of reports (see also [63–65] for a discussion of the quality and perceived trustworthiness of reports). But the main problem seems structural, namely that the information in GRI reports is not very useful for their issue-specific activist tactics. A common complaint

[3] In February 2002 the Law on New Economic Regulations was passed in France. It requires all listed companies to report on their CSR performance in their annual reviews. The financial auditors verify the financial, as well as the environmental and social information. There is no specific regulation on GRI reporting. However, the French companies are basing their non-financial reports on the GRI. The French labor laws strongly influence human resources policy and reporting. In 2005 France adopted and National Sustainability Strategy.

[4] The Dutch have incorporated the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises into its legislation on export credit guarantees, and are actively promoting CSR and reporting through various regulatory and voluntary measures and initiatives. The government has created an independent benchmark on sustainability performance.

[5] The 2006 Companies Act requires company directors to report on the impacts of their companies on the community and environment.

[6] This finding may be overstated through selection bias, owing to a very low response rate.

[7] We interviewed representatives of AFL-CIO, Transparency International, World Resources Institute, CREA, Boston Foundation (the latter two being economic development organizations) and two organizations actively engaged in developing the Guidelines (Forum for the Future, Oxfam International).

is that the information "is not detailed enough", "does not give an adequate picture of the impacts on local communities… and social conditions", is not "situation-specific", is "too processes oriented, rather than performance", or is "disconnected from the realities on the ground." "A single number or description are not enough: we are interested in strategies and plans behind the numbers", remarked one interviewee. On the other hand, for the media the information is excessive and unfocused. Noted a journalist: "[they] write these nice reports…what do we do with them? Nothing, just put them on the pile…".

The problem is exacerbated by the absence of information brokers who would translate the raw information contained in the reports into the language that can be used to rank, rate, or benchmark the reporting companies. Partly, this is the problem of the participant number: "we need a very large pool of participants before we can use a particular source" remarked the representative of the website www.idealswork.com, which allows consumers to rank manufacturers of various product on their sustainability performance.

3. Actors in the GRI organizational field

The description of the activities in the GRI organizational field in Section 2 allows us to identify distinct actors and their mutual relationships. Their levels of engagement with GRI, and interests and links to other activates in the organizational field, collectively determine the nature of the nascent institution of GRI. We describe them below, starting with those most engaged actors.

The GRI Secretariat stands out from the other actors by having a raison d'être and well defined function in the organizational field: to promote GRI, steward the Guidelines and their evolution, and to convene and facilitate the signature multistakeholder process worldwide. As such, it seeks to participate in all the activities in the GRI organizational field, including their use (by reaching out to potential users). It is by design a small organization that depends deeply on the intellectual and other in kind resources of its organizational stakeholders. Following the initial generous support from charitable foundations, it now relies mostly on private sources. As we described previously [2] the built-in competing vision of providing a public good while remaining independent of public funds and depending on private resources creates a chronic tension. Partly for that reason, the Secretariat has grown increasingly dependent on support from large companies and banks – which undermines the perception of impartiality – and on marketing the GRI brand and products, which competes with the goals of inclusiveness and a widely shared public good.

UNEP, which has partnered with GRI from the start, is the most important presence in the multilateral organizations category. In addition to intense participation in, and co-funding of, the GRI initiative, since 1999 UNEP has partnered with companies, consultancies, accountancies and various idea entrepreneurs in developing the Global Compact, sustainability management practices, and verification standards as well as the policy debate on mandatory reporting (e.g. [38,45,53]). Large multinational corporations are key players among GRI reporters and verifiers, and have played an active part in developing and promoting GRI and its current governance. Often the same multinationals participate in overlapping organizational field activities: development and use of codes of conduct, development of other non-GRI sustainability reporting systems, development of sustainability management practices, the debate over verification of reports and setting standards for verification, and public policies regarding reporting. Accountancies and international consultancies are a strong presence in several organizational field activities: GRI governance, development of guidelines for sustainability reporting, preparing and verifying reports, advising companies on sustainability management, developing standards for verification as well as the policy debate regarding mandatory reporting (see, for example, the joint [45]). The BIG4 have become particularly strong promoters of sustainability reporting, which represents significant part of its business portfolio. Similarly, large consulting industry has evolved around reporting and other CSR-related activities (see, for instance Ethical Performance 2006 for the industry directory).

We additionally identify the idea entrepreneurs category to recognize the individuals who absorb and analyze the organizational field activities, identify and frame problems, and develop solutions in the form of proposals and specific projects. They are highly influential in framing the agenda for the organizational field, building legitimacy for ideas, and influencing the course of the policy debate. The GRI idea entrepreneurs represent different organizational actors, especially: international consultancies (e.g. AccountAbility, SustainAbility), the BIG4 accountancy firms, large multinational corporations and banks, and UNEP.

Less actively involved than the previous six categories are international business associations. Some, such as World Business Council for Sustainable Development, CSR Europe, Business for Social Responsibility, and the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum have been active in developing codes of conduct and reporting guidelines, and in the public policy debate regarding reporting. Others, such as the International Chamber of Commerce, which is closely linked to its national members, have not, although that may change over time as their members are increasingly participating in GRI events, working groups and consulting. Similarly, the mainstream investors and other capital providers show minimal interest in using GRI reports or engaging in the GRI process, and only occasional organizations among them issue their own GRI reports. The SRI community within the financial sector is moderately more active, both as producers of reports and in using them. The SCR community participates in such activities as guidelines development, and discussion on standardizing of verification and on public policy.

International civil society organizations (CSOs) and activist NGOs and national governments have been engaged in the GRI field very selectively: a handful of the former have participated in developing codes of conduct and reporting guidelines, especially in response to the Secretariat's efforts during the G3 process, while some governments have actively promoted reporting. But even the governments that have adopted mandatory requirements for sustainability reporting have not engaged with other actors in the GRI field. Among the national civil society organizations, active participants, such as UK-based Forum for the Future are exceptions to the general non-participation. Generally, organized labor, local civil society organizations, and small and medium size business enterprises have been inactive in the GRI field. Recognizing it as a problem of legitimacy and future growth, GRI Secretariat has undertaken initiatives aimed at engaging NGOs and SMEs, including developing a Sector Supplement for NGOs and experimenting with "cluster reports" by similar small businesses. The future will reveal the results of these efforts.

We summarize the above analysis of the GRI organizational field in Table 1. Three observations emerge. First, actors who participate in the GRI field activities are involved in multiple activities. This multiplicity of roles no doubt facilitates interactions among the participating actors and should facilitate institutionalization. Second, the heaviest overall activity clearly occurs at the supply end of the GRI reporting lifecycle: development and application of codes of conduct, development of reporting guidelines, production and verification of reports, and standardization

Table 1
Actors and their activities in GRI organizational field.

	Activities							
Actors	Codes of conduct	Policy debate	Guidelines development	Reporting	Sustainability management	Report verification	Standards for verification	Use of reports
GRI secretariat	**	**	**	**	*	**	**	
Large MNCs	**	*	**	**	**	*		
Accountancies and international consultancies	*	*	**	**	**	**	**	
Idea entrepreneurs	**	**	**				**	
Multilateral Org: UNEP	**	**	**				**	
International business associations	**	*	*					
Investors and capital markets		*	*					*
International activist organizations	*	*	*?					*?
National/local activist organizations	*	*	*?					
Governments		*						
Organized labor	*							
SMEs								

**Signifies high involvement of an actor in an activity.
*Signifies one of the following: moderate/low involvement of the entire group or high/moderate involvement by only some members of the group.
*?Signifies moderate/low activity that seems to be declining; Empty cells signify minimal or no involvement.

of related practices (e.g. verification and business management of sustainability). Very little activity occurs at the user-end of the reporting lifecycle.

Third, the most active and influential actors in the organizational field (not counting the GRI Secretariat) are large multinationals, leading accountancies and international consultancies, followed by UNEP and idea enterprneurs. They fill the ranks of the GRI Organizational Stakeholders and multistakeholder working groups, form coalitions, enter into partnerships with each other and with national governments and UNEP, publish influential joint reports, and influence policy debates relative to CSR and accountability. Through engagement in multiple activities in the organizational field, they frame the debate over what matters most and what should therefore be reported, and influence the outcome of any emerging consensus. By way of participating in the multistakeholder process they are the vital source of GRI's legitimacy and its intellectual and financial resources.

4. GRI: an emerging institution?

Drawing on Powell and DiMaggio [30], Scott [31,32] and other institutional theorists, we use eight criteria to assess the degree of GRI's institutionalization. These are listed in the left hand column of Table 2. Within the bounds of our empirical data the right hand column also depicts some specific manifestations of the eight criteria. The discussion below interprets Table 2, starting with uptake.

4.1. Indicators of GRI institutionalization

Although 1000 GRI reporters worldwide (Fig. 1) may not seem like much, GRI is the best-known and most used single framework for non-financial reporting by companies in 65 countries. It is increasingly made an object of study among academic circles [29,58,63,66–69]. Our interviews suggest that at least some companies who use it take it seriously, invest considerable resources in report production and external verification, find it initially to be a transforming experience and with time adopt it as a standard internal practice. During the first decade of the new millennium non-financial reporting has become embedded in the operational routines and practices of reporting companies.

With regard to the language of the CSR dialogue, GRI has greatly contributed to the popularization of the concepts of inclusive multistakeholder process, social impact indicators and materiality. While the discussion about the precise translation of these terms into common practices continues, we found no ambiguity among our interviewees, ranging from NGOs to the financial sector, about their general meaning.[8]

The attainment of official recognition by national governmental agencies, multilateral organizations such as the UN and OECD, and with International Standards Organization (through the ISO 26,000 process), has imparted to GRI prestige, visibility and legitimacy within the CSR community. This is manifested by the presence of high-level executives, officials and royalty at the 2008 annual conference, and by recent formal efforts to synchronize GRI with UN Global Compact and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Without exception, our interviewees supported the GRI goals, its underlying principles, the participatory open process, and its contribution to openness. Comments such as "GRI raised the bar on sustainability reporting"; "GRI [or some future version of it] is here to stay"; "if GRI disappeared, it would be a big void", or "the really interesting question is not whether it will continue but what G10 or G15 will look like" were common across different groups of actors. We also heard from GRI critics, but those targeted the perceived functioning of GRI rather than its principles.

GRI's impact on the emergence of new norms of behavior and taken for granted assumptions has been uneven. It certainly helped solidify sustainability reporting as a standard business practice. Large multinational companies in Europe and the US are expected to produce sustainability reports, GRI or otherwise, and the majority do (52% of the Fortune 250 in 2005, according to [51]). For those, reporting has become part of sustainability management practices. CSR consultancies and think tanks, leading international accountancies, socially responsible investors and benchmarking and rating organizations that serve the SRI financial markets, all have in place methodologies for generating reports or, as appropriate for their line of business, for using the information therein.

A thriving new industry has emerged around these activities. Propelled by idea entrepreneurs and information brokers, this industry seeks to grow, expand its influence, and standardizes professional practices in relation to verification, stakeholder engagement practices and sustainability management. They support the emerging certification systems (e.g. ISO 26,000 or DJSI) and formal awards (e.g. SustainAbility-UNEP, ACCA, ESRA, Ceres-ACCA). Members of this group interact with one another and with other

[8] For example, the term "materiality", taken from the financial accounting practice to denote relevance, was well understood by our interviewees as meaning responsiveness to the stakeholders' agendas.

Table 2
Indicators of GRI institutionalization.

General characteristics	Possible manifestations
Uptake of GRI by reporters	■ Number of reporters
Emergence of new language and concepts	■ Shared understanding of the meaning of new terms across different actor categories
Visibility of GRI in mainstream policy, political and business dialogue; prestige; legitimacy	■ Increased visibility in press and professional/trade publications, official reports ■ Reference to GRI in formal statements ■ Inclusion of GRI in policy debates and strategic forums ■ New governmental policies related to GRI ■ New NGO/CSO initiatives related to GRI ■ Opinions and attitudes
Uptake of GRI as a mainstream professional/business practice and expected norm of behavior	■ Familiarity with the GRI system by key actors ■ Increased requests for GRI data ■ Use of GRI reports in standard accounting practices ■ Use of GRI reports in standard investment analyses and strategies ■ Use of GRI reports by social activists ■ Standardization of professional norms related to production and use of GRI reports
Emergence of new enterprises, business activities and professions	■ Consultants specializing in preparing and verifying GRI reports ■ Consultants specializing in interpreting GRI reports and other information brokering ■ New professions specializing as above
Emergence of competitive pressures related to GRI	■ Political actions based on GRI reports ■ Consumer actions and shareholder initiatives based on GRI reports ■ Stratification into participants and non-participants in GRI discourse and reporting ■ Stratification into 'leaders' and 'laggards', based on GRI participation and reports
Emergence of awareness of a common enterprise and shared ownership	■ Communications among actors re-GRI and mutual familiarity ■ Joint projects regarding evolution of GRI ■ Multiple platforms for mutual interactions ■ Shared language and attitudes toward GRI
Emergence of new institutional logic	

dominant players in the GRI organizational field, generate ideas, and collectively manage the increased load of information and ideas they share.

But so far, GRI has not succeeded in unifying the social reporting field around a single set of standards; it has not resulted in the generation of data that are of high and consistent quality and that can be easily comparable across companies; and has not delivered the promised efficiency gains to the many potential users of reports. Nor has it stimulated the emergence of a single community of financial, labor, civil right, environmental or consumer activists around these reports for whom using the reports would be a standard, taken for granted organizational practice and a strategic tool. In this regard, GRI has fallen far short of the intent of attaining status equivalent to FASBI standards. As a result, the essential source of competitive pressure among companies to issue GRI reports and to be accountable for their content is absent. The existing incentives, such as awards for good reports or listing on Dow Jones Sustainability Index, do not balance the absence of sanctions for non-participation or poor quality. Furthermore, more specialized reporting mechanisms are emerging, such as the Investor Network on Climate Risks and other business-oriented initiatives spearheaded by Ceres.

On the other hand, the founders' aspiration that GRI would institutionalize a participatory societal dialogue on sustainable business practices has materialized. Murphy [70] refers to the GRI multistakeholder process as "a working model of networked knowledge management which becomes an embedded system upon which corporations and other using organizations may base forward-looking decisions." Participants in this dialogue comprise mostly large companies and banks, leading accountancies, international consultancies, financial information brokers, and idea entrepreneurs representing the above four sectors. Westrik [58] and Villegas [69]made similar findings in France and Brazil, respectively. Our research points to an awareness existing among these actors that they are engaged in a *common enterprise and a shared ownership* of GRI.[9] We also see an emerging power structure through patterns of coalition building and inter-organizational links among them.

In summary, GRI exhibits several characteristics that are typically found in established institutions. It is too early to know how stable these patterns are, given the slow diffusion of GRI into the standard operating practices of the users of information, or how path-dependent their future evolution will be, especially in the absence of other important institutional characteristics. But it is apparent to us that a certain institutional logic has formed for this nascent entity.[10] Strikingly, in that logic GRI is primarily a *tool for sustainability, reputation and brand management by companies*. This is what our interviewees said, and this is what other research on non-financial reporting practices has previously found [50]. The GRI Secretariat puts it this way: "[it]…provides tools for: management, increased comparability and reduced costs of sustainability, brand and reputation enhancement, differentiation in the marketplace, protection from brand erosion resulting from the actions of suppliers or competitors, networking and communications…provides the private sector with a vehicle to better inform capital market decision makers and analysts to ensure stakeholder value [71]."

5. Discussion

The establishment of GRI has been a successful institutionalization project by many measures, especially considering the short period of time since its launch. Social reporting, and the associated language, concepts and assumptions, have rapidly become a taken

[9] By ownership we mean recognition that a systemic failure of GRI would be inimical to one's own interests.

[10] McAdams and Scott [72] refer to institutional logic as the belief system and associates practices that predominate in an organizational field.

for granted practice among large multinational corporations, and GRI has played a dominant role. Despite its problems, it seems unlikely that GRI will disappear any time soon (Palenberg et al. [50] foresee a slow linear growth rate for non-financial reporting). Indeed, perhaps GRI's endurance, despite its inability to demonstrate significant instrumental value to intended users, is a powerful signifier of its institutionalization.

GRI's contribution to strengthening new approaches to governance, based on civil–private regulation and a broadly based multistakeholder collaboration, is not so apparent. The core tension in the social reporting field is between two competing institutional logics. The logic of 'civil regulation' views social reporting as a mechanism to empower civil society groups to play a more active and assertive role in corporate governance. By contrast, the logic of 'corporate social performance' emphasizes its instrumental value to corporate management, the investor community, and auditing and consulting firms. The terms 'private regulation' and 'sustainability management practices' best apply to this latter role of social reporting. These two logics are not inherently incompatible; indeed, the attraction of framing GRI in 'win–win' terms by its founders is precisely that it asserts these logics to be complementary. This is what imparts to GRI the potential to be an agent of strengthening CSR, partnerships, and more collaborative forms of global governance. And it is this vision that some of the early supporters of GRI, who hoped for it to become an agent of a new social contract, found so appealing.

GRI has come a long way from these heady initial years to its current institutional logic of being a tool for managing sustainability, reputation and brand by companies. Over time, the civil regulation logic has gradually faded and so has the longer-term vision of transforming corporate and social governance. One of our interviewees from the SRI sector and an early GRI participant put it this way: "We felt that GRI was a movement but it turned into a service organization." Not only has GRI failed to mobilize civil society groups but also its instrumental value for private regulation by way of market mechanisms seems to be modest.

Partly, we trace these developments to the initial strategy of its founders to build a new institution without posing a direct challenge to existing institutions of corporate governance, including managerial boards and financial market structures, and thus to align it with the FASBI reporting standards. They paid considerable attention to ensuring collaboration from major multinational corporations, accountancies and the SRI sector while activists and labor received less attention. Perhaps it was assumed that these groups would be on board with the project anyway, and so required less of the entrepreneurs' limited time and attention[2].

Partly, it is a structural problem of securing a users' base. While financial reports based on the FASBI accounting standards have a built-in homogenous audience with similar interests and needs, GRI speaks to a range of societal groups, internationally, with widely varied and inconsistent needs and interests. It is perhaps unrealistic to expect a single reporting system to serve them sufficiently well to create a strong user base. Furthermore, the financial markets have so far shown little interest in social and environmental reporting as predictors of financial performance.

Another explanation for the particular trajectory that evolution of GRI' institutional logic has taken lies, paradoxically, with one of GRI's most respected features: the inclusive, unlimited in size and composition, multistakeholder process. While this process encouraged and nourished a rich dialogue about sustainability performance, it has also led to an emergence of a dominant constituency with the greatest stakes and resources to invest in this dialogue: multinational companies and international management and accounting consultancies (see also [73]). In doing so, it propelled GRI's evolution toward the ways of thinking and interests of this constituency.

6. Conclusions

From the perspective of institutional theory, the story of GRI illustrates how an institution emerges in a dynamic fashion as a result of interactions among many actors, how interests and logics evolve, and how the trajectory of the institution can deviate from the intentions of the entrepreneurs. The particular form taken by an institution reflects the power relations among members of the field, their ability to mobilize alliances and resources, and constraints imposed by the broader institutions in which a field is nested. The GRI case also illustrates the importance of economic structures and resources in shaping emerging institutions.

From the perspective of governance, this case leads us to question one of the fundamental assumptions about information-based civil regulation: that standardized commodified information can be an instrument for empowering and mobilizing various societal actors so long as it is produced by way of broad participation and with an eye to the needs of future users. Recent critical studies of information-based regulations especially stress the importance of matching the information to users' needs [74]. The GRI case shows that information indeed must have usable format and content. It also shows that the process of gathering and issuing information may be an important managerial experience for reporting organizations; and that the collective process of deciding what and how to report can generate a useful societal dialogue, clarify concepts and contribute to agenda setting. But the case also suggests that standardized commodified information *in itself* cannot be a strong instrument for empowering or mobilizing social action or for partnerships among traditional adversaries. For one, social actions and partnerships are driven by specific and widely ranging problem definitions, which in turn require specialized and often controversial types of knowledge. Second, and perhaps more crucially, standardized commodified information does not have the visionary power to mobilize for social action.

Acknowledgements

We thank Dr. Teodorina Lessidrenska and Prof. Philip Vergragt for their contributions to collecting the empirical data for this research, based on documentary analysis and interviews. This research was supported by grant #SES0450897 from the US National Science Foundation, Ethics and Values Studies.

References

[1] Brown HS, De Jong M, Lessidrenska T. The rise of Global Reporting Initiative as a case of institutional entrepreneurship. Corporate Social Responsibility initiative working paper #36. Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Available from:, http://www.hks.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI/publications/workingpaper_36_brown.pdf; 2007.
[2] Brown HS, De Jong M. Lessidrenska T. The rise of Global Reporting Initiative as a case of institutional entrepreneurship. Environ Polit 2009;18(4):182–200.
[3] National Academy of Engineering. Industrial environmental performance metrics: challenges and opportunities. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1999.
[4] World Bank. Greening industry: new roles for communities, markets, and governments. A World Bank research report. New York: Oxford University Press; 2000.
[5] Fiorino DJ. The new environmental regulation. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; 2006.
[6] Graham M, Miller C. Disclosure of toxic releases in the United States. Environment 2001;43:9–19.
[7] The Enterprise for the Environment. The environmental protection system in transition: toward a more desirable future. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies; 1998.
[8] Sexton K, Marcus AA, Easter W, Burkhardt TD, editors. Better environmental decisions: strategies for governments, business, and communities. Washington, DC: Island Press; 1999. p. 331–52.
[9] Graham M. Democracy by disclosure: the rise of technopopulism. Washington, DC: Brookings/Governance Institute; 2002.

[10] Tietenberg T, Wheeler D. Empowering the community: information strategies for pollution control. Frontiers of Environmental Economics Conference, October 23–25, Arlie House, Virginia; 1998.
[11] Florini AM. End of secrecy. Foreign Policy 1998;111(Summer):50–63.
[12] John DW. Civic environmentalism: alternatives to regulation in states and communities. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press; 1994.
[13] Gunningham N, Kagan RA, Thornton D. Social license and environmental protection. Law Soc Inq 2004:307–41.
[14] White A, Zinkl D. Green metrics: a global status report on standardized corporate environmental reporting. Joint publication-report by CERES Annual Conference, Boston, MA and Tellus Institute; 1998.
[15] White AL. Sustainability and the accountable corporation. Environment 1999;41(8):3–43.
[16] Zadek S. The civil corporation: the new economy of corporate citizenship. London: Earthscan Publications; 2001.
[17] Corporate storytelling: non-financial accounting is now too serious to be left to amateurs. The Economist November 2004.
[18] Herremans IM, Herschovis S. Sustainability reporting: creating an internal self-driving mechanism. Environ Qual Manage 2006;15:19–29.
[19] Reinicke WH. Global public policy. Governing with government?. Washington, DC: Brooking Institution Press; 1998.
[20] Reinicke WH, Deng F. Critical choices: the United Nations, networks, and the future of global governance. Ottawa: Canada: International Development Research Centre; 2000.
[21] Keck ME, Sikkink K. Activists beyond borders: advocacy networks in international politics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 1998.
[22] Bendell J, editor. Terms of endearment. Business, NGOs, and sustainable development. Aizlewood's Mill, UK: Greenleaf Publishing; 2000.
[23] Ottaway M. Corporatism goes global: international organizations, nongovernmental organizations networks, and transnational business. Global Govern 2001;7(3):265–92.
[24] Glasbergen P, Groenenberg R. Environmental partnerships in sustainable energy. Eur Environ 2001;11(1):1–13.
[25] van Tulder R, van der Zwart A. International business–society management: linking corporate responsibility and globalization. London: Routledge; 2006.
[26] Biermann F. 'Earth systems governance' as a cross-cutting theme of global change research. Global Environ Change 2007;17(3–4):326–37.
[27] Biermann F, Chan M, Mert A, Pattberg P. Multistakeholder partnerships for sustainable development: does the promise hold? In: Paper presented at the 2007 Amsterdam conference on human dimensions of global environmental change: earth systems governance: theories and strategies for sustainability, May 24–26, Free University of Amsterdam. Available from: http://www.2007amsterdamconference.org; 2007.
[28] Zadek S. The logic of collaborative governance. CSR initiative working paper 17. Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Available from:, http://www.harvard.edu/m-rcbg/CSRI/publications; 2006 [accessed 07.01.08].
[29] Dingwerth K. The new transnationalism: transnational governance and democratic legitimacy. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 2007.
[30] Powell WW, DiMaggio PJ. The new institutionalism in organizational analysis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1991.
[31] Scott WR. Unpacking institutional arguments. In: Powell WW, DiMaggio P, editors. The new institutionalism in organizational analysis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1991. p. 164–82.
[32] Scott WR. Institutions and organizations. London: Sage; 1995.
[33] Kolk A, van Tulder R, Welters C. International codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility: can transnational corporations regulate themselves? Transit Corp 1999;8(1):143–80.
[34] Kolk A. Environmental reporting by multinationals from the triad: convergence of divergence? Manage Int Rev 2005;45(1):145–66.
[35] EU. European Union multistakeholder forum on CSR, 2004. CSR forum final report. Available from:, http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/csr/csr-index.htm; 30 June 2004 [accessed 03.01.08].
[36] OECD. Codes of conduct – an expanded review of their contents. TD/TC/WP (99)56/FINAL. Paris: OECD Working Party of the Trade Committee; 2000.
[37] Leipzinger D. The corporate responsibility code book. Sheffield, UK: Greenleaf Publishing; 2003.
[38] GC and GRI. Making the connection: using the GRI's G3 reporting guidelines for the UN global compact's communication on progress. Global Compact and Global Reporting Initiative; October 2006. Draft Publication.
[39] Waddock S. On CERES, the GRI and Corporation 20/20: Sandra Waddock talks to Allen White. J Corp Citizen 2007;(June)::26.
[40] GRI. Sustainability reporting guidelines G3. Amsterdam: Global Reporting Initiative; 2006.
[41] Richards T, Dickinson D. Guidelines by stakeholders for stakeholders. J Corp Citizen 2007;(Spring).
[42] ACCA, Association of Chartered Certified Accountants and CorporateRegister.com. Environmental, social and sustainability reporting on the worldwide web: a guide to best practices. Available from: http://www.accaglobal.com/pdfs/environment/ACCA-RJ3-002.pdf; 2001. p. 39 [accessed 07.01.08].
[43] Heemskerk B, Pistorio P, Scicluna M. Sustainable development reporting – striking the balance. Geneva: World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Available from: http://www.wbcsd.org/DocRoot/GGFpsq8dGngT5K56sAur/20030106_sdreport.pdf; December 2002 [accessed 04.01.07].
[44] Stratos Inc. and Government of Canada. Sustainability reporting toolkit. Government of Canada. Available from: http://www.sustainabilityreporting.ca; 2003 [accessed 07.01.08].
[45] UNEP and KPMG. Carrots and sticks for starters: current trends and approaches in voluntary and mandatory standards for sustainability reporting. Available from: http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID = 486&ArticleID = 5365&l = en; 2006 [accessed 07.01.08].
[46] Business in the Community. The business case for corporate responsibility in the community. Available from: http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/business_case_for_responsible_business/businesscase.html; 2003 [accessed 07.01.08].
[47] UNCTAD. Disclosure of the impacts of corporations on society: current trends and issues. United Nations conference on trade and development report, August 15, 2003. Available from:, http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/c2iar20_en.pdf; 2003 [accessed 07.01.08].
[48] ISO. Participating in the future international standard ISO 26 000 on social responsibility. Available from: http://www.iso.org/iso/iso26000_2006-en.pdf; 2007 [accessed 07.01.08].
[49] Kolk A. Sustainability reporting. VBA J 2006;21(3):34–42.
[50] Palenberg M, Reinicke W, Witte JM. Trends in non-financial reporting. Paper prepared for the United Nations Environment Programmes, Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE), November 2006. Berlin, Germany: Global Public Policy Institute. Available from:, www.gppi.net; 2006.
[51] KPMG. KPMG international survey of corporate responsibility reporting, June 2005. Amsterdam: KPMG Global Sustainability Services; 2005.
[52] Context. Reporting in Context: global corporate responsibility trends 2006. London: Context; 2006. 11–13 p.
[53] SustainAbility and UNEP. Tomorrow's value: the global reporters 2006 survey of corporate sustainability reporting, November 2006. London: Sustainability; 2006.
[54] GRI. Statistics provided by GRI secretariat, April 2007..
[55] Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). Association of Chartered Certified accountants corporate responsibility reporting survey 2004. London: Association of Chartered Certified Accountants; 2004. 12 p.
[56] AccountAbility (Institute for Social and Ethical Accountability). AA 1000 Series assurance standard. Available from: http://www.accountability.org.uk/aa1000/default.asp?pageid=52; 2004 [accessed 7.01.06].
[57] International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB). International federation of accountants, international standards on assurance engagement (ISAE) 3000: assurance engagements other than audits or reviews of historical financial information. Available from: http://www.ifac.org/; 2006 [accessed 10.01.06].
[58] Westrik S. Sustainability reporting in France. The institutionalization and impact of sustainability reporting and GRI in the French transport sector. Masters thesis, Delft University of Technology, Delft, the Netherlands; 2007.
[59] SustainAbility. Radar the government issue: what role for governments. London: SustainAbility; June 2004.
[60] Pleon. Accounting for good: the Global stakeholder report 2005, the second world-wide survey on stakeholder attitudes to CSR reporting, September 2005. Bonn: Pleon Kothes Klewes; 2005.
[61] Vogel D. The low value of virtue. Harvard Business Review 2005;83:26–36.
[62] SIRAN. GRI reporting–aiming to uncover true performance. Report prepared by West LB AG. Available from:, http://www.siran.org/pdfs/WestLB_GRI_reporting.pdf; 2007 [accessed 08.01.08].
[63] MacLean R, Rebernak K. Closing the credibility gap: the challenges of corporate responsibility reporting. Environ Qual Manage 2007;16:1–6.
[64] O'Dwyer B, Owen DL. Assurance statement practice in environmental, social and sustainability reporting: a critical evaluation. Br Account Rev 2005;37:205–29.
[65] Moneva JM, Archel P, Correa C. GRI and the camouflaging of corporate unsustainability. Account Forum 2006;30:121–37.
[66] Mudd GM. Global trends in gold mining: towards quantifying environmental and resource sustainability. Resour Policy 2007;32:42–56.
[67] Capriotti P, Moreno Á. Corporate citizenship and public relations: the importance and interactivity of social responsibility issues on corporate websites. Public Relat Rev 2007;33:84–91.
[68] Etzion D, Ferraro F. Institutional entrepreneurship through voluntary standard setting: the case of global reporting initiative. 22nd EGOS Colloquium, July 6–8, 2006, Bergen, Norway. Available from:, http://www.econ.upf.edu/docs/seminars/etzionferraro.pdf; 2006.
[69] Villegas Timm C. Sustainability reporting in Brazil. Analyzing the emergent institutionalization of global reporting initiative: between reputation building and performance improvement. Masters thesis, Delft University of Technology, Delft, The Netherlands; 2007.
[70] Murphy JC. The global reporting initiative in the knowledge-based economy. Knowledge-based economy: management of creation and development, 2005: p. 275–82.
[71] GRI. GRI website: frequently asked questions. Available from: http://www.globalreporting.org/AboutGRI/FAQs/FAQSustainabilityReporting.htm; 2007 [accessed November 2007].
[72] McAdam D, Scott WR. Organizations and movements. In: Davis G, McAdam D, Scott WR, Zald MN, editors. Social movements and organization theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2005. p. 4–40.
[73] White AL. Why we need global standards for corporate disclosure 2007. Law Contemp Probl 2007;69:167–86.
[74] Fung A, Graham M, Weil D. Full disclosure. The perils and promise of transparency. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2007.