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From market logics to esthetic logics: interaction between de novos and de alios in the comics publishing industry

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ABSTRACT
The article contributes to a better understanding of the impact of the interaction between diverse organizations in the same creative industry on their logics and practices, by investigating the role of the origin of organizations – as a dimension of organizational diversity – in this process. The main distinction is that between two organizational categories: de novos, who are founded to function in a specific field, and de alios, who have their origin in another, earlier developed field. The interaction between both types is analyzed within a specific creative industry: Dutch language comics publishers. Using data on industry level that cover the period 1945–1994, and combining this with case studies of four individual publishers, I argue that when this industry gradually became dominated by de novos, de alios publishers who aspired to stay in the field, adapted their practices to those of de novos. If in a creative industry smaller, specialized companies (de novos) prevail, this may force much larger companies (de alios) in the same field to copy their practices. Thus, even in an originally mainly market-oriented industry such as that of comics publishing, within-field interaction can lead to a shift towards more esthetic logics.

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Introduction
In the cultural industries, organizations have to cope with what Lampel, Lant, and Shamsie (2000) call a fundamental ‘balancing act’ (263): a continuous tension between creative and economic forces. On top of that, and just as organizations in other industries, they are challenged by external and internal dynamics, which makes it complicated for them to make sense of these developments and translate them in a clear strategy. Nevertheless, many organizations apparently find their ways to deal with this
variety of changing demands. The institutional logics perspective proves to be fertile ground for organizational research on exactly this domain.

Institutional logics (from now on: IL) can be defined as ‘the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space and reproduce their lives and experiences’ (Thornton and Ocasio 2008, 101). IL research focuses on the organizational use of multiple, sometimes conflicting logics (a.o. Almandoz 2014; Battilana and Dorado 2010; Besharov and Smith 2014; Glynn and Lounsbury 2005; Jones et al. 2012; Kodeih and Greenwood 2014; Thornton 2004).

For research into the creative industries especially mutual influences between mainly market-oriented organizations and artist-oriented organizations are an interesting topic. The stream of IL research (the sources aforementioned) has led to insights on this topic, and on organizational adaptability. However, not much is known yet about the differences regarding logics between organizations in the same field, and to what extent these can be explained by the background of these organizations. This article contributes to filling that gap, by paying attention to one aspect of that background: the origin of an organization, and relating that to the logics of that organizational type, on the individual firm level and on the field level.

If organizations have originally been founded to function in another field, they may have different logics than organizations that were founded to function in that field from the beginning. Here, organizational ecology (from now on: OE) comes in. OE studies the diversity of organizations in a population, and organizational origin is a specific dimension of organizational diversity. OE researchers labeled the former group of organizations as de alio organizations, and the latter as de novo organizations (Carroll et al. 2007). According to Hsu and Hannan (2005) the ratio of both types of organizations in a niche characterizes its identity. Perretti, Negro, and Lomi (2008) take a somewhat broader view: according to them the legitimacy of de alios and de novos in a niche is ultimately based on validation by external audiences. However, thus far these findings are based on only a few industries. This article adds a new organizational field: the comics publishing industry, and pays attention to the interaction between individual firm and field.

The main research question of this article is: to what extent does the origin of organizations have an impact on institutional logics in the comics industry? More specifically the article analyses processes within comics publishers in the Netherlands and Belgium in the period 1945–1994. This industry and this period were chosen, because of the institutional dynamics in the comics publishers field, that went accompanied with changes in the composition of its population, and with changes of its audiences.

This will be explained in more detail in the next section, which contains a concise historical description of western comics industries. After that the theory section introduces the relevant concepts from IL and OE, and relates these to each other. Subsequently the method and the data are introduced. The findings section has a quantitative and a qualitative part. In the first, quantitative part, an overview will be given of the shifts in the proportions of de alio and de novo publishers during the chosen period. The second, qualitative part is based on case studies of four comics publishers. After the discussion of the findings, the article ends with conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research.
Introduction to the field: a concise history of western comics industries

In Europe and in the United States comics appeared in magazines and newspapers since the nineteenth century. Very occasionally books were published of popular comics from these media. This began to occur more regularly in the 1920s and the 1930s, but the comics book industry only really began to boom in the 1940s (Sabin 1996; Wright 2001). Comics publishers got a severe blow in the period of the Cold War, when the world-wide fear for everything that might stir society or could be harmful to children and adolescents, resulted in censoring and self-censoring measures in the comics book industry that limited the scope of subjects that comics could deal with, and the types of comics that publishers could produce (Lopes 2009; Nyberg 1998). This narrowed the supply of comics down to books and magazines that addressed children and families.

In Western-Europe, especially Belgian and later French artists and publishers contributed to the development of comics as a popular mass medium after the Second World War. Belgian comics publishers introduced formula-based comics magazines and comics albums that were copied by other publishers (Dierick 2000; Dierick and Lefèvre 1996; Kousemaker and Kousemaker 1979). Publishers from other countries had a more modest comics production, and imported the most successful Belgian and French comics. Already since the 1960s a big part of the Dutch comics supply was based on imported comics, mainly from Belgium and France (De Vries 2012).

Comics magazines were very popular in the 1950s and 1960s, but the subscriptions to these magazines began to dwindle in the 1970s. At that time comics began to lose their traditional readers: children and families. These target groups were partly replaced by adolescents and adults, who had become more interested in the complete stories that they could find in comics albums, than in weekly or monthly installments of stories that were published in magazines.

At the same time, a new generation of comics artists, who had a higher level of self-consciousness and ambition than their older colleagues, wanted more creative autonomy in their work. Such autonomy was more effectively realized by the medium of the comics album, that could be produced on a small scale for a specific target group, than by the traditional comics magazines that were mass produced and meant for a broad audience. Starting in France in the 1970s, many new publishing companies were founded, sometimes by comics artists, that specialized in comics for adolescents and adults.

Gradually, as a consequence of the parallel processes described above, the comics album replaced the magazine as the main medium for comics in Europe.1

In the Dutch speaking countries comics albums had been published already since 1858, long before the first comics magazines appeared on the market, but during a century only on an incidental basis. In the 1970s and 1980s the supply of comics albums increased and, since 1986, surpassed the supply of magazines, which decreased in the same period. Data on the situation of the Dutch language comics production in the period 1945–1998 are visualized in Figure 1.

The album format enabled comics to develop as an independent medium (independent from newspapers and magazines), which led to artistic innovations such as
the graphic novel and the author’s album.\(^2\) Some graphic novels and author’s albums have more in common with literary books than with the traditional children’s comics.

At the end of the twentieth century, in among others France, Belgium and the Netherlands, the governments who in the first decades after World War Two had rejected comics, now accepted them as a form of art, and included comics in their arts policy. Since then artistic comics, artists, comics festivals and comics museums in these countries receive financial governmental support.

**Theory**

**Institutional logics**

IL have symbolical and material dimensions that are related to each other. The symbolic dimension is related to meaning, whereas the material dimension is that of structures and practices (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012, 10). Practices refer to ‘a set of meaningful activities that are informed by wider cultural beliefs’ (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012, 128). In her study on higher education publishing conglomerates, Thornton (2004) describes how both dimensions are related, and how they are based on logics that are competing. She discerns two ideal types of logics: editorial logics, with attention for books and networking with authors, and market logics, with attention for the market of companies (to acquire or to merge with). The logics of educational publishers have shifted from attention for their products to financial motives. With this conclusion she confirms earlier findings by Fligstein (1990), who states that in general the institutional changes in large corporations shift from the product to sales and finally to a financial conception, no longer related to a specific industry. The fact that Thornton supports Fligstein’s findings suggests that, when organizations and their fields become bigger and older, IL move from product oriented logics to market and finance conceptions by definition. It is however not clear

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**Figure 1.** The production of Dutch language comics albums and issues of comics magazines in the period 1945–1998. *Source:* Author’s database, based on SDCN (2005).

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\(^2\) The graphic novel and the author’s album.
whether this is always necessarily so, or whether there are alternative institutional dynamics as well. This article will address this issue.

Glynn and Lounsbury (2005) use concepts that are comparable to those of Thornton in their paper about the influence of a mixture of logics within a symphony orchestra, on critics in their reviews of the orchestra’s concerts. They describe this in terms of blending esthetic and market logics. Jones et al. (2012) show how different groups of architects that operate within the de novo category ‘modern architecture’ have conflicting logics, and how this is related to their clients.

From the research by Thornton (2004), Glynn and Lounsbury (2005) and Jones et al. (2012) it can be concluded that organizations in the same field can have a mixture of logics that are contrasting, and that stress on a specific type of logics depends on the situation that they are in. How changes of field level characteristics affect the logics of individual firms cannot be found in these studies, but it will be explored upon in the case studies of this article.

The IL perspective offers a theoretical foundation for paying attention to the differences and similarities between logics. Applied to the cultural industries, this especially concerns logics based on esthetic and on market values, and shifts in these logics in the course of time.

IL-based research contributes to knowledge about the identity of organizations. However, logics and identity are not synonyms: ‘while IL guide how to act in a particular situation, the concept of identity focuses more on the question who we are’ (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012, 129–130). Organizations in the same field can have ‘a collective identity that is bound together by shared cognitive and normative orientations’ (130).

Organizational ecology

The concept of collective identity within a field is comparable with OE’s concept of niche identity. Central to OE is the theory of legitimacy (Hannan and Freeman 1977): in the early days of an industry, the new organizational form must first develop legitimacy to stand a chance of survival. Without legitimacy, critical stakeholders such as customers and investors will not become interested in the new organizational form, which will then gradually become extinct.

An important addition of OE to IL with regard to field identity, is the fact that OE makes systematic distinctions between different types of organizations in the same field or industry. For this article especially the distinction between de alio and de novo organizations will be used. De alio organizations have originally been founded to function in another field than the one at stake, whereas de novo organizations are founded to function in that field from the beginning.

The activities of large and well-known de alio organizations in a novel niche can be a condition for developing legitimacy of a new product (McKendrick and Carroll 2001). The presence of these de alio organizations in a new niche suggests to other actors that the product is viable and that specialization into the product can offer market opportunities. Newcomers that from their foundation have specialized in the novel
product (de novo organizations) will then subsequently start to enter into the new niche.

According to Hsu and Hannan (2005), the sharpness or visibility, of a new niche’s identity depends on the share of de novo and de alio organizations in the niche. De novo (newcomer) organizations are specialized in the new niche, but de alio (established) organizations are not, as these are still connected to their niche of origin. De novo organizations will only enter into a niche if this niche contains enough resources for specialization. If, in the longer run, this appears not to be the case, then de alio organizations will continue to dominate the niche. The niche will remain associated with de alio organizations, and with the niches that they originated from. The new niche will not develop into a field with an identity of its own, and this can lead to a short life cycle of that niche. To summarize this: in the early stages of a new niche de alios are important for giving it legitimacy, but later de novos are necessary, in order for the niche to develop an identity of its own.

What IL and OE miss separately (IL: no attention for different organizational backgrounds; OE: no attention for different logics) can be found when integrating their concepts. This integration will be explored on for its usefulness in the findings and discussion sections. Before that, the next section provides information on the data and the methods that were used to come to the findings.

Data and methods

The data used in this article are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data will be used to show how the de alio/de novo ratio of the comics publishers population has developed. Qualitative data are used for a multiple case study that explores on the practices and logics of individual comics publishers, and how these are interrelated with those of others in the same field.

For an overview of the dynamics in the Dutch and Belgian comics publishing industry, data were necessary that identified the publishers and the years in which they published comics. A dataset that includes this information was derived from several sources. The most important source is a database provided by the Dutch Comics Documentation Centre (‘Strip Documentatie Centrum Nederland’: SDCN) that is part of the library of the University of Amsterdam. The database is used for bibliographical purposes by SDCN, which owns an extensive collection of Dutch language comics. It contains comics that have appeared in Belgium and the Netherlands until the year 2001, either translated or originally in Dutch.

The most relevant variables in the database for the purpose of this article are names of publishers, and the years in which they published comics. The SDCN-database (2005) was checked for mistakes, by comparing and combining it with several other sources, of which the most important ones were the catalogue of the Royal Library of the Netherlands (the KB-catalogue) (Koninklijke Bibliotheek 2009–2012), which contains all official Dutch publications, and another database for Dutch language comics collectors (Vranken, Vranken, and Matla 2001). The SDCN-database appeared not to be complete after 1998, and for that reason 1998 is the most recent year included in the database. After the necessary changes and additions, the final
database contains 24,258 albums, and the titles of 653 comics magazines with in total 48,987 issues. The first Dutch language comics book, according to definitions by comics specialists, was published in 1858. In total, in the period 1858–1998, 1184 publishers have been active in Dutch language comics production.

The original SDCN-database does not include variables related to the de alio or de novo status of the publishers, which means that these data still had to be collected. For each publisher information could be found about its origin, which was mainly derived from the digital catalogues of the national libraries of the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders as well as Wallonia) and France. If a publisher had produced other books or magazines than comics before its first comic publication, it automatically was categorized as ‘de alio’. If on the other hand its first publication was a comic, and (a substantial part of) its next publications were also comics, it was categorized as ‘de novo’. After applying these criteria, all 1184 publishers could be labeled as either de alio or de novo: the database counts 822 de alios and 362 de novos (respectively, 69% and 31% of all comics publishers).

The descriptive statistics used in this article are based on the density of the de alios and of the de novos in the population of comics publishers. The density of a population on a specific moment is expressed by the absolute numbers of organizations that are active in the niche. To avoid right censoring problems the last year that the analysis will cover is 1994. Because of the fast changes in the industry especially after World War Two, the focus will be on the period 1945–1994.

For detailed data on the level of individual organizations case studies were the most suitable method. The cases were chosen for theoretical reasons. This implies that the number of cases should be big enough to reach theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt 1989).

The cases were chosen among all de alio and de novo comics publishers in The Netherlands and Belgium. Both categories and both countries are represented, as well as publishers from both language areas in Belgium (Wallonia and Flanders; respectively, French and Dutch speaking). It appeared that four publishers were enough to meet the conditions, because already at that point theoretical saturation was reached. In line with Eisenhardt’s (1989) view on theory development and case studies, polar cases were chosen ‘in which the process of interest is “transparently observable”’ (537).

The cases are: Dupuis, VNU (‘Verenigde Nederlandse Uitgeversmaatschappijen’: United Dutch Publishing Companies), Oog & Blik (from now on referred to as O&B), and Bries. VNU and O&B are Dutch firms; Dupuis and Bries are from Belgium. Dupuis is Walloon (the native language is French, but the publisher has a very active Dutch language division) and Bries is Flemish. These publishers also fit with the polar extremes of the criteria: Dupuis and VNU are (relatively) large de alio generalists,
whereas O&B and Bries are (very) small *de novo* specialists. The most extreme differen-
tces are those in size, between VNU and Bries: at the end of the 1990s VNU had over
19,000 employees worldwide (Johannes and Cohen de Lara 2005, 257), whereas Bries
has been a one person firm since the start: the founder is the owner and has
remained its’ only employee.

Dupuis and VNU were important for the development of comics magazines and
albums in the twentieth century in their home countries, and Dupuis also internationally.
O&B and Bries contributed to the diffusion of innovative author’s albums and graphic
novels, and to the recognition of comics as a form of art in the Netherlands and Flanders,
at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Within the case studies triangulation of data was used. Secondary sources and pri-
mary data, derived from interviews, were collected. Secondary literature was available
on each of the publishers. Among the sources were monographs about Dupuis and
VNU, historical books about comics in Belgium and the Netherlands, and articles from
popular journals and newspapers.

The SDCN-database (2005) includes overviews of the comics published by the case
studies publishers, including year of publication and type of publication (album or
magazine), and for the albums names of artists and titles of series. These overviews
give a first impression of the outcomes of the publishers’ practices: the comics that
they produced. More detailed information on these publications was necessary to be
able to interpret the relationship between the publishers’ practices and logics, and
therefore, this was one of the topics for the interviews.

Contact persons from the publishers were approached with the request to partici-
pate in the research. Of each organization at least one person was interviewed; all the
interviewees were editors or publishers. Interviews with some of the leading people
from the case publishers had been published in magazines and newspapers quite
often before. This made it possible to compare the findings from the interviews with
these earlier conversations.

Of all the candidates that were approached, no one refused to participate. The half-
structured interviews lasted from 40 min to 3 h, mainly depending on the information
that was needed. They were digitally recorded and transcribed afterwards. If parts of
the transcripts were not clear, the interviewed persons were contacted again to clarify
their answers. This was only necessary in a few cases. All persons who were
approached with such requests helped to clarify their original answer.

After the data were collected, the next step was the analysis. In the next section, the
within-case analyses of the four publishers are followed by a cross-case analysis
(Eisenhardt 1989), in which the four *de alio* and *de novo* organizations from both countries
are compared with each other. In the discussion of the findings literature will be enfolded
that helps to explain the outcomes and to understand its implications.

**Findings**

*Introduction*

The first part of the findings shows how the *de alios/de novos*-ratios of Dutch language
comics publishers changed in the period 1945–1994. Together with the historical
overview already given, this information serves as a context for the four case studies and the cross-case analysis.

**Comics publishers in the Dutch language market**

*De alio* publishers outnumber *de novo* publishers by far in the period 1945–1970, as can be seen in Figures 2 and 3. Since the 1970s, this begins to change, to the advantage of *de novo* publishers. In the middle of the 1980s both categories are almost in equilibrium, and since 1988 *de novo* publishers are in the majority. The proportion continues to shift in the advantage of *de novo* publishers until in the period 1990–1994, the most recent years in the database, an average 64% of the population exists of specialized *de novo* publishers.6

**Case studies**

**Dupuis (Belgian *de alio*, Walloon)**

Dupuis started as a Walloon family-owned firm, which published magazines for a general audience since the 1920s. In 1938, Dupuis started the publication of the comics magazine *Spirou* in two languages (French and Dutch), so that audiences from Belgium, France and the Netherlands could be reached.7 Dupuis started as a generalist publisher, but gradually became one of Belgium’s most productive comics publishers. Because of its bilingual activities, Dupuis could reach an enormous market: in the early 1960s the weekly circulation for the French and Belgian editions of *Spirou* was almost 300,000 copies.

After the war Dupuis developed specific practices with regard to publishing comics albums. These had a steady formula: a predetermined length of 48 pages, and based on stories that had been pre-published in *Spirou*. The constraint with regard to the number of pages in the albums was born out of necessity: in the years after the war there was a scarcity of paper, and the 48 pages format enabled Dupuis to make use of standard sizes for industrial paper in the most efficient way. This formula led to a recognizable image of Dupuis as a comics magazine and album publisher. The album

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**Figure 2.** *De alio* and *de novo* publishers of comics albums (1858–1994). *Source*: Author’s database, based on SDCN (2005).
series from *Spirou* were reprinted over and over again during decades. These formula-based practices were soon copied by other comics publishers, also abroad, including the Dutch VNU.

In 1985, the division of Dupuis that was responsible for the comics magazines and albums was acquired by Groupe Bruxelles Lambert (GBL) and the French publisher Hachette. At that time *Spirou* magazine had already lost many of its readers and had become less profitable than the album series. Nevertheless all comics albums that Dupuis published at that time were still originally from the magazine, and there were no albums that addressed the new, adult comics audiences.

In 1988, Dupuis’ new comics editor, the comics albums scenarist Jean van Hamme, was allowed to launch a new album series, *Aire Libre*, based on the artist-driven author’s albums that had become popular at that time. The albums in this series contained complete stories that had not been published in a magazine before. *Aire Libre* was a response to the successes of French de novo album publishers such as Les Humanoïdes Associés, but it was also Dupuis’ answer on comparable series published by their de alio competitors Casterman from Belgium and Dargaud from France. By means of this series Dupuis could realize its intention not to be associated with *Spirou* and children’s comics only, but also with innovative, adult comics. Another advantage of the series was that Dupuis had a substantial publishing opportunity to offer to young artists, who more than their predecessors wanted to have creative freedom with their comics.

The market logics that led to Dupeus’ acquisition by GBL now went accompanied with esthetic logics on the editorial level: editors with a network among young (French and Belgian) comics artists were empowered to choose and guide talents that were necessary for the production of the new album series, meant for a more adult audience. At the same time GBL knew that many albums series derived from *Spirou* had become evergreens, so they also kept them in print, for the traditional Dupuis audience of children and their families.

In 2004, GBL sold Dupuis to Média Participations (MP). By this acquisition MP became Europe’s largest comics publisher. MP has its’ headquarter in Paris, and also shelters the other large Belgian and French comics publishers Lombard and Dargaud, that were acquired earlier.
In 2006, the market logics that prevailed in MP’s top management led to a conflict with the Dupuis artists and editors, when MP announced to fire Dupuis’ popular main comics editor. The artists wrote a joint protest letter to the CEO in which they demanded more autonomy for their editors at Dupuis. After this action MP’s CEO guaranteed Dupuis’ autonomy, but popular editors and artists had already lost their trust and left the publisher in spite of MP’s promises. It took years before the situation had stabilized again.

**VNU (Dutch *de alio*)**

VNU was the result of a merger between several magazine publishers, which took place in 1964. VNU dominated the Dutch market of magazines for a general audience, and it also was by far the biggest producer of comics in the Netherlands during a long time. Not only that, some of the publishers that later merged into VNU produced comics already since the 1920s, as a small but constant part of their publishing portfolio.

In the 1960s, when comics gradually got a more prominent place within VNU, this was reflected by the amount of time that editors were allowed to spend on them. Knowledge of the comics market was imported from Belgium, by hiring an originally Dutch, former Dupuis editor. His first initiatives to publish comics albums on a regular basis were met with distrust from VNU managers and distributors. They were not used to albums, which were more related to books than to the magazines that they knew.

In the 1970s, separate functions were created for the VNU comics albums and comics magazines departments: for editing, marketing, merchandising and licensing comics. The practices related to comics within VNU became more professionalized. Separate comics divisions (Oberon, followed by Big Balloon) were launched, whose practices were comparable to those of Belgian and French *de alio* comics publishers. These publishers had already launched specialized comics divisions before.

In the same period, the subscriptions to comics magazines, that in the 1960s had mounted to 100,000s for the most popular titles, started to decrease strongly, and this led to a stronger focus on albums. But VNU’s magazine distributors kept having difficulties with distributing these albums. Specialized comics shops that had spread throughout the country in the course of the 1970s, were a perfect distribution channel for the many albums from specialized, *de novo* comics publishers, but the audience of these shops (adolescent and adult comics fans) was too small and fragmented for a big publisher as VNU. Many new album series were only bought by a limited audience: these were products for a niche-market instead of the mass market that comics magazines addressed.

Nevertheless in the 1980s and 1990s VNU’s comics division Big Balloon tried to reach the comics shops audience with many albums series. Among the translated albums were author’s albums, licensed from French *de novo* comics publishers such as Glénat and Les Humanoides Associés, which had not been published in Dutch before, with an innovative, artistic character.

The young comics albums editors who worked for VNU in the 1970s and 1980s looked at the commercial potential of a new series before they published it, but this was combined with a genuine interest in comics and its creators. This was caused by
the fact that these editors were already comics fans and collectors before they were recruited by VNU. Whereas the practices of their predecessors were purely based on market logics, those of the new generation of editors were based on a mixture of market and esthetic logics.

These logics in the editorial departments were in contrast with those of the managers of VNU. VNU’s management was increasingly directed towards the market of companies to acquire or to merge with. By 2001, after more acquisitions, VNU had become an enormous company, for whom the Dutch magazine and comics albums market was too fragmented and unpredictable. In that year VNU not only sold the titles of their remaining comics magazines, but all their magazines for a general audience to the Finnish publisher Sanoma. Big Balloon became an independent comics publisher and still exists today.

**Oog & Blik (Dutch de novo)**

Oog & Blik (O&B) was founded in 1992. It is a typical de novo comics publisher: a small organization, founded with the purpose to publish high quality comics albums, and specialized in doing that. Comics artist Joost Swarte was the co-founder of O&B. Swarte is not only a comics artist, but also an organizer and designer. He played an important role in the recognition of comics as a form of art in the Netherlands.

O&B introduced young Dutch artists to the market, and in addition produced translations of artistic comics (author’s albums and graphic novels). In order to reach a broader audience than just the specialized comics shops, O&B cooperated with a literary publisher. This enhanced the distribution of their comics albums in bookstores.

Joost Swarte was a member of an international network of artists and publishers who introduced new forms of comics. He used his knowledge to stimulate the legitimacy of comics as an artistic medium in the Netherlands. One of his strengths was that he could switch roles between that of an artist (esthetic logics) and that of an entrepreneur (market logics). Swarte stimulated the symbolical production of artistic comics albums, by lobbying for comics at a governmentally supported arts foundation. He convinced this foundation that comics had developed into a form of art and as such should be a part of their arts policy. In 1998, this led to grants for comics. Since then a selection of the best young Dutch comics artists can get governmental subsidies, which enable them to devote time to their artistic work, without having to meddle with more commercially oriented assignments. Comparable to VNU, O&B also copied their practices with regard to comics publishing from another comics publisher, in O&B’s case the French de novo publisher Futuropolis.

Internal subsidy from more commercial, less costly, translated comics enabled O&B to continue offering publication opportunities to young, still unknown artists.

In 2010, the small size of O&B’s market made it more and more difficult to survive independently, which led to its’ acquisition by literary publisher De Bezige Bij, one of the most prestigious literary publishing houses in the Netherlands. This acquisition had become attractive for De Bezige Bij, because of the increasing status and popularity of author’s albums and graphic novels, which were the core of O&B’s publishing list.
Bries (Belgian de novo, Flemish)

Bries started as a comics library in Antwerp in 1985, and was founded by Ria Schulpen. In 1990, Bries obtained the legal status of a not-for-profit foundation (‘Vereniging Zonder Winstoogmerk’). Later Schulpen started a comics shop, specialized in international small press comics, and after that she also started publishing, mainly alternative, innovative comics albums in varying formats. In 1999, Schulpen decided to work professionally as a publisher, and introduced the name Bries. Since then Bries has been active as a comics shop, a gallery and as a publishing company.

Schulpen started as a publisher in order to add more variety to the existing supply of comics, and aspired to introduce young, mostly still unknown comics artists from the small press scene to a wider, international audience. These artists experimented with new formats and with new styles of drawing and narrating, using the comics medium in an innovative way. Bries also published albums with a traditional format.

Just as in the Netherlands the Flemish government started to support young experimenting comics artists, since 2001. Bries was among the most active publishers on this area. Together with another Flemish comics publisher, it received the largest amount of subsidies for co-financing comics albums by Flemish artists.

Bries has remained small and independent, and although Schulpen’s comics are professionally published, it still is closely linked to the small press movement. Bries’ comics have evolved from mainly international productions in English, into mainly Dutch language productions by Flemish and Dutch artists.

Bries is innovative in publishing books by experimental and artistic young creators from Flanders, the Netherlands and abroad. It cooperates with other publishers to share risks and enhance distribution possibilities. In comparison with O&B, Bries has published relatively more originally Dutch language comics.

Schulpen only publishes the comics that she likes. Her aim is to make comics known to a wider audience, which originally were only distributed in the ‘scene’ of small press artists. She does not aspire to grow and change into a mainstream publisher, and therefore, she consciously chose the structure of a non-profit organization.

Cross-case analysis

In the first part of these findings, the shift from de alio to de novo publishers in the comics publishers population in the Dutch language area was described, which was related to the evolution of the main format for comics: from magazines to albums. Publishers use different editorial and distributional practices for each format.

De alio as well as the de novo publishers copy these practices from other publishers, in their own country or across national borders. De alios (the cases VNU and Dupuis) did not only copy from de novos, but also from other de alios. De novo organizations (the case organizations O&B and Bries) were not the only publishers who introduced innovations, but nevertheless the most radical ones (author’s albums and graphic novels) are originally from them. Innovative albums produced by the de alio publishers would not have been there if they had not been preceded by comparable books from artist-focused de novo publishers.
In the period when the album became comics main publication format, the practices of de alio as well as the de novo cases are based on a mixture of esthetic and market logics, but esthetic logics are more characteristic for the de novo publishers than for the de alio publishers. This is shown among others by the activities that O&B’s co-founder Joost Swarte developed to legitimize artistic comics, and by the idealism of Bries’ founder and owner Schulpen, who did not even want to make profit by selling comics.

The conclusion with regard to the logics of de alios in the comics album era depends on the level of analysis. Overall, esthetic logics have become more important, but within the de alios this especially is clear on the editorial level. On the management level in these organizations market logics still prevail. Thus, within de alio publishers there is a stronger differentiation between esthetic and market logics than within the de novos.

Tables 1 and 2 give an overview of the logics and practices of both organizational types, add other relevant characteristics, and show how de alios were affected by the changes in the field, that became manifest by the rise of the de novos.

Discussion

According to Hsu and Hannan (2005) the ratio of de alio and de novo organizations determines the identity of a niche. As was shown in the findings, de alios dominated the comics publishing field until 1988. Only since that year the majority of the publishers are formed by de novos. This implies that the comics niche has only since a relatively short time developed the sharpness necessary for the organizations in that niche to ‘emerge as legitimate, established types’ (Hsu and Hannan 2005, 481).

Table 1. Logics and characteristics of de alio and de novo comics publishers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logics and characteristics</th>
<th>A. De alios before interaction</th>
<th>B. De novos</th>
<th>C. De alios after interaction with de novos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logics</td>
<td>Market: focus on marketing, primarily profit-driven. Comics seen as a derived product.</td>
<td>Esthetic: focus on artists, ideal-driven, but to some extent also based on market logics. Comics seen as the core product.</td>
<td>Differentiation of values within the organization: partially esthetic (editors), partially market (managers) logics. Comics seen as one of the core products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Magazines and formula-based album series.</td>
<td>Author’s albums, graphic novels.</td>
<td>Reprints and new formula-based album series, combined with selection of author’s albums or graphic novels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiences</td>
<td>Broad, general audience: children and families.</td>
<td>Specific audiences: adolescents, adults, comics fans, artists.</td>
<td>Combination of general and specific audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position of artists</td>
<td>Often anonymous artists who work in studios, long term contracts with publisher. Title of series more important than name of artist.</td>
<td>Artists have creative autonomy. They work individually, sometimes in small teams. Name of artist more important than title of album or series.</td>
<td>For author’s albums and graphic novels: artists have a degree of creative autonomy. Due to tension between editors and managers this autonomy is sometimes at risk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The case analyses show that organizations in the same niche with different origins interact with each other. As a consequence of the increasing importance of practices based on esthetic logics that dominated among de novos, de alios copied these practices from them, in order to survive. The main tool of de alio publishers to realize this, was hiring comics fans and comics creators as editors, people who had a network among comics creators, and who had the same attitude towards comics as the novo publishers. These new editors were given relative autonomy in their publishing strategies. Thus, esthetic logics became more important for all comics publishers since the shift from comics magazines to comics albums.

These field dynamics are related to changes of comics audiences. The demands and expectations of the new audiences – artists as well as adolescent and adult comics buyers and comics fans – are different from those in the era of comics magazines and require more knowledge about the medium and more attention for artistic input.

Dupuis, after its’ acquisition by GBL, had identity aspirations (Kodeih and Greenwood 2014) that led to a new identity. Dupuis continued to produce comics for a broad audience, but simultaneously published innovative comics albums for small niches that originally were the domain of de novo specialists. Seen from the resource partitioning perspective Dupuis changed from a generalist into a polymorphist: a hybrid between generalist and specialist organizations, offering products in the market centre as well as in the periphery (Wezel and van Witteloostuijn 2006).

Although the editorial logics of the Dutch publisher VNU also changed into the direction of those of the de novos, VNU was not able to make the radical change that Dupuis did. In the end VNU even stopped with publishing comics altogether. Belgium, because of its geographic position between France and the Netherlands, and because of its bi-lingual culture, has a bigger market potential than the Netherlands. Dupuis

<table>
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<th>Table 2. Practices of de alio and de novo comics publishers.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Practices</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Production-related capabilities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prices</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
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</table>
reached sub-niches that were each big enough for the publisher to remain profitable. This makes Belgium better equipped for comics publishers that are polymorphist than the Netherlands.

The *de alios* VNU and Dupuis introduced practices based on esthetic logics, but this choice was made by their management for instrumental reasons, not as a consequence of the intrinsic motivation of the *de novos*, who started publishing because of their attachment to comics. The fact that *de alios* copied the prevailing esthetic logics of *de novos* in the comics album niche is a clear example of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). It appears that neo-institutional theory’s view on field dynamics has not lost its’ explanatory power.

Média Participations (MP), who acquired Dupuis, broke the delicate balance between esthetic and market logics, by infringing with Dupuis’ editorial autonomy. This immediately led to protest actions, and to the departure of artists, as well as editors. In the cultural industries, to which comics albums publishers belong, the balance between conflicting logics is crucial (Lampel, Lant, and Shamsie 2000), and therefore, it is risky to overrule one type of logics with the other.

**Conclusion**

The main question of this article was to what extent the origin of organizations had an impact on IL in the comics industry. For this purpose, organizational origin was related to logics in the field of Dutch language comics publishers. The categories *de alio* and *de novo* organizations, derived from OE, were used for the main distinction between organizations regarding their origin.

After the shift from magazines to albums as the main format for Dutch language comics in the period 1945–1994, the *de alio/de novo* ratio gradually changed into the advantage of the latter category. Comics albums and its audiences (comics buyers and comics artists) demanded a more specialized approach than magazines. *De novos* were better able than *de alios* to cope with these demands. *De novos*’ practices were, therefore, copied by *de alios*, and as a consequence the industry developed from being largely market-oriented into a direction were esthetics became more important. This contributed to a different identity of the comics field. For individual *de alio* organizations this meant that if they aspired to stay within the field, they also had to adapt. This interaction between *de alios* and *de novos* further sharpened the field’s identity.

A more general implication of these outcomes is that large organizations do not by definition overrule smaller organizations in the same field. If the dominating practices in a field are those that prevail in smaller organizations (which *de novos* usually are), they can force larger organizations (which *de alios* usually are) to copy their practices, which indirectly will affect the logics of the latter.

The article also explored on the possibility of big companies’ institutional dynamics going into a different direction than the one described in earlier institutional research: from product to market logics (Fligstein 1990; Thornton 2004), or in terms of cultural industries: from esthetic to market logics. The findings shown here suggest that there is such an alternative direction: from market to esthetic logics.
A limitation of case studies is that they are by definition about a limited number of companies. More specifically, for this research polar cases were chosen, based on their expected contribution to the construction of theory. For inductive research this is a valid principle, but for future deductive research a representative sample of de alio and de novo organizations is necessary. Especially among de novo publishers there is more variety than is suggested in the findings: there are de novos that are less ideal-driven than the de novos in the case studies presented here.

The conclusion points into a direction that is to some extent comparable with research into another creative industry: that of popular music. Huygens et al. (2001) show how in the pre-digital part of the twentieth century the evolvement of the main publication format for pop music (from the ‘single’ to the LP) forced the major record companies to pay attention to practices introduced by smaller, specialized independent record companies. In terms of this article, the practices of the latter were also based on a mixture of market and esthetic logics, whereas those of the former mainly were based on market logics. This is also how the majors survived: by acquiring independent record companies or by forming alliances with them. For future research it would be interesting to find out whether the change from market to a mixture of market and esthetic logics can also be found in other creative industries with audiences that expect a higher level of specialization than before, which survival strategies are used, and what this implies for the field.

Finally, the relevance of the interaction between de alios and de novos for how a niche develops, as shown in earlier research (a.o. Hsu and Hannan 2005; McKendrick and Carroll 2001; Perretti, Negro, and Lomi 2008), is confirmed here in a relatively unknown industry, and with a new approach: by a combination of concepts from OE and IL. Research based on this combination can add depth to our understanding of the development of organizational fields. Therefore, it should be explored upon in other industries as well.

Notes
1. ‘Comics album’, shortly ‘album’, is the common denominator in among others Belgium, France and The Netherlands for comics books with complete stories.
2. European author’s albums (the label is derived from author’s cinema) and graphic novels are not made according to the industrial formulas that are used for the production and marketing of traditional comics albums. The most important properties of this formula are: a maximum page length of 32, 48 or 64 pages; a low price; constraints with regard to content and style (should be attractive for all ages); each album is a volume of a series; the title of the series is more important than the name of its’ creator. Author’s albums and graphic novels on the other hand can have the length of a novel; they can also be as expensive as a novel; the name of the author is clearly mentioned. The importance of the creator can be compared with that of an author of fiction. Its’ content can be serious, reflective, critical, intellectual or literary. The drawings can be experimental, artistic. The best known example of a literary graphic novel is Maus by Art Spiegelman, the first comics album that got a Pulitzer Prize (in 1992).
3. In 1858, the album De Reizen en Avonturen van Mijnheer Prikkebeen appeared; a translation from French of the album Monsieur Cryptogame by the Swiss artist Rodolphe Töpffer. According to the Dutch comics expert Matla (1998), this is the first Dutch language comics
album. Internationally, according to the French and Belgian comics experts Groensteen and Peeters (1994) and Lefèvre and Dierick (1998), Töpffer is regarded as the creator of the first modern comics.

4. Some publishers produce albums only occasionally, for example, three albums in year \( t \), no albums at all in year \( t + 1 \) and \( t + 2 \), and then, again ten albums in year \( t + 3 \). It can be expected that the knowledge on publishing comics will not disappear very quickly if there is a period in which no comics albums are made. For this reason, it was decided that the maximum length of nonactivity still acceptable for inclusion in the density figures could be relatively long: five years. Publishers who do not produce an album during a period longer than five years are considered to have left the comics niche. In the most recent years that are covered in the database, it becomes more complicated to calculate density, because of right censoring problems. Inactive publishers in this period might have exited the niche, but this cannot be calculated, because the data are only reliable until the year 1998. For that reason the last year that the quantitative part of the analysis will cover is 1994.

5. More detailed information about the case organizations can be found in De Vries (2012). A full list of references that were used for the cases is obtainable from the author upon request as a separate Appendix.

6. Figure 3 only visualizes the data for 1945–1994, because in this period the differences between both types of organizations become manifest.

7. Many comics (a.o. Lucky Luke, the Smurfs) from Spirou became very popular and are now part of the European ‘comics-canons’.

8. Small press comics are produced and distributed by the artists who created them, usually on a small scale.

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Disclosure statement

No financial interest or benefit has arisen from the direct application of this research.

Geolocation information

This research is based on activities of organizations in The Netherlands and Belgium.

Notes on contributor

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