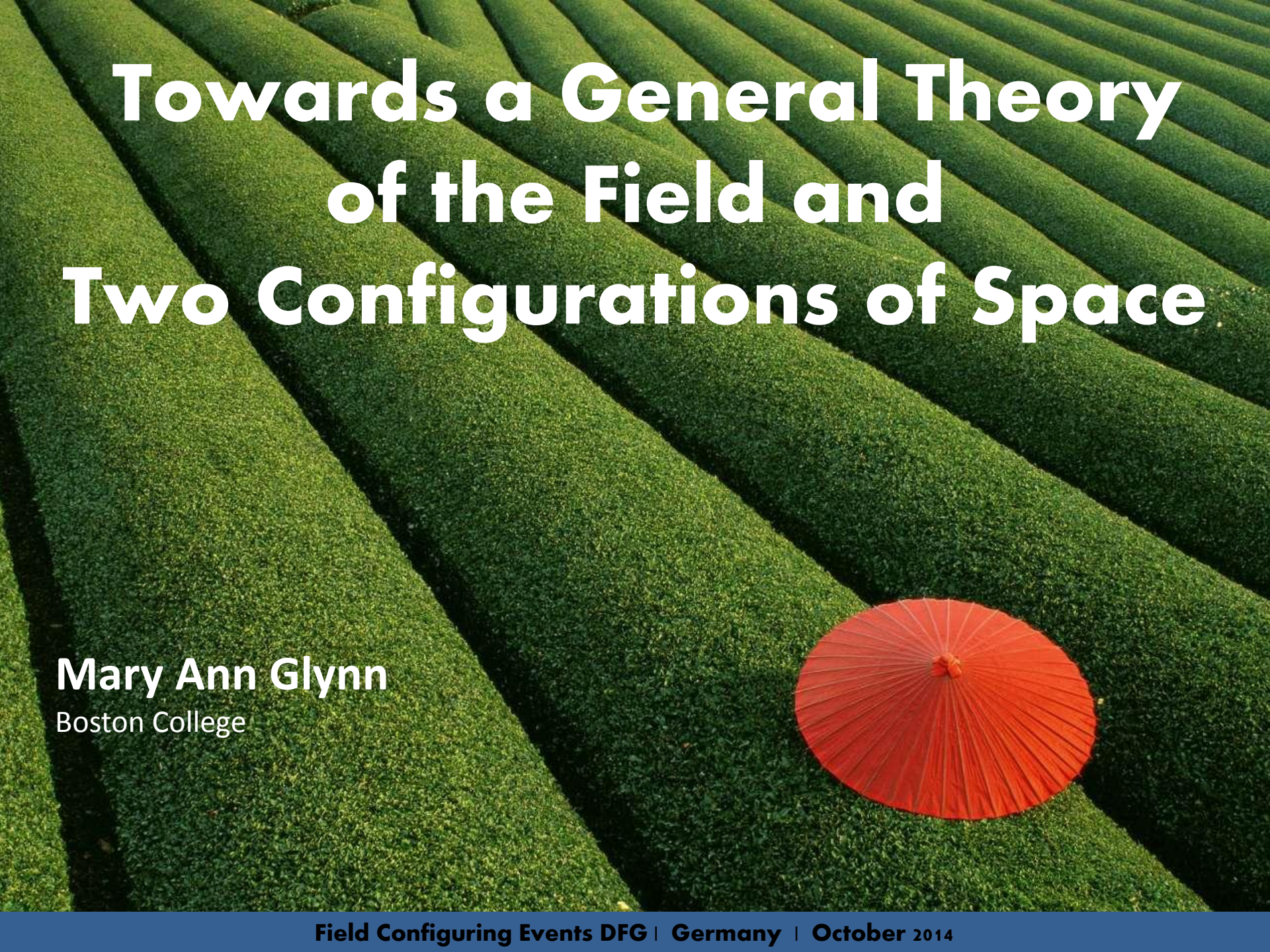
Towards a General Theory of the Field and Two Configurations of Space



Mary Ann Glynn
Boston College

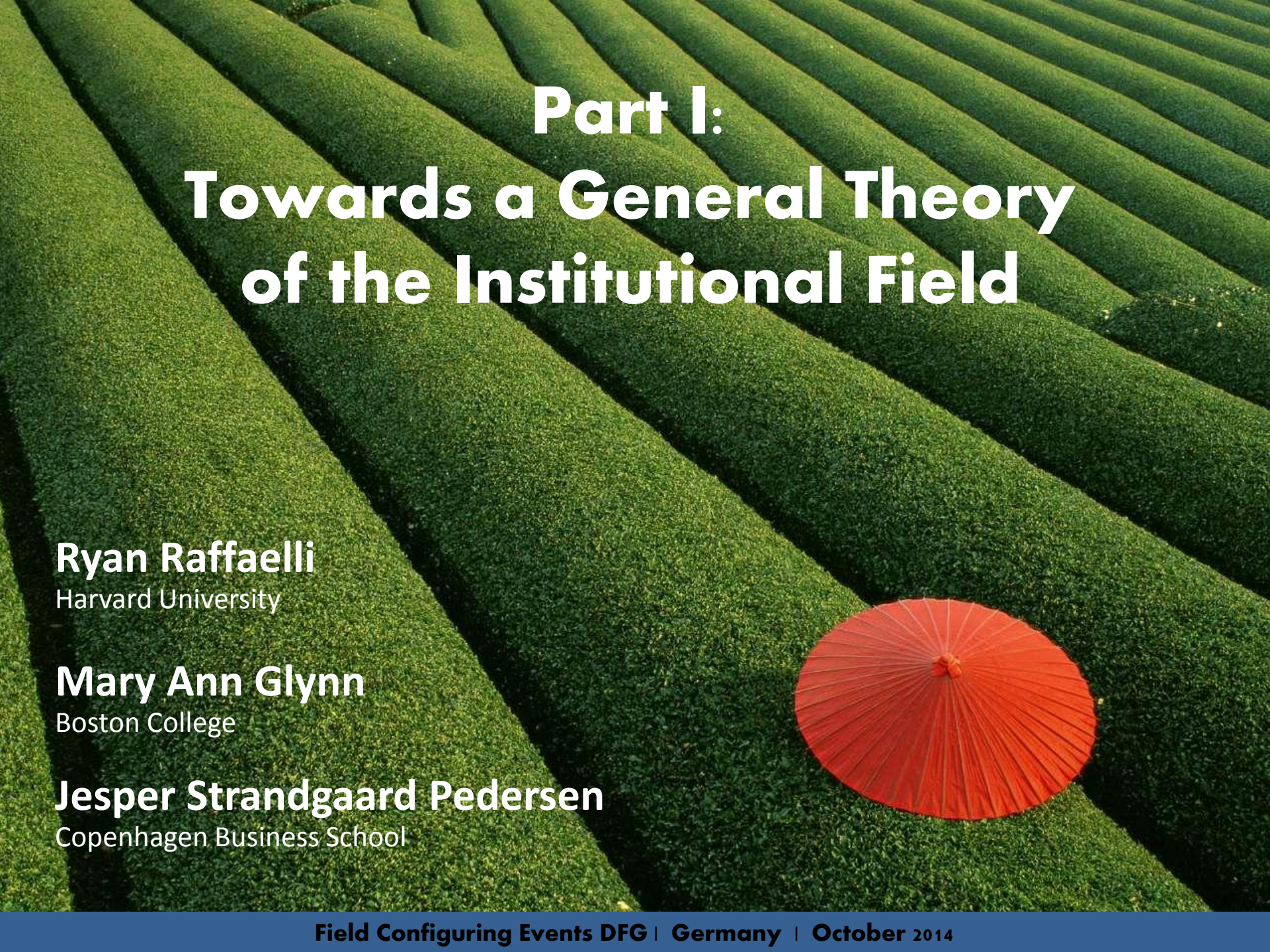
Agenda

Part I:

- **Towards a General Theory of the *Institutional* Field**
  - Raffaelli, Glynn & Strandgaard Pedersen (working paper)

Part II:

- **Two Configurations: The Constitution of Space**
  - ***Virtual Space***: Tweeting *How* Boston Got Strong
    - Glynn & Lockwood (working paper)
  - ***Physical Space***: Geography of the Olympic Games
    - Glynn, 2008 (JMS)



Part I:
Towards a General Theory of the Institutional Field

Ryan Raffaelli
Harvard University

Mary Ann Glynn
Boston College

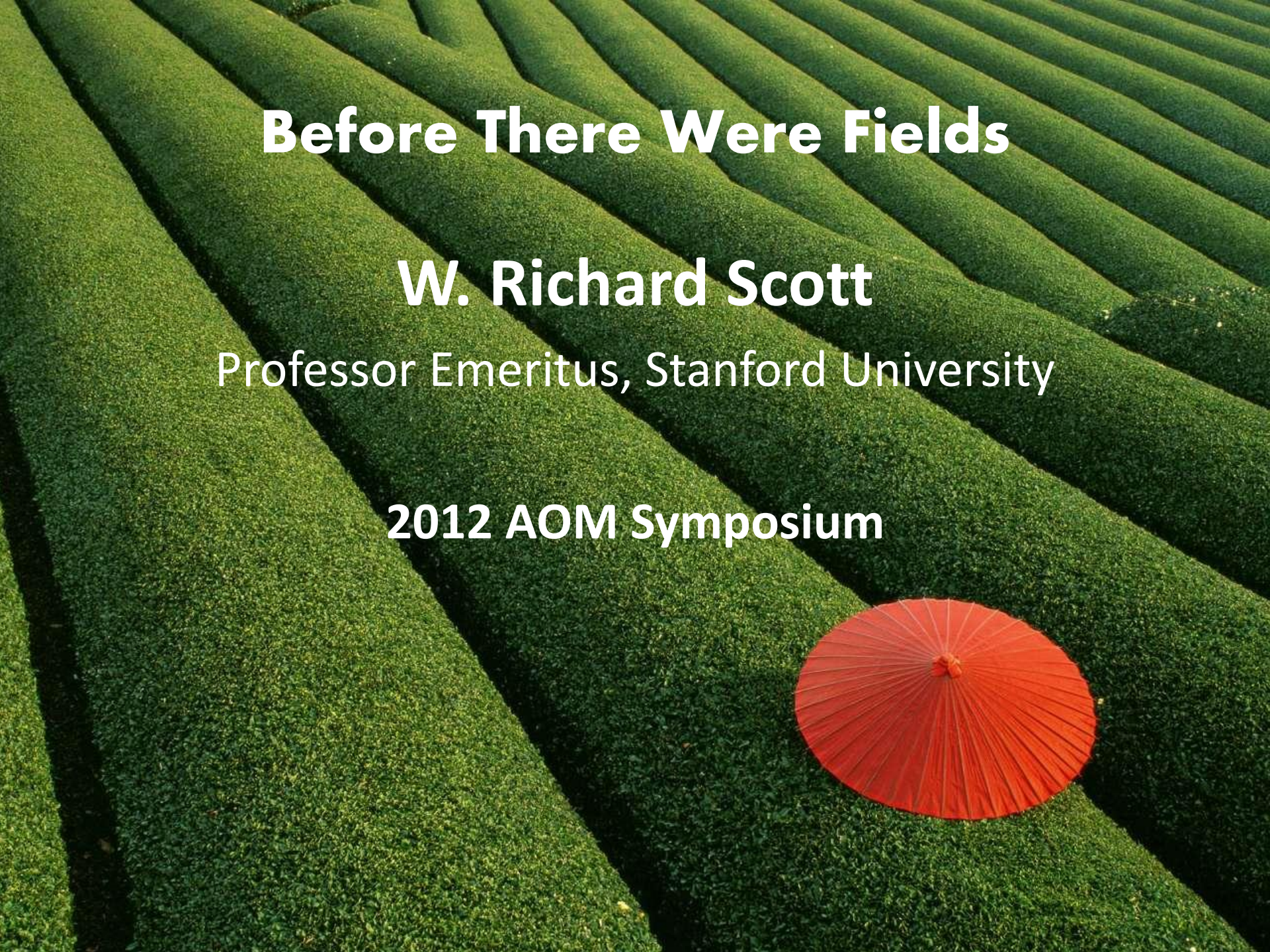
Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen
Copenhagen Business School

Goals

- **Three decades** have passed since DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) foundational work.

- We aim to:
  - return to the historical origins of the field
  - trace its theoretical evolution
  - mine the extant literature for hidden assumptions
  - revisit the notion of the field as both a theoretical construct and a level of empirical analysis.
  - discuss its importance to future theory building
  - ***move toward a general theory of a "field."***

—In the beginning…



Before There Were Fields

W. Richard Scott

Professor Emeritus, Stanford University

2012 AOM Symposium

The Open System Perspective

- Arose in the late 1950s
- Invaded organization studies soon thereafter
- Open systems capable of self-maintenance (survival) based on throughput of resources to and from the environment
- Focused attention on the significance of environments

Conceptualizing Organization Environments -- Steps along the Way

- Abstract dimensions (homogeneity-heterogeneity; munificence-scarcity) (Emery & Trist 1965, Dill 1958, Thompson 1967)
- Levels:

  -Organizational populations (Hannan & Freeman 1977; Aldrich 1979)

  -Organization sets (Blau & Scott 1962; Evan 1966)

  -Interorganizational fields (Warren 1967)

  -Institutional environments (Meyer & Rowan 1977)

Theoretical Trajectories

- From convergence/uniformity to divergence
- From structure to agency
  - -from institutional structure to
    - institutional work
- From stability/harmony to arenas of contention
- Increasing attention to cultural (symbolic) systems to balance focus on relational networks

Advances from Field Conception

- Recognizing that environments are not passive contexts, but collections of multiple types of actors
- Broadening the locus of agency—may be distributed throughout the field
- Increasingly coherent model of organization field allows us to vastly enhance the specificity and accuracy of our measures

Advances (continued)

- Organization fields themselves have become an important topic of study, central to understanding organization and change in modern society

- ***Thanks, Dick!***

Theorizing the "field"

- The concept of the "field" was primarily used to **set the boundaries** for the empirical context in question
  - But what triggers fields? Field-configuring ***events***

- But, the dynamics and **mechanisms** within the field were relatively unexplored

Variants of organization-based fields

Theoretical Conceptualizations of the Field

Institutional dimensions

The Institutional Field

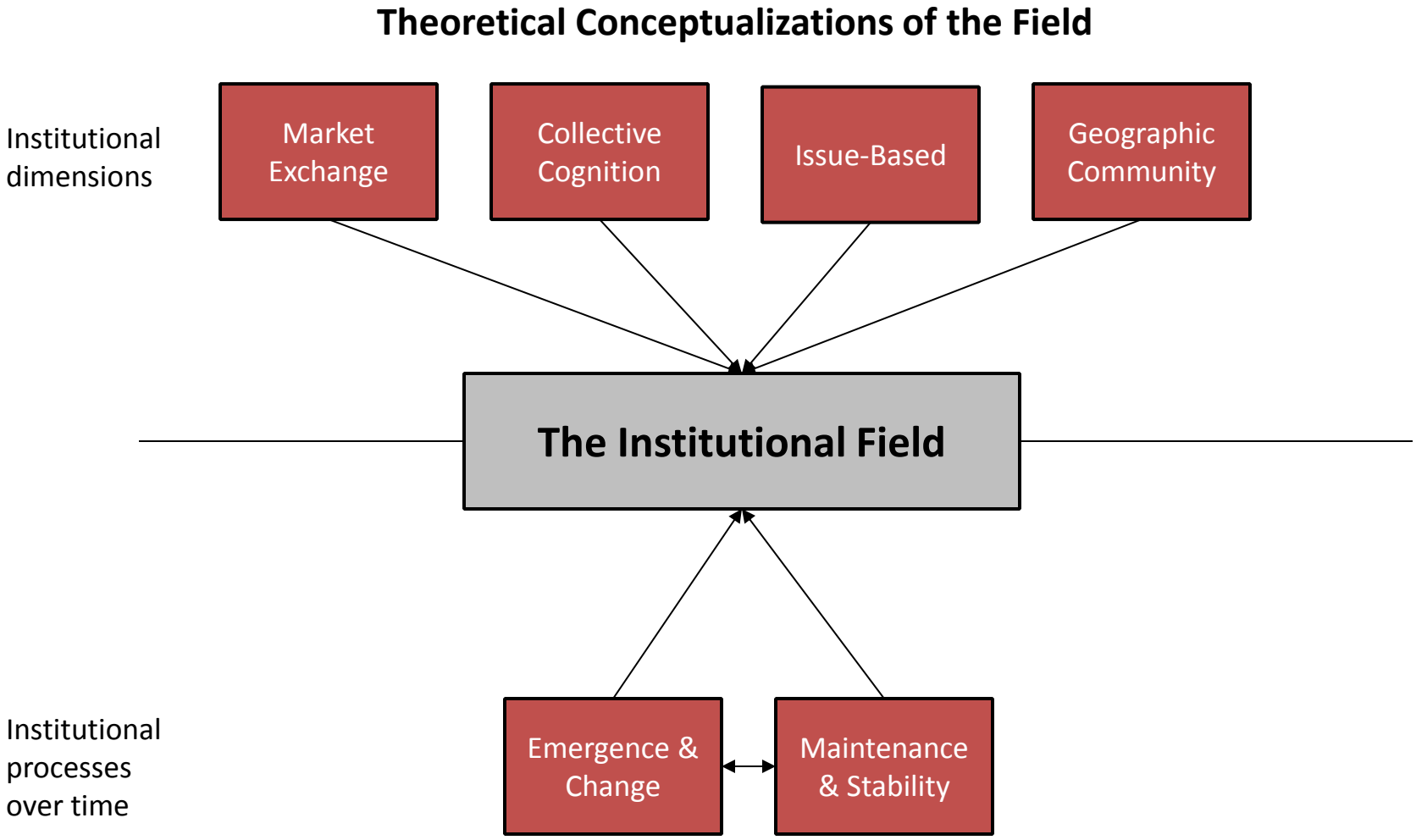
Institutional processes over time

Field as an Empirical Unit of Analysis

Four Variants of Fields

Variant	Organizing Principle	Boundary Setting	Dominant Logics	Influential Articles
Market Exchange	Market space for technology, product, service, etc.	Recognized market actors (e.g., competitors, suppliers, distributors, etc.)	Market Capitalism	DiMaggio & Powell, 1983
Collective Cognition	Shared meaning systems and common sensemaking	Frequency and fatefulness of interaction	Market Capitalism	Scott, 1994
Issue-Based	Political issues, contested arenas	Access to and influence in arenas of debate	Democratic	Hoffman, 1999
Geographic Communities	Spatial proximity	Physical location	Family	Marquis, et al, forthcoming

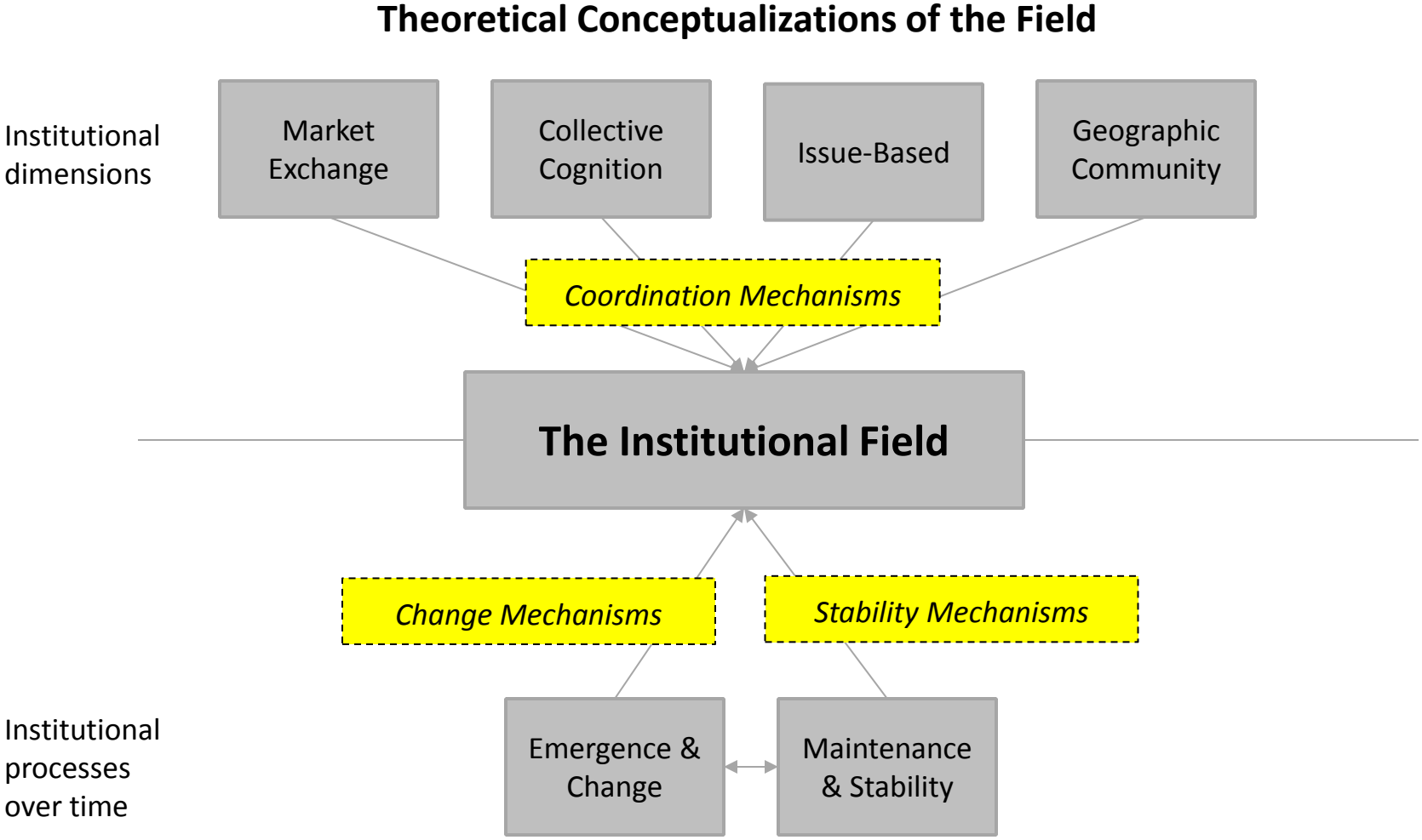
Variants of organization-based fields that have received attention



Field Dynamics: Three Mechanisms

Variant	Coordinating mechanism	Stability mechanism	Change mechanism
Market Exchange	Economic exchange	Isomorphism or compliance for the sake of legitimacy	-Peripheral actors -Ineffective isomorphic pressures -Recognition of new market actors or technologies that redefine boundaries
Collective Cognition	Organizational Interaction	Institutional pillars (regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive)	Change in interaction patterns, cognitive understandings, or structural arrangements
Issue-Based	Common interests, Opposition to other's interests	Shared interests & agendas	Shifting power relations
Geographic Communities	Community building	Co-location	Re-districting and (trans)migration

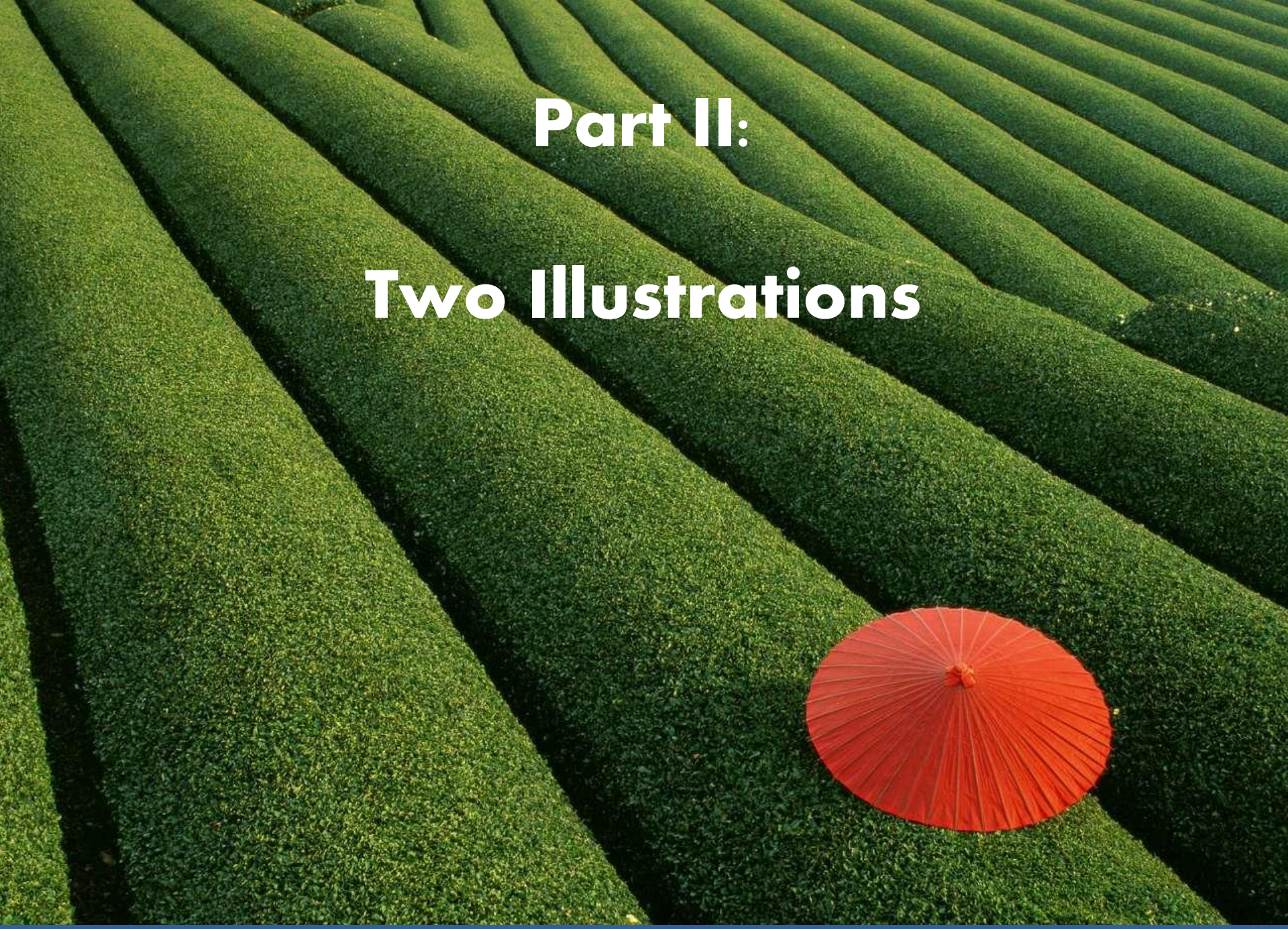
Towards a general model of the institutional field



Towards a general model of the institutional field

- **Theoretical conceptualizations of the field:**
  - 4 variants of the organizational field (market exchange, collective cognition, issues, geographic community)
  - Particular coordinating mechanisms associated with each variant

- **Empirical conceptualizations of the field:**
  - Institutional processes of emergence & change, and maintenance and stability define and redefine the field over time
  - A dynamic view of the field
  - Processes of stability & change are interrelated


Part II:
Two Illustrations

Two Field Variants

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Two Variants of Field Configurations and The Constitution of Space as Virtual and Physical

Issue-Based Field in Virtual Space

- Tweeting *How* Boston Got Strong
  - Glynn & Lockwood (working paper)

Geographic Field in Physical Space

- Geography of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games
  - Glynn, 2008 (JMS)

First Illustration

Issue-Based Field in Virtual Space

- Tweeting *How* Boston Got Strong
  - Glynn & Lockwood (working paper)

Boston Strong

"You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have…"

(Tweet @NadineCrazyNice, April16, 2013)

April 15, 2013

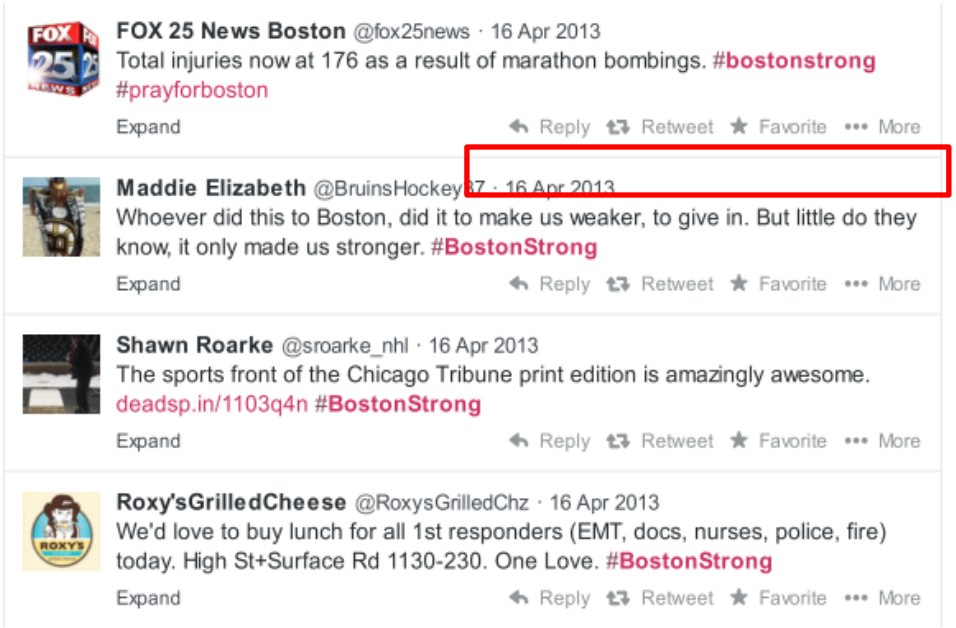
Boston Strong: Local and Global

- Boston Strong": anthem for recovery
  - "a proud mix of **resiliency and defiance**, an attitude **rooted in local culture**…and became intertwined with a sense of recovery"
    - (Globe Editorial 6/18/13)

- Voiced and diffused through social networking tools
  - **Twitter**, a microblogging service used to send and receive short 140-character messages (called "tweets") in real time

#BostonStrong

- Top Tweets tagged #BostonStrong
  - Those that resonate most broadly: highest number of “re-tweets” and “favorites”
  - Capture interactions and level of interest
  - April 15, 2013 (bombings) through April 30, 2014



Twitter enables interaction

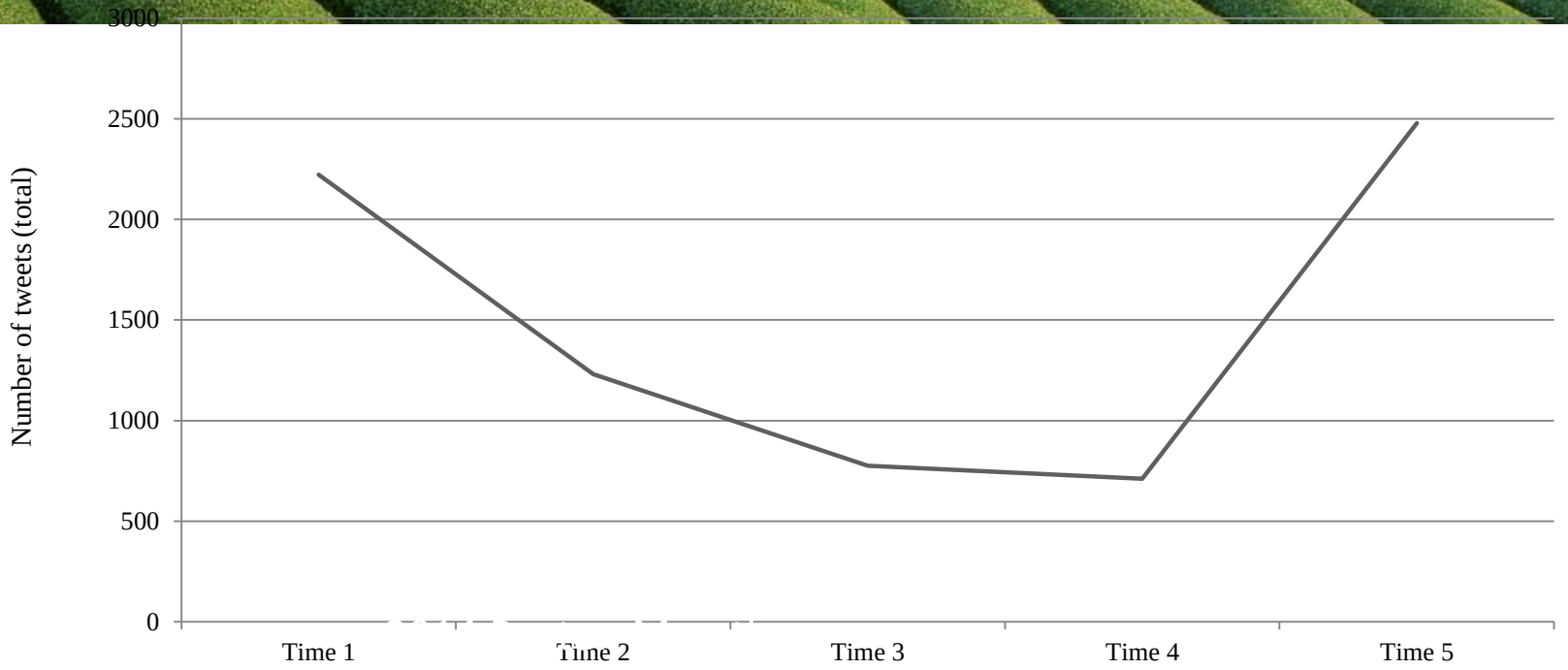
- @ **Replies facilitate exchanges:**
- @KevinKwwbe247 @BrookeBCNN We are a resilient brood here Brooke! Let America know we are strong and NOT scared one bit! #BostonStrong

- RT **Retweets 'spread the word' and diffused:** RT@chuckontheec: @BostonDotCom Emerson students have started campaign #BostonStrong in honor of victims.

- ★**Favorites signal resonance:**
- On this day - we remember all those impacted by the attack one year ago. God Bless us all. We are #BostonStrong.

2,518 RETWEETS 1,493 FAVORITES

Number of Tweets by Time Period



4/15 – 4/30/13
Bombings;
Lockdown;
Suspect in
custody

April 2014
Anniversary of
Bombings;
2014 Boston
Marathon

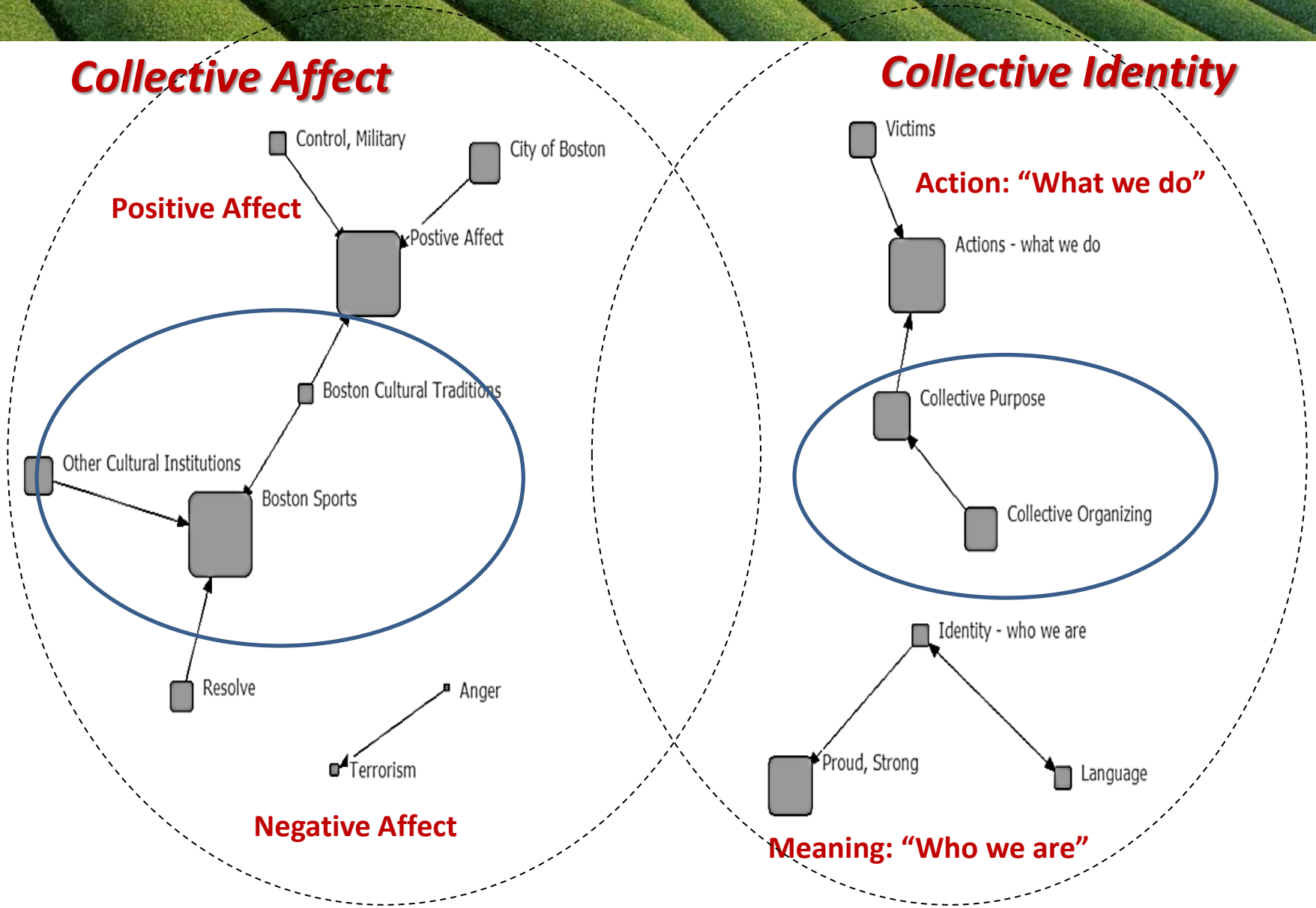
Total tweets: over 8,200
Coded about 45%

Early Findings

- Field Formation: Most tweeted
  - **Collective Affect**:
    - Positive >> Negative
  - **Collective Identity**:
    - Meaning (“who we are”) and Action (“what we do”)

- Field Constitution: Relational & Structural Interplay btw Individual & Institutional Actors
  - Institutions were appropriated in expressing positive affect, often as carriers or vehicles for affect
    - Solidarity, connectedness, relational
  - Institutions were “re-worked” (or sometimes constructed) in the service of collective purpose and action

Ego-net analysis of co-occurrence of nodes > 30%



Collective Affect

- Overwhelmingly positive response – particularly immediately after the bombings and a year later

- Positive affect closely linked with (and supportive of) institutional actors
  - Police and first responders
  - Governmental figures
  - Boston Marathon
  - Boston Sports teams

Positive Affect: Individuals and institutions

Sports: "'stood up for us when we needed them most'"

- "What a powerful and emotional pre game video and National Anthem at **Bruins game** #BostonStrong #united"
- "**Seeing Yankee Stadium sing Sweet Caroline is inspiring...even the most bitter rivalries can come together in hard times..** #BostonStrong"
- "Heard @RedSox stopped the parade to put **World Series trophy at Boston Marathon finish line. Those guys are bearded medicine!** #BostonStrong"
- "**#BostonStrong was never about sports. It's about people coming together after unimaginable tragedy with strength, love & respect**"

Negative Affect: Individual-focused

- Largely focused on the bombing suspects (anger) and on the bombing victims (sadness)

- Less closely linked with institutions – unless they are clearly associated with those individuals

  – Rolling Stone: “Rolling Stone has made my ban list. Absolutely disgusting.

  – #whatiswrong withthisworld? #BostonStrong”

Collective Identity: "Who we are"

More immediate claims to "who we are" and sustained focus on "what we do"

- Claims to a proud, strong identity:
  - "BOSTON…WE ARE A FAMILY. #BostonStrong"
  - "We're a strong bunch and are fierce fighters when someone attacks us! #bostonstrong"
- Closely linked with institutional response enabled by individual actors
  - In immediate aftermath: "Boston has shown it is never wavering in its strength. Fire, Police, EMS, and bystanders ran in as evil gripped downtown. #BostonStrong"
  - At the one-year anniversary, with official memorials, 2014 Marathon: "we are all #BostonStrong today"

Collective Identity: "What we do"

- Individual action through institutions
  - **"Red Cross** is actually turning down blood donations because so many people ran to the hospital to help. #WeAreBoston #BOSTONstrong"
  - "Across @**MLB ballparks** last night, fans sang "Sweet Caroline" to show their support for Boston…#BostonStrong"
  - "**Boston Marathon runners**, we're right behind you cheering. **Show the world what this city is made of**. #BostonStrong"

- Action propelled the community forward
  - Fostered a collective sense of efficacy and purpose: "Today we finish the race #BostonStrong"
  - What we do became, over time, who we are

#BostonStrong: One Year Later

"we will never yield, we will never cower,
we are Boston, we are America...
we own the finish line"

(Vice President Biden, April 2014)

Boston Strong: Issue-Based Field

- Space is constituted virtually through:

- Coordination Mechanisms
  - Relational aspects (retweets; responses)
  - Structural aspects (institutions)
  - “Temporary” field?

- Field Dynamism: Emergence & Stabilization
  - Collective Affect and Identity
  - Membership: easily accessed but fleeting?

Second Illustration

Geographic Field in Physical Space

- Geography of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games

JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Journal of Management Studies 45:6 September 2008
0022-2380

Configuring the Field of Play: How Hosting the Olympic Games Impacts Civic Community

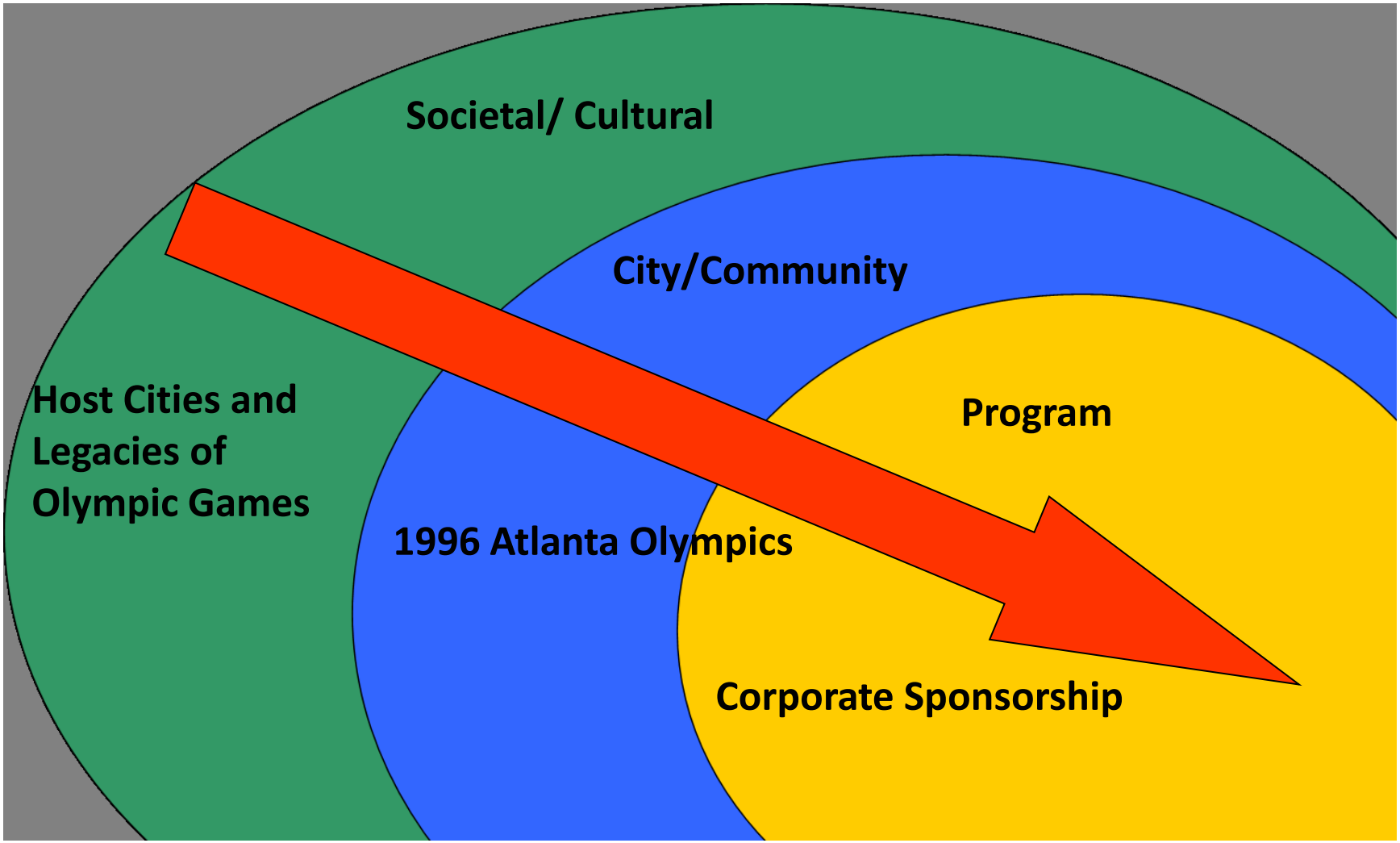
Mary Ann Glynn
Boston College, Carroll School of Management

1996 Atlanta Games

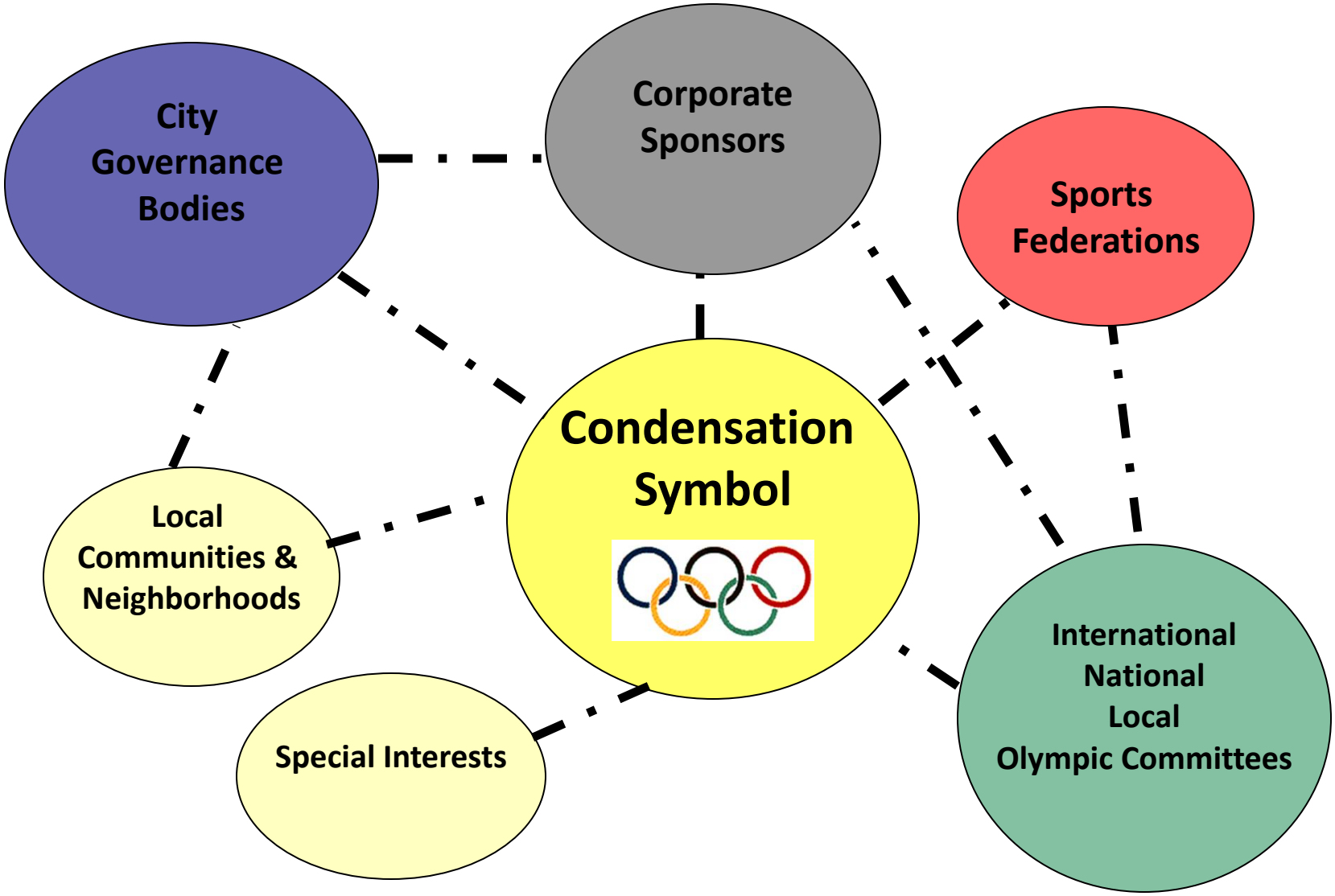
"Olympic sponsorship places you in a new circle, and importantly, in a favorable light…It felt like you were a member of a 'club' where everybody wanted everyone to do well."

1996 UPS Interview

Geographic Community of the Olympic Games: Structural



A Field Configured & Symbolized



Symbolic Networks

- Condensation or Dominant symbols at the relational center of a web of signification, linking diverse meanings.

- "Organizing symbols create a shared interpretive framework that facilities coordination, exchange and ultimately commitment" (Ansell, 1997)

- Symbolic understandings create a network that is a "community of practice" (Davis & Greve, 1997)

Operation Legacy
1996 Atlanta Games

- Spearheaded by Georgia Power,
  - *"a citizen wherever we serve"*

- Aspiration:
  - *"once the last bill is paid and the last light is switched off, the Olympics will quickly fade out of memory, the legacy will be that there will be one for Atlanta, as a city"* (1996 interview)

- Focus:
  - *Economic development campaign partnering public & private orgs to bring more business opportunities to Atlanta and the state.*

1996 Atlanta Olympic Games: Geographic Community

- Space is constituted – and bounded -- physically through:

- Coordination Mechanisms
  - Relational aspects (partnerships; collaborations; commonalities in sponsorships)
  - Structural aspects (institutions, e.g. IOC, city)
  - "Temporary" field … but more enduring (Legacy)?

- Field Dynamism: Emergence & Stabilization & Collapse
  - Collective Identity; Purposeful commitment
  - Membership: more challenging and enduring?

Towards a general model of the institutional field

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Two Field Variants Illustrated

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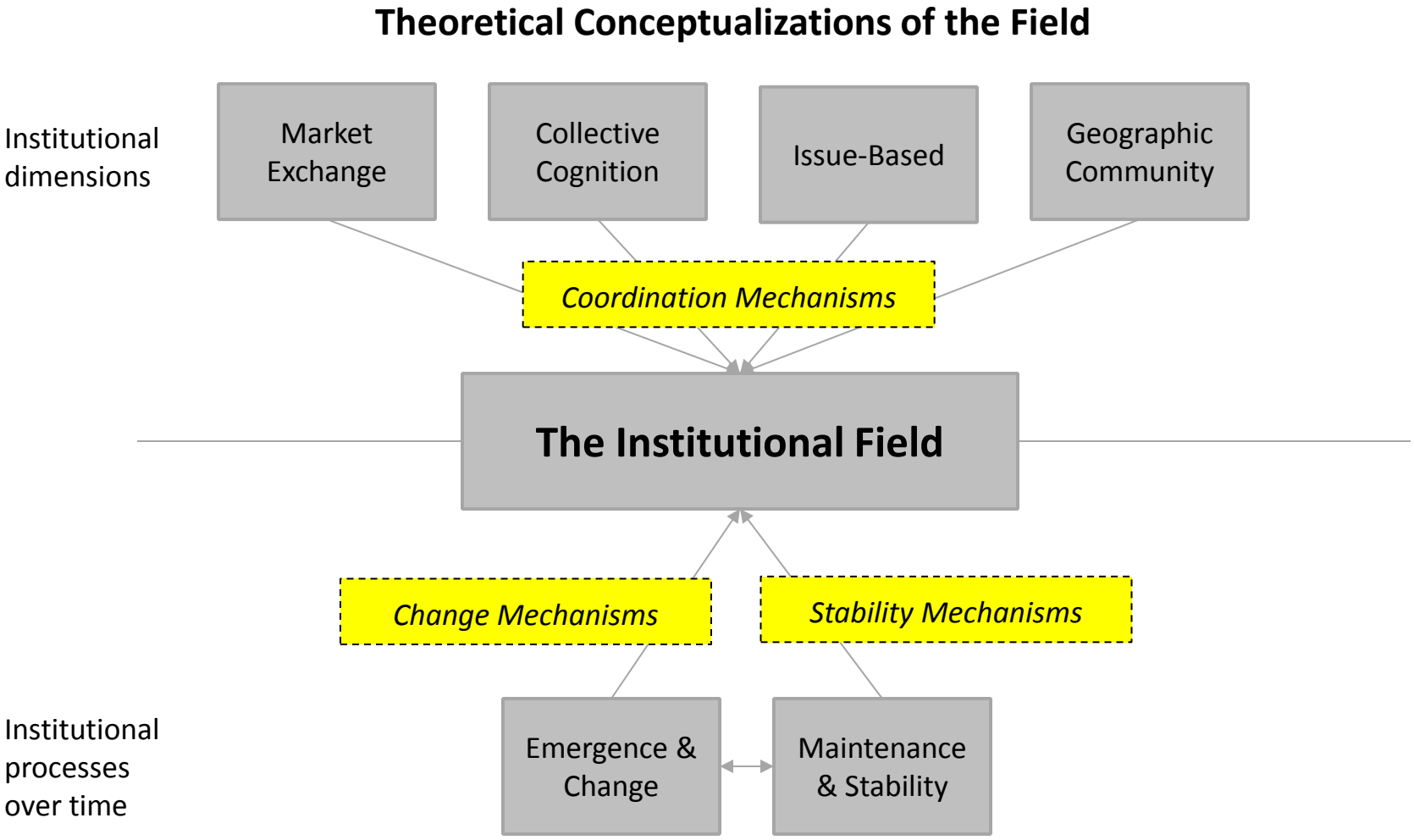

Thank you!