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Transformation and transnationalisation of schooling: Wherein lies the transformative potential of Global Citizenship Education?

Abstract

Building on a combination of different conceptualisations of “the transnational” in education, this contribution interrogates the transformative potential of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and the extent to which it can be seen as part of a wider transnationalisation process. We address this question through an analytical strategy that brings together neo-institutional approaches to educational diffusion (Ramirez, & Meyer, 2002), the concept of *transnational educational spaces* (Adick, 2005; Hornberg, 2010), and an emic approach to GCE (Szakács-Behling, Riggan, & Akar, 2020). Empirically we draw on examples from our research in/to schooling beyond the confines of nation-states, namely the transnational network of Eco-schools and the supranational system of *Schola Europaea* that we examine with the help of two perspectives (meso-, and micro-). A third lens, the macro-perspective, exemplified by the work of UNESCO in the field of GCE, serves as a key context for meso- and micro-level developments. Taken together these viewpoints offer complementary insights into the question of the transnational(ising) transformation of schooling and aims at the further development of this research field.

Keywords: *Global Citizenship Education (GCE), transnationalisation, Eco-Schools, Schola Europaea*

Zusammenfassung

Ausgehend von verschiedenen Konzeptionen „des Transnationalen“ in der Bildung, wird in dem Beitrag das transformative Potenzial der Global Citizenship Education (GCE) befragt und inwieweit sie als Teil eines breiteren Transnationalisierungsprozesses betrachtet werden kann. Dies geschieht mit Rekurs auf den Neoinstitutionalismus (Ramirez, & Meyer, 2002), das Konzept Transnationale Bildungsräume (Adick, 2005; Hornberg, 2010) und einem emischen Ansatz zur GCE (Szakács-Behling et al., 2020), um Theorie und Praxis miteinander zu verknüpfen. In einem zweiten Schritt ziehen wir sodann zwei Beispiele aus unserer Forschung heran: das transnationale Netzwerk der Eco-Schools und das überstaatliche System der *Schola Europaea*, die mit Hilfe von zwei Perspektiven (Meso- und Mikro-) untersucht werden. Eine dritte Perspektive, die Makro-Perspektive, hier ex-

emplifiziert durch die Arbeit der UNESCO im Bereich der GCE, dient als wichtiger Kontext für Entwicklungen auf der Meso- und Mikroebene. Zusammen bieten diese drei Zugänge ergänzende Einblicke in die Frage der transnationalen Transformation des Schulwesens und zielen auf die Weiterentwicklung dieses Forschungsfelds.

Schlüsselworte: *Global Citizenship Education (GCE), Transnationalisierung, Eco-Schools, Schola Europaea*

Introduction

In times of intense globalisation cross-border relationships and institutional arrangements between various societal actors beyond nation-state borders are no longer extraordinary. They are common and long-lasting, but also conducive to, and reflective of, deep-seated global inequalities. One could thus ask wherein lies the transformative and progressive potential of transnationalisation which has become as ubiquitous today as it is, paradoxically, contested? In its widely accepted definitions, transnationalisation refers to a process linking non-state actors (individuals, organisations, companies) in a network of cross-border activities that are stable, intense, and durable in time. This leads to novel social relationships above, below, and/or beyond state-(governmental) structures (Nowicka, 2019; Pries, 2010). This may democratise social structures and it holds the inherent promise of de- and anti-nationalisation by de-linking them from the top-down authority of a state apparatus entrusted with the task of furthering national interests. However, studies show that transnational dynamics and the social inequalities resulting from them are interlaced with, and sometimes serve rather than subvert, nation-state agendas (Amelina, Boatcă, Bongaerts, & Weiß, 2021; Faist, 2014; Soysal, 2015). As mass schooling is, *par excellence*, an institution of nation-building, the question of transnationalising (aspects of) it can be seen as contentious at best or counterfactual and normative at worst (Carney, Rappleye, & Silova, 2012). And yet, discussions of how trans- and internationalisation of formal schooling are deeply intertwined with national/public agendas have gained new impetus in educational debates (Schippling, & Keßler, 2021; Tröhler, Piattoeva, &

Pinar, 2021) despite these not being inherently *new* phenomena (Caruso, 2014; Kesper-Biermann, 2016). The question of the transformative potential of transnationalisation to change schooling as we know it remains, thus, open.

In this paper, we shed light on this puzzle by focusing on one area of concern in transnationalisation debates, Global Citizenship Education (GCE). As GCE has been vigorously debated at normative and empirical levels in the past twenty years and no consensus has been reached as to what it is/should be, we purposefully refrain from offering a single definition. Instead, we specify two current uses of the term – a narrow use, as top-down agenda promoted by specific organisations, and a broader use, as a bundle of uncoordinated, widely diffusing educational ideals having a common cosmopolitanising outlook but manifesting differently in various socio-temporal locations.

Resting on these understandings of the term and the puzzle sketched above, the key questions we aim to answer are: (1) to what extent is GCE an expression of transformation in education and schooling, and (2) in how far can this (putative) transformation be characterised as transnational(ising) in its scope and/or effects? To answer these questions, we consider selected *motors* and *manifestations* of GCE that we examine with the help of two analytical ‘glasses’: meso-, and micro-lenses, each with a different example from our research in/to transnational school settings. A no less-important third lens, the macro-perspective, serves as a background for these developments.

We proceed in three steps: firstly, we offer a short conceptualisation of how we understand GCE while outlining the theoretical anchoring of the paper. Secondly, against the backdrop of macro-level processes outlined with the example of UNESCO, we turn to two so far ignored cases in studies of GCE: the worldwide network of Eco-schools and European Schools (*Schola Europaea*). We end with a critical reflection on how our conceptualisation of GCE and the examples given can serve to answer the questions asked at the beginning and also to invite readers to rethink the methodological apparatus needed to investigate transnational aspects of education and schooling in a multidimensional fashion.

Our understanding of GCE

In our contribution we engage with two major understandings of GCE. In a first, narrow, understanding, GCE is a clearly defined educational agenda or policy (e.g. Target 4.7 of UN’s Agenda 2030) promoted by different actors at international and national levels through specific mechanisms, actions, and indicators of success. These translate into various pedagogical concepts holding a deeply transformative potential that can be actualised in various ways (Lang-Wojtasik, 2019). GCE aims in this case to form ‘globally minded’ future citizens through educational means and is meant to contribute to a wide-ranging transformation of society; sometimes, this transformation is envisaged to lead towards a more socially- and environmentally-just world. Its scope is global and covers several aspects, such as peace, tolerance, celebration of diversity, critical thinking, environmental protection, equality, and democracy.¹ Such agendas are agreed upon at ‘the top’ by policymakers, while the ways in which they ‘trickle’ down to practices are largely contested. A large body of work in various geographical contexts has shown

that GCE intentions often fail to find resonance in everyday activities (e.g. Davies, 2006; Goren, & Yemini, 2017; Marshall, 2011; Rapoport, 2015). How everyday actors understand GCE differs considerably from the programmatic level, leading to calls for more interventions. The transformation called for by these agendas hardly, in fact, takes place.

A second sense of GCE is broader and less clearly delimited, let alone measurable: GCE appears here as a bundle of cosmopolitan educational idea(l)s that have gained prominence and spread worldwide in the second half of the 20th century through different mechanisms as shown by neo-institutionalist scholarship, e.g. on growing human rights, diversity, global citizenship, environment emphases in official curricula (Bromley, 2009; Bromley, Meyer, & Ramirez, 2011; Jimenez, Lerch, & Bromley, 2017; Meyer, Bromley, & Ramirez, 2010). Pedagogical concepts reflecting cosmopolitan ideals have been called differently in various times and places and do not form a single agenda, although they are intertwined: i.e. development education, education for global citizenship, global learning, education for peace, human rights education, education for sustainable development (Lang-Wojtasik, & Schönborn, 2020) etc.² What they have in common is their transformative scope affirming globally oriented values in opposition to narrowly understood nationally oriented ones. These manifest in various ways at international, national, and local scales and can be seen from a *longue-durée* cross-national comparative perspective as a transformation that indeed has been taking place, albeit slowly, incrementally, and often imperceptibly.

The GCE agendas of inter-/supra-national organisations such as the UNESCO or the EU (see above) can be understood as explicit *manifestations* of this more diffuse and imperceptible transformation, which, we argue, with Meyer et al. (2010), is transnationally oriented and transnationally driven via transnational actors and networks. The result is a decoupling of educational contents and structures from the grip of the national, by reorienting the knowledge and skills to be taught and learned towards global or international problems (Bromley, & Cole, 2017). This contributes *indirectly* to the formation of “global citizens” who “think and act globally” and call for global solutions. Even when global agendas fail to materialise or are grossly violated in practice, the trust in cosmopolitanising ideals does not fade; it is rather reinstated and deepened, thus indicating an ongoing institutionalisation of these values in various world regions.

While these understandings bring complementary strengths to answering the question of GCE’s transformative potential, they also suffer from limited explanatory power beyond the mentioned implementation gap. This ends up pitting programmatic policies against actual practices, thus reducing the complexity of the phenomenon. We propose an approach to GCE that accounts for both policies and practices in their interconnections and situatedness. To this end, we combine: (1) insights from neo-institutional scholarship (Ramirez, & Meyer, 2002) that are well-suited for explaining the diffusion of global citizenship ideals from a macro-perspective; (2) the concept of *transnational educational spaces* (Adick, 2005; Hornberg, 2010) that builds on the first perspective (notably, the notion of transnational convergences) and is well-suited for understanding the role of organisational forms in promoting GCE at meso-level;

and (3) an ethnographically inspired perspective to GCE (Szakács-Behling et al., 2020) to complement the first two perspectives with accounts of practices and discourses from the micro-level of school interactions. This last approach extends the *transnational educational spaces* concept empirically by adding “life” to it.

Motors and manifestations of GCE

Macro-perspective: UNESCO's GCE agenda in a historical context

To illustrate the first analytical lens as a backdrop to our meso- and micro-level empirical examples³, we briefly consider UNESCO, a highly recognised international organisation that has been active in the field of GCE for a long time and, as we argue, acts as a key *motor* of GCE in the international sphere. The specificity of UNESCO's understanding of global citizenship is its emphasis on cultural and cosmopolitan aspects of world citizenship, rather than on economic aspects and global competencies, as the OECD does (Vaccari, & Gardinier, 2019). It is important to mention here three central contributions of UNESCO to GCE: (1) the “Recommendation on Education for International Understanding and Cooperation and for World Peace, and Education in Respect of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” adopted in 1974; (2) the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) announced in 2012 by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon aiming to make education available to all through school attendance for every child, improving the quality of learning and promoting GCE; (3) the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN in 2015, in particular Target 4.7 related to education. UNESCO's understanding of GCE has been widely disseminated and enjoys extraordinary longevity (in some cases for over 70 years). From 2010 onward, UNESCO has been spreading and legitimising educational ideals of global citizenship worldwide within the framework of its specific strategic area called Global Citizenship Education (GCED). We can conclude that UNESCO is a long-lasting and influential transnational(ising) motor of GCE at the world level that both reflects and contributes to the further institutionalisation of GCE and its transformative aspirations. This is because of its continuing and deepening involvement in promoting GCE throughout the years: what first was a ‘recommendation’ became an ‘initiative’ and then an ‘agenda’ with clear targets, measurements, and an ever expanding amount of stakeholders involved.

Meso-perspective: a transnational network of schools promoting GCE

It is not only international organisations that promote GCE. Transnationally networked organisations that are active in the schooling sector *across borders* also play a central role in spreading these ideals among schools, teachers, and pupils. We focus here on one such network, the Eco-Schools, which have not yet been to our knowledge the focus of research into GCE so far. Eco-Schools are discussed as an example of nationally organised, state-funded schools that have adopted a specific profile that transnationalises their educational offer in one way or another (in this case, an environmental profile). This profile is authorised by a transnational NGO, the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), allowing them to enter a transnational net-

work of schools bearing the same profile. In this sense, they lend themselves to being analysed as *transnational educational spaces* (Hornberg, 2010) in which various aspects of GCE are promoted, enacted, and shaped above, below, and beyond the exclusive grip of a national education system.

In what follows we outline the establishment of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and its activities in the field of education for sustainable development (ESD) and GCE in order to locate this network in the landscape of *motors* of GCE. FEE was founded as the “Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe” (FEEE) in 1981 in the Netherlands and consisted in 1987 of four national members (Denmark, France, Germany, and Spain). Due to the growing interest of non-European countries, FEEE decided in 2001 to abandon the words “in Europe” and has been operating under the name “Foundation for Environmental Education” (FEE) ever since. FEE is a non-governmental, non-profit education organisation with headquarters in Copenhagen and more than 100 member organisations in 81 countries in 2023. It cooperates with corporate partners and foundations, e.g. the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT). Its education programs follow a solution-based approach and include Eco-Schools, Learning about Forests (LEAF) and Young Reporters for the Environment. In the tourism sector, the FEE is responsible for the Green Key and Blue Flag initiatives, which are dedicated to the promotion of sustainable business practices and the protection of valuable natural resources.

FEE aims to establish and expand a global network and usually accepts only one organisation from each nation state as a member. The task of this representative is to act as a point of contact for other organisations in the country of residence and for FEE. In Germany, this task is performed by the German Society for Environmental Education (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Umwelterziehung/DGU*), whose projects include the programme Environmental School in Europe – International Sustainability School, for which FEE is responsible internationally and which is part of the Eco-Schools network. The DGU has been awarding the title Eco-School in Europe – International Sustainability School to schools in Germany since the school year 2018/2019. In 2022, more than 30,000 schools in more than 50 countries worldwide were involved in this project, and in Germany more than 900 schools in eleven federal states: Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Brandenburg, Hamburg, Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia. The programme aims at promoting ESD in schools and developing environmentally sustainable schools. The participating schools are ‘normal’ schools that must successfully implement a self-developed concept to improve their environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the DGU and the FEE encourage schools to participate in their annual themes. In 2022 these were: 1. Sustainable development and democratic processes (participation) at school, 2. Measures for climate protection / climate adaptation, 3. Sustainable consumption – ecological and social responsibility to participate. The schools in the network meet regularly for exchange at regional, state, and national levels. If required, the DGU provides support in establishing contacts with schools abroad and in maintaining international exchange.

Organisations wishing to apply for FEE membership must fulfil criteria allowing them to implement FEE programmes in the respective countries with the approval of the authorities in charge and with the necessary financial resources.⁴ If an organisation is accepted as a member, it has five years to install at least one FEE programme in its country. As a rule, only non-profit organisations are eligible, but in cases where there is no NGO in the respective country that wishes to become a member, a for-profit organisation can serve as a member for a maximum of three years; however, it must acquire a non-profit organisation to replace it during this time. The costs for the application are a one-time fee of 250 Euro for the national organisation; the annual fee is calculated based on the gross national product of the country of the respective FEE member organisation and amounts to 400 Euro per year. In addition, costs for programme participation not listed on the homepage are to be paid. FEE maintains an online learning platform with 20 online courses for teachers, students, and other target groups. Most of the courses are offered in English and can be attended by anyone free of charge. By May 2023, a total of 3,000 users had taken advantage of this offer.

With FEE, a global, highly professional network has emerged in the field of education that supports UNESCO's GCE goals and the work towards them in schools and other educational institutions worldwide. This is expressed, for example, in the orientation towards UNESCO's SDGs, but also in the parallels, both in terms of content and organisation, with the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (Hornberg, 2010, pp. 130–146; Hornberg, Sonnenburg, & Zipp-Timmer, 2022). While the latter reflect *international educational spaces* (in the line of argumentation provided by Hornberg), the FEE and its programmes mark *transnational educational spaces*. This is because (a) the provider of the educational offer (FEE) is in a country different from the one where the recipient is located, and (b) the recipient organisation has to pay privately for the use of FEE's educational services.

School profiling is often explained in terms of ensuring competitiveness in an increasingly diversifying educational market. GCE skills (e.g. multiculturalism, international-mindedness) appear to be 'good for business' (Resnik, 2009). Reading the case of Eco-schools in a neo-institutionalist key we suggest that besides economic requirements (which vary locally), there are also (world cultural) expectations from the wider environment (as shown by UNESCO's agenda) that may influence the choice of school profiles given the legitimacy and availability of these offers. If the chosen profiles are consistent with educational ideals of world citizenship, the profiling may be read as *manifestation* of GCE and as transformative change in a transnationalising direction, while the organisation authorising the profile (i.e. the FEE) may be read as *motor* of GCE.

Micro-perspective: emic insights into everyday GCE practices

We now turn to an example of global citizenship in practice to illustrate the possibilities opened by a micro-perspective. By micro-perspective we mean paying attention to the day-to-day life of schools, the practices and interactions between teachers, students, staff, etc. We draw here on our text referring to 'Intentions, Power, Accidents' (Szakács-Behling et al., 2020) where we

introduced the key tenets of an emic perspective on GCE.⁵ The idea of this approach was informed by the realisation that GCE may/or may not always happen in consonance with intended agendas. In other words, there may be GCE beyond "normative, top-down, predetermined and prescribed definitions of what education policy actors [...] deem [it] to be" (Szakács-Behling et al., 2020, p. 103). This is not to say that normative contexts do not matter. Rather, we add an extra layer of complexity by 'listening' to the voices of participants engaged in everyday interaction (micro-level) within the institutional context of schooling (meso-level) and acknowledging that practices are always situated, underlaid by relations of power, and never happening in a vacuum (macro-level). By 'accidents' we do not mean destructive occurrences, but serendipitous moments when GCE may be exercised even when not intended or may fail to actualise despite all efforts to promote it.

The example brought draws from a study examining meanings and practices of solidarity in different types of schools with an explicit European ethos located in Germany (Szakács-Behling, 2021). The focus was on expressions and enactments of solidarity with individuals or countries beyond national borders. One of the types of school examined in this research is the *Schola Europaea*. These schools are mostly attended by children of wealthy parents who either work for EU institutions or have enough money to pay the fees privately. The schools are partly publicly financed and supranationally organised (except for *Accredited Schola Europaea*), follow a European curriculum, and offer an internationally recognised qualification, the European Baccalaureate. While one could assume that a European (not global) sense of belonging would be preferred in these schools and thus a limiting, more traditional and exclusive form of GCE might be in evidence, it was, surprisingly, in these schools (in comparison to other, less privileged ones) that the most critical approaches to global citizenship (Oxley, & Morris, 2013) were observed in daily interactions.

The following example is drawn from ethnographic observations in a philosophy class in 12th grade in a *Schola Europaea* in which the teacher tried to position Kant as the uncontested father of universal human rights. A white, eloquent, and obviously well-read young man led the discussion away from the intended curriculum by saying that Kant could not be considered the father of human rights given his notoriously racist views. The topic was picked up by other students and ended up involving the whole class. The teacher allowed them to express their views and some students of colour felt 'called upon' to 'represent' the voice of racialised subjects. The critical aspects of the discussion revealed a decolonising narrative which went well beyond the intended lesson plan of the teacher, as she herself revealed to the researcher in a subsequent interview. The scene does not exclude, however, the Eurocentrism and more conventional (i.e. white, colonial, neoliberal) forms of GCE (Oxley, & Morris' typology) characterising the *Schola Europaea* intended curriculum more broadly. An analysis of syllabi and textbooks indeed revealed a strong emphasis on Europe – particularly of white, Western Europe – as the motor of development, the cradle of civilisation, and the location of important events in the history of humankind (Szakács-Behling, 2022). Such contradicting perspectives coexisting in a single school could not have been revealed without due concerted attention to all levels (meso-

level of *Schola Europaea's* programmatic mission, micro-level of everyday life, against the backdrop of macro-developments worldwide).

Although the explicit intention of these schools is to create “in mind, Europeans” (Gray, 2003), a decolonial and critical approach to European modernity, which is *not* programmatically prescribed by the school, was made relevant in everyday practice. Learning in a setting explicitly geared towards *Europeanness* has (or may have) *global* implications in this case. A power paradox, however, emerges: it is well-positioned European elites, i.e. the overwhelming clientele of these schools (Shore, & Baratieri, 2006), who emerge as having the opportunity to rehearse the necessary skills for a socially more just world resonating with a critical model of GCE (Andreotti, 2014). The question (inspired by Anyon, 1981) then is: Is criticality and its transformative potential a privilege of a white, Western European elite who, in fact, would not have many incentives to change the global status-quo in the first place?

To summarise, in looking at how GCE unfolds in this example, we can see how *European* ‘intentions’ may ‘accidentally’ become *global* in everyday enactments. The (understanding of the) *global* may at the same time remain ‘soft’ in some cases, thereby reproducing an Eurocentric view of cosmopolitan ideals underlying dominant understandings of GCE as largely colonial and elitist (Andreotti, 2014). In other cases, instances of GCE become critical and transformative, even in unlikely settings where the intentional curriculum is overrun by actual practices. An examination of GCE diffracted by two (meso- and micro-) analytical lenses allows therefore for a more nuanced answer to the question of whether, and if so, *how* transformative GCE is, and could be, in different schooling settings. In comparison to other methodological strategies (e.g. multi-level designs), we are able, with an added emic perspective, to arrive at unexpected, surprising (dis)connections between ‘levels’ or ‘dimensions’ thus revealing the complexity of the empirical phenomenon under scrutiny.

Discussion and conclusion: the transformative potential of GCE and its research

In this paper we employed a twofold strategy to explore some of the *motors* and *manifestations* of GCE based on empirical examples from meso- and micro-perspectives on schooling against the background of macro developments in education more broadly. What answer have we reached to the questions asked in the introduction about the transformative potential of GCE and its consequences for education? GCE is mostly known as a top-down agenda promoted by various international organisations and taken up in various ways at national and local levels. If we see it this way, its transformative potential is not fully realised given that GCE policies often fail in practice. If we see GCE in a broader sense, as a bundle of educational idea(l)s spreading since 1945 in different directions and taking different shapes, as neo-institutionalist scholarship suggests (Ramirez, & Meyer, 2002), we can say that a transformation has taken place and will continue to do so because global citizenship agendas have not been dropped, but rather expanded, became more specific, and more legitimate, even in the absence of actual implementation success. The answer can be rephrased that GCE is, in both its narrow and broader senses,

a *manifestation* and a *motor* of a transnational(ising) transformation in and of education.⁶

By adding an emic perspective on GCE that starts from research results we proposed a new way of looking at GCE. The purpose was to shift the current conversation away from either an exclusive focus on top-down agendas that only partially actualise, or on broader transformations towards a more transnationally imagined world. Beyond macro-level transformations that are disconnected from practice, our twofold perspective acknowledged: (a) what happens in educational structures at the meso-level, i.e. through the emergence of school profiles that increasingly decouple education from the organisational structure of the nation-state through the involvement of transnational NGO networks in their activities; as well as (b) transformations occurring at micro-level, in classrooms where topics relevant to GCE are appropriated, resisted, and/or distributed further – even ‘accidentally’ irrespective of top-down ‘intentions’. In other words, the emic perspective resting on everyday occurrences and the voices of participants fills with ‘life’ the transformations that are either intended normatively or described empirically via different approaches, such as neo-institutionalism and the concept of *transnational educational spaces* in its original form.

Finally, our contribution showed that as researchers, we are also fully implicated in producing knowledge that can be conducive to or subversive of global citizenship practices in a critical understanding, because our methodological choices of how to conceptualise and empirically approach GCE have important implications on what can be observed in the first place. We can therefore conclude that our conceptual access points must themselves become objects of ongoing inquiry, reflection, and transformation.⁷

Anmerkungen

- 1 Similar agendas are promoted, under different names, by other organisations (e.g. “education for democratic citizenship and human rights” by the Council of Europe).
- 2 See Hornberg (2010, pp. 130-146) for a historical overview.
- 3 For a more detailed treatment of the macro-perspective, see Hornberg (2010, pp. 138-141).
- 4 All information in this regard is accessible on their homepage (<https://www.fee-global/programmes>).
- 5 Our co-author, Jennifer Riggan, had the eponymous idea (Intentions, power, accidents) which generated a special issue of *Tertium Comparationis* (2/2020) exploring the affordances of an emic take to understanding GCE in its various facets.
- 6 Whether this transformation is progressive towards global social justice or not is a different question.
- 7 The first author’s work on this article was supported by the German Research Foundation under grant number 396205389.

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