CHAPTER 1

The Architecture of Arguments in Global Social Governance: Examining Populations and Discourses of International Organizations in Social Policies

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INTRODUCTION

International Organizations (IOs) are vibrant actors of global social governance. They provide forums for exchange, contention, and cooperation on social policies. IOs prepare, guide, and supervise international treaties about welfare issues which states sign and adhere to. They direct, finance,

This chapter is a product of the research conducted in the Collaborative Research Center “Global Dynamics of Social Policy” at the University of Bremen. The center is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)—project number 374666841—SFB 1342.

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K. Martens et al. (eds.), *International Organizations in Global Social Governance*, Global Dynamics of Social Policy,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65439-9_1

and implement projects which affect people's lives. The World Bank, for example, has been identified as having had a significant impact on social policy development in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in some countries in Latin America with regard to pension systems. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) considerably fueled the German debate on appropriate education systems, and the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a very visible actor when it comes to development aid for children. The study of IOs in general has advanced tremendously in recent decades. Today, we have a much better understanding of different types of global actors and their mechanisms of influence. However, our knowledge about the involvement of IOs varies significantly by policy field. While scholarship on IOs often focuses on issue areas like security, economics, or environmental policies, we know comparatively little about the specific roles of IOs in social policies. Furthermore, within global social policy and governance studies, there have been very few systematic attempts to analyze different social policy fields in their dimension of global actor involvement.

With this book, we intend to enhance and systematize our understanding of IOs in global social governance. It provides studies on a variety of social policy fields in which different, but also the same, IOs operate. Basically, the chapters in this book have *two purposes*. On the one hand, they shed light on IO involvement in a particular social policy field by describing the *population* of engaging IOs. They explore how a particular global social policy field is constituted as a whole, and which are the dominant IOs setting the trends. On the other hand, the contributions examine the *discourses* within and between these IOs on the respective social policies. Thus, the chapters present the ideas IOs are promoting as well as their policies and leitmotifs which guide the discourses they produce. By examining the population of IOs and their discourses in different policy fields, the book both gathers insights from different projects on global social policy fields and opens the floor for comparing IO involvement in those fields. We generate new insights and future steps for describing and theorizing global social governance as an *architecture of arguments*. By this, we refer to the specific and varying constellations of IOs in different social policy fields and their patterns of discourse that characterize global social policies.

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In this introduction, we first briefly recap in broad strokes the knowledge about the purposes, functions, and characteristics of IOs in general, and their involvement in social policy issues. Thus, we look at ‘public’ organizations, namely at IOs which are understood as intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), in which states are the prime members. We then set out some basic conceptualizations for studying IOs in global social governance before specifying our framework for exploring populations and discourses of IOs in global social policies. Complementing liberal and constructivist International Relations (IR) theories, we use organizational ecology and soft governance approaches as heuristic frames for our analyses of different architectures of IO global social governance. ‘Populations’ are identified as the dominant as well as regional IOs active in a specific social policy issue; they are analyzed in their current state but also from a historical perspective. In this volume, the concept of ‘discourse’ is understood as the strategic way in which individuals or collective actors frame ideas, and not as a structural understanding of how certain meanings influence behavior.

Overall, despite intense scholarly work focusing on IOs, looking at specific policy fields and the roles, characteristics, or functions of single IOs and of IOs within their organizational contexts is surprisingly underdeveloped. Furthermore, the differences between such IO populations across different social policy fields are still rarely explored. Although IOs are one of the major components of global social policy and their prominence and influence in international life has steadily grown over the last decades, we need deeper research about how the population of IOs active in social policy is constituted and to better understand what discourses IOs actually spread in social policy, as they aim to influence national policies or the international community by means of soft governance with these discourses. This volume seeks to complement research on IOs in social policy by addressing the following sets of research questions:

- Which IOs are active in different social policy fields? How is the population in social policy fields constituted by specific types and constellations of IOs? How (and why) do IOs cooperate with other IOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or transnational actors, such as commercial enterprises, in social policy fields?
- What ideas about social policies are these IOs promoting? How can IO discourses over specific social policy issues be characterized? What were watersheds in the discursive framing of social policy ideas through IOs? Who are the addressees of IO discourses?

We find that diverse IOs populate the different social policy fields—for a long time and with significant impact on the different discourses. While some have been around for a century or even longer, IO activity is fairly new in other fields. All social policy fields are populated by a variety of IOs which consist of universal IOs, but often also regional organizations occupying particular niches. Some IOs, like the International Labour Organization (ILO) or World Bank, are present in multiple social policy fields and shape them by putting forward their ideas. With few exceptions, IOs active in global social policy mainly exert soft governance. They develop and broadcast ideas and norms about social policy issues which are transmitted into national systems. They are recognized normative players due to their reputation in the field. Overall, we find a highly sophisticated architecture of arguments in global social policy which builds on a dense population of IOs and the discourses they spread. The different discourses in the studied social policy fields have idiosyncratic structures but also feature some commonalities. Often, the discourses of IOs are influenced by general global political and economic developments, like the rise of neoliberalism or globalization.

STUDYING IOs AND SOCIAL POLICY

Different types of actors can be identified in global social policies. These include civil society organizations, digital movements, formations of states, or even individuals (Kaasch and Martens 2015). In this book, however, we turn our focus exclusively to IOs in order to develop a more profound understanding of the variation of IO influence in different social policy fields. Nevertheless, despite the long existence of a continuous scholarship on IOs, there is no commonly accepted definition of the term ‘international organization’. However, there is widespread agreement on the characteristics of IOs. As a minimum, IOs are interpreted as international bodies that have been set up through a treaty between nations and thus have an international, legally binding character. Furthermore, IOs have structural bodies which are operating on a continual basis.

For the purposes of studying IOs in social policy, we employ the following definition: An international organization is a formal institutional arrangement created by an international treaty between at least three sovereign states or government agencies of states and has a permanent organizational body, including a secretariat, staff, headquarters, and a charter that addresses its mission and purpose. Such a definition follows common

practice in IO research (Hooghe et al. 2015) and excludes other international bodies that are not founded by states, such as NGOs (e.g. Amnesty International) as well as those bodies that lack a permanent organizational underpinning, such as groupings or coalitions of states (e.g. the G8/20).¹ Among the tasks and functions of IOs are that they prepare, guide, and supervise international treaties. They also direct, finance, and implement projects, and exercise many more duties such as providing arenas for exchange, networking, and debate.

Scholarly research on IOs has dealt with them, for the most part, within the discipline of International Relations (see e.g. Keohane and Nye 1974; Hurd 2011; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Nielson and Tierney 2003). IOs have long been participants of international life and they play a significant role in managing cooperation, providing forums for multilateral exchange, and in disseminating norms. Thus, research on IOs has focused on “why these phenomena exist, how they function and what effects they have on world politics” (Martin and Simmons 2013, 326). Recent research projects have also dealt with the performance of IOs and their policy output (Tallberg et al. 2013, 2014), as well as the design of IOs in relation to their assigned authority (Hooghe and Marks 2014, Hooghe et al. 2015; Zürn 2018; Abbott et al. 2014). Consequently, multiple theoretical approaches have been developed and applied to the study of IOs and their roles in the international community. As part of these diverse studies, the perception of IOs changes in accordance with developments in international relations. Reflecting these different perspectives, scholars conceptualize IOs as either ‘instruments’, ‘arenas’, ‘actors’, ‘bureaucracies’ or ‘resources’ (e.g. Hurd 2011; Barkin 2006).

In the research on social policy, the attention to the role of IOs has emerged from studies on transition and developing countries. While in traditional welfare state research, the units of analysis used to be national contexts, actors, and institutions, most countries outside of a narrow ‘OECD country’ view developed forms of social protection with different kinds of transnational involvement. IOs have, for example, been identified as important in designing schemes of social protection in Central and

¹ While the term IO has long been used for organizations founded by governments, the globalized turn in international relations also strengthened the interpretation of internationally operating and non-governmental organizations as being IOs. In this context, the term IGOs was introduced to distinguish governmental from non-governmental actors. Either way, the significance of providing a definition of the type of organizations dealt with is immanent.

Eastern European countries in the 1990s. In development contexts, the impact of conditionalities on loans, as well as the promotion of specific schemes of social protection (e.g. Conditional Cash Transfers) by IOs, has been subject to extensive research as well. Theoretical approaches combining different streams of theoretical literature for better capturing global social governance and the role of IOs within have been developed accordingly (Kaasch et al. 2019).

Contributions focusing on the role of specific IOs in social policy include work on the World Bank (e.g. Ervik 2005; Vetterlein 2007) and the ILO (e.g. Deacon 2015), but also the OECD (e.g. Armingeon and Beyeler 2004; Deacon and Kaasch 2008; Mahon 2009) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the field of global education policy (Lerch and Buckner 2018). What we learn from such contributions is that while each IO does come with a specific, individual background, constitution, mandate, and working mode, they all coexist in contexts of mutual recognition, exchange, struggle, collaboration, and so on (e.g. Deacon 2007; Yeates 2008; Deacon 2013; Kaasch 2015; Kaasch and Martens 2015).

Moreover, it is hard to determine the value and quality of impact in a generalized way—even for one single IO—there are usually multiple messages and working mechanisms that play out differently. How do ideas and policies get diffused and how do norms get implemented? Considering different modes here, the World Bank for example can be the good guy (providing support for implementing social policies) or the bad guy (forcing states to introduce certain reforms) depending on what policy field we look at. Similarly, looking ‘inside’ organizational structures, one OECD department can be identified as producing more social ideas than another one, and both messages may be communicated simultaneously to the public. This also illustrates that IOs are not monolithic actors, but rather complex bureaucracies with possibly competing departments.

In addition, assessing the power of specific working modes or means of communication is also difficult. To be sure, there is comparatively little ‘hard law’ in global social policies, however, depending on the breadth of the concept, human rights law or international regulation may be part of the picture and there we may even find enforceable norms. Nevertheless, the only transnational context with something like a more comprehensive social policy is still the European Union (EU). The impact of the EU on social policy is mostly determined by its supranational legal framework in

the free movement of labor and, to some extent, health services, as various contributions have shown (e.g. Ferrera 2005; Anderson 2015).

An important task remaining for research is to get a clearer picture of what qualifies as ‘impact’ or ‘influence’. For instance, Armingeon and Beyeler (2004) argued for the OECD that it has at best little influence on national social policymaking. Orenstein (2003) and Müller (2003) instead found that the World Bank strongly influenced the set-up of national pension systems. While the aim of this book is not to analyze the impact that IOs have on specific national social policy reforms, the changing national discourses generated by global discourses, rankings by IOs, and hard law (e.g. as part of trade agreements) in some policy fields may have both direct and indirect implications and consequences for national social policymaking. Epistemic communities have been identified as playing a role in several cases. By taking into account how discursive practices shape the understanding of policy goals and appropriate means, we show how IO influence can be translated onto the state level.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF SOCIAL POLICY FIELDS

In understanding the meaning and impact of IOs from a horizontal perspective, the study of IOs is closely associated with concepts of global governance. For more than two decades, global governance has helped to frame the understanding of how political steering on the international level takes place and to what extent IOs can account for autonomous actions (Muldoon 2004; Mayntz 2008). As a system, global governance builds on normative principles and reflexive authorities (Zürn 2018). The notion of global governance is important because, “the purpose of global governance no longer reflects solely the interest of states but now also includes other actors” (Barnett and Sikkink 2008, 64). Following this aspect, territorial boundaries and national sovereignty cannot be taken for granted in contemporary policymaking (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006). This also holds true for the involvement of IOs in social issues, despite the general assumption that social issues are dominantly governed by national constituencies.

Thus, an enhanced understanding of political steering processes allows for analyzing mechanisms of governance detached from the state-centric perspective and includes additional, more comprehensive forms of governance. Furthermore, it entails a shift from states to a multiplicity of regulatory actors: from hard to soft law, from formal to informal rules (Mingst

1999, 93). This understanding of governance presents IOs (and other inter- and transnational actors) as having the ability to create, diffuse, and implement rules, norms, and (behavioral) standards through means of soft governance rather than through binding legislation understood as hard law (Abbott and Snidal 2000). In other words, IOs can “use institutional and discursive resources to induce deference from others” (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 5).

In this regard, the discursive actions of IOs become pivotal in the realm of global governance, given that the ways in which issues and problems are framed and perceived play an important role in influencing policy outcomes. In this vein, IOs can become “knowledge brokers” (Niemann and Martens 2018). They define social problems, provide answers to them, and distribute the solutions worldwide, often backed by academic research and empirical data. Thus, global social policy research is concerned with questions of who formulates and frames what kinds of ideas, goals, and rights on social protection (Deacon et al. 1997; Deacon 2007). Such kind of research also seeks to answer questions regarding how these processes take place and how they are ‘communicated’ to other levels of social policymaking (Béland and Orenstein 2013).

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AS IO INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL POLICY FIELDS

For the purpose of this book, we study global social governance as the involvement of IOs in different fields of social policy. Concepts and theories vary though with regard to what forms part of social policy (or a ‘welfare state’). Such concepts are often driven by the institutional arrangements of ideal types within welfare state regimes. Since the view has broadened so as to include low- and middle-income countries into welfare state analyses, the concept of what may form part of a system of social protection has also widened. Pension and unemployment care schemes usually relate to concepts of social insurance, while food, housing, or water are more about the provision of public goods. Health and care extend to both the provision of services and forms of social insurance against connected risks. Identifying vulnerable groups, such as children or disabled people, is another way of defining and organizing social policy fields. Moreover, when we look at eco-social policies, we can consider both a connection between policy fields, as well as how they may stand for a new form of

welfare state conception. In the selection of contributions to this volume, we intend to exemplify several of such ‘fields’ without constraining ourselves to one specific understanding of what forms a part of social policy, or one interpretation of how best to break social policy down into further policy fields.

With this approach, we are in line with the character and emergence of international law in relation to social issues and global development goals. The United Nation’s International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights refers to fundamental human rights connected to labor, social security, health and care, and education. Many ILO Conventions, especially and most recently the Social Protection Floors Recommendation (R202), specify these social rights as well. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a further reflection of the broad and multifold nature of social policy and social protection systems. At the same time, many of these instruments of global social policy also single out vulnerable groups for which they discuss and define the specific applications of social policies.

However, when studying the population of social policy IOs, theoretical streams of International Relations hold different factors accountable for IOs being engaged in the field of social policy. A realists’ interest in the activities of IOs is rather limited, as this perspective considers IOs to be institutions associated with reflecting the political power structures between states (e.g. Hoffmann 1970; Mearsheimer 1994). The existence and eventual influence of IOs would thus reflect state decision-making in terms of national interest in power perpetuation. Informed by functionalism and rational choice theory, neo-institutionalism views IOs as entities created to manage interdependencies and facilitate cooperation among states (Keohane 1984; Zürn 1998; Keohane and Nye 1977). In this vein, it is argued that IOs are suitable for pooling the interests of different actors and may achieve better outcomes than if states were to act on their own (Martin and Simmons 1998; Weingast 2002). Following this line of thought, IOs should form once a goal that requires international cooperation is defined. They are sustained if the reason for cooperation persists or if the benefits for their involved members outweigh the costs. In any case, an IO’s existence depends on the goodwill and preferences of states.

Other approaches to international relations grant IOs more autonomous actorhood. Neoliberalists try to balance IO autonomy and their responsiveness to the demands of member governments (Hawkins et al. 2006; Nielson and Tierney 2003). Thus, an IO’s existence is affected by their agent relationship to the state principal. Consequently, it becomes

costly for the principal to dissolve its agent once it is installed. According to assumptions of path dependency this cost increases the longer the IO exists and the more institutionalized it becomes. The work of constructivists and others have drawn attention to IOs' nature and the characteristics of their actorhood as well as to the activities of IOs as norm entrepreneurs who are able to influence state behavior (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Finnemore 1993; Abbott and Snidal 1998). From this view, IOs are not mere instruments of states. Rather, IOs and their bureaucracies can develop a life of their own, including the definition of new goals, structures, and *modi operandi*, eventually being able to influence state behavior (Niemann 2012). Activities in social policy are therefore also within the hands of the IO itself and can even be dysfunctional to the initial tasks.

Our volume builds up on liberalist and constructivist work, as scholars of these theories emphasize the actorhood of IOs, though to different degrees. Such approaches are a helpful starting point for exploring IOs as important actors in global social governance. However, these classic IR theories are not yet sufficient for exploring what shapes the populations of IOs in a field and the significance of the discourses they produce. Therefore, we complement our analytical framework with a theoretical heuristic, adapting Organizational Ecology and Soft Governance approaches for our purposes.

POPULATIONS OF IOs: ORGANIZATIONAL FIELD AND INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

In conceptualizing global social governance as a number of social fields, we are interested in mapping each field according to the IOs active in it. How a field is constituted and which IOs populate it is determined by exogenous and endogenous elements. The analytical approach of Organizational Ecology within the study of IR is loosely applied in this volume as a heuristic frame for this aspect of the analyses. It offers a theoretical lens for assessing the developments in the population of social policy IOs. This theoretical account, which stems from biology sciences and was adapted to the social sciences most prominently by Hannan and Freeman (1977, 1986, 1989), was recently revived by Abbott, Green, and Keohane (2016) for studying IOs.

Organizational Ecology is marked by two complementary approaches: *organizational environment* and *intrinsic features* (Abbott et al. 2016). The intrinsic features approach emphasizes endogenous factors of IOs to explain how IOs are capable of acting within a given institutional environment and what accounts for change. The organizational environment approach addresses how this institutional field is composed and acknowledges external factors and externalities of the IOs' surroundings. Hence, combining both could be seen as a promising analytical tool for developing a framework for examining developments and changes in the realm of (social policy) IOs. Thus, from the perspective of organizational ecology, one focuses on both the constitutive features of the organizational field and the characteristics of IOs within this field. In addition, the theoretical view of organizational ecology with its focus on constraining and enabling environmental variables is seen as compatible with actor-centered approaches, which can offer more detailed explanations on how IOs respond to imposed external constraints and opportunities (Abbott et al. 2016, 272–273).

Organizational Field: Topography of IOs

Organizational environment is related to the sociological concept of an 'organizational field' and refers to what we call topography. Thus, the topography of an organizational field comprises underlying characteristics of the field itself, the density of relevant actors in that field and their relationship to each other. This concept, also widely used in political science and international relations, marks the aggregate of actors that constitute the institutional environment.

The characteristics of an organizational field further include the rules and belief systems, as well as the relational networks that arise in the broader societal context (Powell and DiMaggio 1991; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Scott 1983). In this approach, the environment, which IOs cannot control, is seen as shaping the opportunities for their development and actions. In sum, IO behavior and interactions with others is shaped by the field's topography.

The organizational environment emphasizes that adaptation to the environment determines the opportunities and scope of action of an IO. Thus, a population is marked by its degree of diversity. This means that in a highly diverse field, organizations can populate different niches within a community. Also, the density of a population has to be taken into

account when analyzing an organizational field. For instance, the concept of isomorphism emphasizes how organizations act in a highly elaborated environment in which they become more alike in order to gain legitimacy and ultimately increase their impact (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 352).

This means that for an IO in social policy, the ability to shape discourse in a field is impacted by the number and power of competing, cooperating, and coexisting actors. If many actors hold the same beliefs and ideas, they can form coherent epistemic communities and put forward their claims and positions more easily in a partnership. Accordingly, a homogeneous community could generate more leverage to influence other actors (e.g. domestic governments or other organizational fields). In contrast, if IOs face competition with other IOs (or other actors), they may lose out to those with stronger positions. IOs may also populate and cultivate a niche in some social policy issues and coexist without disturbing the vital interests of states or other IOs. When IOs populate a niche in a population, an important issue in this context is often the question of expertise (Ness and Brechin 1988; Jonsson 1986), which could apply to regionally active IOs that address specificities.

Institutional Design: Intrinsic Features of IOs

While the organizational environment approach focuses on the interaction between IOs and their environment, the concept of intrinsic features emphasizes how the institutional design of IOs shapes their behavior and determines how autonomous IOs can act in an organizational field. On the one hand, it finds support in rational choice concepts, such as the principal-agent model (Hawkins et al. 2006; Nielson and Tierney 2003), which implies that the designers of IOs can actively influence the scope of possible actions of an IO. On the other hand, this approach is also congruent with approaches based on path dependency theories of historical institutionalism, as they explain why initial choices may have long-term effects on the future of the organizational development (North 1990; Pierson 2004).²

²This is in line with one early observation by Stinchcombe (1965), who argues that organizations incorporate and preserve institutional characteristics that are fashionable or legitimate during the period in which they were founded. Intrinsic features also relate to theorists who have documented how public organizations reinvent their original missions and tailor their appearance to placate and please external stakeholders (Boin et al. 2010, 402).

One important issue in this regard concerns the institutional design of membership rules (Koremenos et al. 2001, 763). Membership in IOs is usually distinguished as either universal or restricted (Rittberger et al. 2012, 7–9; Jacobson 1984, 12). Thus, it can be assumed that IOs that are potentially open to all states feature different discursive patterns than IOs with restricted membership. Moreover, if an IO has many different member states with different interests and preferences, this heterogeneity makes it more difficult to find a commonly accepted framing of an issue at stake. On the other hand, once the frame is set, its moral authority is high.

Another important aspect regarding the institutional design of IOs is the scope of issues covered (Koremenos et al. 2001). In IO research, two notions are commonly distinguished, namely comprehensive and policy-specific concerns of IOs (Lenz et al. 2015). IOs with comprehensive scopes deal with more issue areas than those with specific policy concerns. Hence, comprehensive IOs could link issues of social policy with other topics in their portfolio, for instance economics or the environment. IOs with more than one policy field usually have to find an overarching world view which is implicitly reflected in the IO's discursive approach in all policy fields it is dealing with.

Understanding IOs (and particularly IO secretariats) as complex bureaucracies entails some important implications for the discourse characteristics of IOs. As has been shown, the analysis of IOs as bureaucracies must also take into consideration the internal IO procedures, rules, and mechanisms (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). These influence how flexible an IO is in terms of dealing with changing external situations. In the context of studying the discourses of IOs in social policy, this means that the organization of IO bureaucracies influences how the discursive culture of IOs is institutionally constituted. These factors provide a framework for deliberations within IOs and shape the scope of discussions.

DISCOURSES OF IOs: COGNITIVE AUTHORITY AND SOFT GOVERNANCE

As a second step, we are interested in the discourses which take place within and between IOs in different social policy fields. The organizational environment, characterized by the degree of density, diversity, and interaction between IOs as well as the institutional design of an IO, which includes its scope of membership and the structure of its bureaucracy,

provide an analytical framework for analyzing how IOs are influenced by each other in terms of what they can do and how they can interact. However, the analysis of their discourses provides insights on what ideas, policies, and leitmotifs they promote both regionally and globally in their field about a particular social policy. This allows us to assess how their views on social policies have evolved and whether we can observe isomorphic tendencies regarding ideas.

The importance of discourses from an International Relations' point of view is usually associated with social constructivism, as it offers explanatory strength in assessing IO governance capabilities. Discourses, in this sense, are understood in this volume as strategic discourse promoted by individual or collective actors, and not as structural components which constrain activity. Central to this perspective is the role of IOs and their ability to gain autonomy and authority as actors. Often equipped to set agendas, prepare and shape decisions, or foster implementation, IOs are thus more than the sum of their member states' interests (Koremenos et al. 2001).

In particular, in a highly complex field where knowledge is considered a key resource, IOs make themselves irreplaceable in terms of providing information to their members that is otherwise not available (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, Martens and Jakobi 2010b). In the absence of command and control, IOs can make use of their ability to produce information and knowledge to generate influence (Conzelmann 2008, 44). Unlike hard or coercive mechanisms of governance, such soft governance cannot be equated with traditional hierarchical steering, but rather with epistemic knowledge (Haas 1992). What is important in this line of thought is that IOs need to be accepted as cognitive authorities on discursive governance and discursively provide a set of coherent ideas for policy solutions.

Cognitive Authority: Legitimacy and Reputation of IOs

IO soft governance implies that although IOs are set up by states and consist of state delegates, they are able to develop their own preferences and ideas because of intra-organizational networks and interactions that cannot be fully controlled by any principals (Hawkins et al. 2006). Despite the provision of a clear mandate on how to act, IOs can go beyond their previously defined roles and generate new aims that exceed their initial purpose and scope. With time, IOs may even embrace policy positions that are at odds with the interest of their founders, thereby exerting influence

back onto their member states and beyond, given the potential for agency slack (Koenig-Archibugi 2006). This may be accomplished when IOs, or more specifically their bodies (e.g. secretariats, departments, and working groups), develop idiosyncratic discourses and generate their own ways of framing an issue. Instead of simply carrying out what their member states urge them to do, IOs become policy entrepreneurs.

In this context, an IO needs to be accepted as a *cognitive authority* in the given policy field (Broome and Seabrooke 2012, 2015) in order to shape a given discourse. The authority of an actor lacking coercive powers is strongly linked to the aspect of legitimacy. An indicator of an IO's legitimacy is its reputation. IOs with a 'good' reputation (i.e. a reputation for being rational and impartial) are accepted as legitimate sources of advice largely due to the fact that they exhibit apolitical and technocratic expertise (Barnett 2002, 113; Sharman 2007; Meyer and Rowan 1977). The perceived legitimacy of an IO leads others to follow its recommendations.

The ability to shape how to think about something is central in understanding soft governance by discursive means. Since IOs utilizing soft governance rely on their function as advisors and opinion leaders, one key element is the role and dissemination of ideas. The central argument in this respect is that the proliferation of ideas and ideational change in turn promote policy change. Ideas serve as a cognitive framework for interpreting an issue, identifying something as a problem, and rendering suitable solution strategies (Martens and Jakobi 2010a). Thus, both the social creation of common knowledge as a standard in a policy field and the role of IOs in shaping international discourse are essential for soft governance (Abbott and Snidal 1998). In the case of social policies, this means that ideas IOs create and promote about social policies serve as "cognitive filters through which actors come to [...] conceive of their own interests" (Hay 2011, 69).

This takes place in a discursive process. First, ideas shape the definition of an issue as a problem. In this regard, the reinterpretation of a policy in the light of a new idea reveals that something needs to be changed. This means that IOs first create common shared knowledge by providing information which was otherwise not accessible. The collected data is then interpreted against the background of views and ideas within the IO. Pure information is transformed into substantial knowledge (Barnett and Finnemore 2004).

Second, by identifying something as problematic, ideas can also indicate goals (i.e. a more desirable policy). The SDGs are a current and prominent example. They address global challenges in various social policy fields, interconnect them, and define targets to be achieved. It is deemed essential to back arguments with empirical evidence, as they must be proved to be conclusive and sound.

Third, suitable means for accomplishing the new goals are communicated through ideas. This “meditative mode” of soft IO governance addresses direct contributions to the policy discourse (Mahon and McBride 2008). IOs make recommendations to their members on the basis of publicized information and findings about best practices in a certain policy field and consequently lobby for them (Martens and Jakobi 2010a). This lobbying can take different forms, such as recommendations which illustrate directly how to act in a policy field, for instance. More indirectly, recommendations can also emphasize the behavior of a peer actor in order to serve as a blueprint.

Soft Governance: IOs as Broadcasters of Ideas and Policies

Ideas are not just tools in the hands of strategic actors (Lieberman 2002, 699), they need agents to be disseminated in a discursive process. IOs act as these disseminators or broadcasters of ideas (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006, 17) and aim to “nurture people’s identities, helping them to construct their fundamental values which, in turn, shapes their beliefs and interests” (Béland and Cox 2011, 9). IOs help to define what stakeholders want and provide them with the justification for why they want something.

By discursively constraining the frame of appropriate behavior, IOs are able to influence others, be it national governments or other actors in the international sphere, because they possess the authority to create social reality (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 2005). IOs aim to frame a common understanding of the issue at stake and define goals for policymaking by increasing or decreasing the legitimacy of a certain norm, policy, or action (Nay 2014).

Interesting questions in this regard are about whether the nature of the discourse is normatively constituted or whether it focus on strategic behavior and technical aspects. Who is participating in these discourses? Can we observe different discursive frames competing within single IOs or

between IOs? Why does one prevail? Or do different IOs within a social policy field hold different discursive frames and compete with each other?

By virtue of the promoted leitmotifs or guiding principles, IOs can set how the discourse of a topic is defined, shaped, and promoted. IOs set standards against which national policies can be evaluated and create normative pressures for the national context of policymaking (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). They form opinions which stimulate and inspire national discourses in politics, the public, and in the media. In other words, shaping discourses is a form of soft governance.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Taken together, this volume seeks to fill a major gap on IO social governance. The chapters in this book have *two purposes*. On the one hand, they shed light on IO involvement in a particular social policy field by describing the *population* of engaging IOs. They explore how a particular social policy field is constituted and which major or dominant IOs are setting the trends. On the other hand, the contributions examine the *discourses* these IOs promote in ‘their’ field by exploring and analyzing the ideas and leitmotifs they produce. By exploring the trajectories IOs set and spread, the chapters in this book provide novel knowledge about the architecture of arguments in global social governance. In addition to the introduction and the conclusion, the volume contains three parts and each part contains four chapters.

This introduction provides a systematic theoretical approach to examining IOs in global social policy. It lays out in broad strokes the knowledge about their purposes, functions, and characteristics in general, and their involvement in social policy issues in particular. Complementing liberal and constructivist IR theories, the introduction lays out organizational ecology and soft governance approaches as heuristic frames for the analyses of different architectures of IO global social governance.

Part II deals with *labor and migration* issues. The following Chap. 2 by *Fergusson* addresses the ways IOs have responded to youth unemployment as an important and distinctive policy field by tracing the historical context of multiple IOs’ engagements. It also gives particular attention to the evolving relationship between the ILO and the World Bank as well as their construction of, and withdrawal from, partnerships that variously facilitated and limited the pursuit of their respective strategies and goals for alleviating youth unemployment. By analyzing the policy discourses of

both IOs, it finds externally facing partnerships were established as they better reflect distinctive ILO and World Bank priorities. In Chap. 3, *Römer, Henninger, and Dung* compare how three international and two regional organizations, namely the ILO, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank, as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), approach the global governance of labor standards. They argue that two main discourses have been pursued in the global debate, a ‘social’ discourse, and a ‘neoliberal’ discourse, and they find that IOs whose intrinsic features allow for an institutionalized representation of workers’ interests pursue variations of the social discourse, whereas those that do not stay closer to a neoliberal position. Furthermore, they show that the coexistence of these two conflicting discourses has led to contestation, but also to exchange and cooperation. In Chap. 4, *Yeates and Pillinger* offer a historical development of health care worker migration as a global social policy field in which distinct fields of care and migration overlap. They emphasize the pluralistic and dynamic nature of the field, and the role of contestation, cooperation, and coordination in the unfolding of global policy in order to better understand the origins of this field and its key characteristics. Chapter 5 on the global social governance of pensions by *Heneghan* analyzes the way in which IOs have competed to shape the pensions discourse. It shows how the organizational field has been shaped by the dominant economic paradigm, which has created space for IOs to operate in the policy area. It also finds that the intrinsic features of each IO active in the pension reform arena determine its approach to influencing the pensions discourse and its response to rivals entering the field.

Part III deals with issues concerning *family and education*. Chapter 6 by *Holzschleiter* traces the history of children’s rights as a distinct sphere in international law from the first recognition of the special status of children, to adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to the growth of the contemporary complex IO landscape. Children’s rights enjoy growing visibility and relevance, and continue to be a cross-cutting issue in international organizations of all kinds, making them a central dimension of global social governance; nonetheless international norms and measures surrounding children’s rights continue to be challenged and questioned by scholars and practitioners alike. This contestation is also reflected in the discourse within the population of IOs. In Chap. 7, *Niemann and Martens* map the population of education IOs to describe what types of IOs deal with education and to identify different

clusters of IOs. Moreover, the ideas IOs hold regarding education are analyzed and show how the discourse on education has developed over time within the population of IOs. They show that IOs' ideas about the purpose of education converged over time and that IOs became more holistic with regard to the leitmotifs they hold. In Chap. 8, *Mahon* identifies that from the 1990s to 2008, the family policy field was bifurcated between the North and the South, whereby the former followed the shift from the male breadwinner to the adult earner family with its work-family tensions as promoted by the ILO and the OECD, and the latter focused on policies targeting children in poor families and had UNICEF and the World Bank clearly playing an important role on the ground. Since the 2008 crisis, the field has come together through the Sustainable Development Goals which simultaneously address both North and South. Chapter 9 by *Schuster* and *Kolleck* deals with disability as a global social policy issue since the shift in conceptualization from a medical to a social perspective. It identifies influential actors, relates them to the main discourses, and maps their relations by using network analysis.

Part IV deals with *health and environment*. In Chap. 10, *Kaasch* focuses on four key IOs involved in global social policy in the field of health care systems. She traces their roles and relationships over time and argues that the architecture has been increasingly characterized by collaboration around key concepts such as Universal Health Coverage (UHC). In the current COVID-19 response, however, preliminary findings suggest a shift back to original mandates. In Chap. 11, *Lakeman* deals with climate change as a global social challenge. The chapter highlights the temporal shift toward the current understanding of climate change as a pervasive threat to social policy writ large at the IO level across various issue areas. Climate change as a compounding issue has led to compelling developments regarding the roles of IOs as actors of soft governance, which this chapter illustrates via the example of climate insurance. In Chap. 12, *Schmidt* looks at water as a field of global social policy concern. The chapter provides the historical context for understanding how international organizations developed a distinctly global orientation to water policy alongside the emergence of global hydrology. Water security is now central to how international organizations frame and respond to risks affecting interconnected environmental and economic systems. In Chap. 13, *Wolkenhauer* examines the policies of IOs in the Governance of Food. Despite having been on the global (social) policy agenda since the beginning of the previous century, hunger and undernourishment have not

been resolved to this day. The chapter traces discursive and institutional shifts and shows how, after an initial focus on smallholder agriculture, IOs' focus shifted from production to consumption. Coupled with an overly optimistic trust in the market, they have thus been as much part of the problem as they might still become part of the solution.

The concluding Chap. 14 by *Martens, Niemann, and Kaasch* resumes the arguments made in the introduction to this volume. It summarizes the empirical findings of the individual contributions and highlights prevailing cross-cutting issues and themes. Overall, it becomes evident that IOs have been part of the architecture of arguments in global social governance for a long time: They have been populating diverse social fields in which they more often cooperate or coexist in issue-related or individual regional niches than contest each other. IOs have also proven strong in exercising soft governance as the broadcasters of new ideas, having cognitive authority over their specific field. The chapter closes by formulating avenues for further research.

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