

Why ‘Low Politics’ Matter?

From International Environmental Institutions to Inter-generational Discursive Arenas

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1 International Environmental Institutions and Contestation

“A central feature of modernity is that state authority has been conceived as resting on the consent of the governed, which in turn depends upon governments’ ability to promote economic prosperity” (Litfin 2000: 119). What if the very source that allowed unparalleled successful economic growth starts to be regarded as a menace for those governed (and directly or indirectly for those governing) as it is currently the case with global warming caused by over consumption of fossil fuels? As diagnosed by Litfin: “[t]he authority of science presents a challenge to a key source of the state’s political authority: its role as guarantor of wealth production” (Litfin 2000: 122). In a way, International Environmental Institutions (IEI)³ collect the legitimacy lost by states that delegate functions to IEI since they are not able to deal with transboundary environmental matters. Then, in turn, IEI restore to science for further legitimacy.

When ‘brand-states’ (Van Ham 2000), transnational companies and other non-state actors compete for maintaining and/or gaining authority in a globalized world, it is also justified to ask what is the role of intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations (UN), whose creation was embedded in a political climate, i.e. the aftermath of Second World War, that radically differs from today’s. Similar to states, nothing points to the dismantling of the UN in a foreseeable future. Quite on the contrary, in the international issue area of environment, the number of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) grows exponentially and with their signature, new international bureaucracies for their administration appear. More than 125 separate international environmental regimes have been identified and since 1992 five additional environmental agreements have been concluded on average per year (Beisheim et al 1999, cited in Oberthür and Gehring 2005: 206) what has lead to the so-called emergence of ‘a World Environment Regime’ (Meyer et al. 1997).

Commentators agree that some environmental NGOs are often better informed about global environmental issues and problems than many national governments. Moreover, environmental NGOs are in many cases better able to portray themselves as guardians of environmental values than governmental actors, and this moral authority⁴ allows these groups to publicize harmful actions by other actors. The NGO campaign launched by a prominent group of American NGOs aimed at building support within Congress for reforming the World Bank at a time when the U.S. was negotiating over its contribution to this institution’s capital replenishment, is a paradigm case in point (Wade 1997; Gutner 2002).⁵

World environmental politics clearly illustrates how non-state actors have increasingly gained legitimacy in world politics. Modern international environmental treaties frequently leave open provisions for implementation as well as monitoring mechanisms to non-governmental environmental organizations, traditionally delegated to UN bodies (Tamiotti and Finger 2001: 62). Functions earlier delegated to

³I define International Environmental Institutions as actor’s roles played in cooperation to socially construct norms that later enter into discursive contestation with already constructed normative structures

⁴ On moral authority see Bruce Hall (1997)

⁵ Several Bank projects were object of criticism, one prominent example being the Polonoreste project in Brazil to promote agricultural colonization and road-building in the state of Rondônia.

IOs have been actively taken as new niche by non-state actors: first, agenda-setting and lobbying governments in international environmental decision-making processes; second, contributing to the implementation of environmental agreements; and third, monitoring of the state compliance with such international environmental agreements⁶. States and intergovernmental organizations are no longer therefore regarded as the only actors concerned with solving global ecological problems⁷. As a consequence, a wider range of actors such as non-governmental organizations, transnational corporations, and research institutions, here referred as stakeholders have increased their visibility.

Two main phenomena justify the study of the evolutionary of IOs and, IEI in particular, the contestation of IOs performance by, a) NGOs, and, b) other IOs. First, IOs are no longer perceived as the only ‘teachers of norms’ (Finnemore 1993). Globalisation and regional integration has resulted in an increase of the parties affected by international policy making. Not surprisingly are IOs the focus of increasing criticism then when the negative effects of globalization are apparent to the general public and can not be satisfactorily alleviated by international institutions alone. Empirical evidence shows how IOs are criticized by non-state actors who then collect that legitimacy lost by IOs and start acting themselves as regime implementers and contributing to overseeing compliance with international institutions. Paradoxically enough, even if not controlled through democratic mechanisms, non-state actors, most prominently but not exclusively, NGOs have been taking over the legitimation that IOs fail to keep (Noya 2007: 337)⁸ and increasingly gain authority in world politics (Arts, Noortmann, and Reinalda 2001; Cutler, Haufler, and Porter 1999). Second, we observe how MEAs increasingly enter into conflict with other legal arrangements belonging to other issue areas (e.g. environment v. trade) or even with also other MEAs (climate v. biodiversity). Besides, Reinalda and Verbeek have pointed how IOs, such as Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Programme, have entered into competition to ‘sell policies’ to states (Reinalda and Verbeek 1998).

Because non-state actors have increased their participation and visibility and have collected legitimacy lost by international institutions, it is both reasonable and legitimate to ask what is their opinion about IEI performance.

While recent attempts to account for the relevance of IEI have concentrated in explaining their influence and power, mainly from what I argue a critical (behaviourist) approach, ultimately nearly all aimed at explaining how IOs diffuse norms in some cases acting from “undemocratic liberalism” (Barnett and Finnemore

⁶ Based on a similar classification Tamiotti and Finger (2001: 62)

⁷ Traditionally main IR approaches namely, realism, critical theory, rational institutionalism have disregarded the role of IOs as actors in their own right (Biermann and Bauer 2005). Only functionalism pioneered the study of international organizations in the seventies however its nearly exclusive empirical focus on the European Union limited its extrapolation to other IR research areas.

⁸ The fact that among the first five most valued international organizations in a recent survey (Results for Spain in BRIE spring 2006) are found the three most well-known NGOs: Amnesty International, for human rights; Greenpeace, for the environment; and Médecins sans Frontiers, in health and humanitarian aid supports the argument that NGOs are gaining legitimacy in front of other international organizations (Noya 2007).

2004c: 166), norm contestation has remained outside the debate on IOs and global environmental politics.

I argue that studies on international environmental politics by heavily borrowing from mainstream IR conceptual tools have focused on explaining why international environmental regimes matter at the price of disregarding IOs as units of analysis of norm contestation (Wiener 2007). I suggest to bring together two literatures that have been treated rather in isolations, namely the study of ‘emerging modes of legitimation’ and ‘greening of sovereignty’ (Litfin 1998, 2000), on the one hand, with the study of norm contestation in transnational arenas (Wiener 2004, 2007).

I assume that learning what stakeholders think about IO performance and by studying what role(s) a perceived relevant IEI deliver can serve to objectify what the general public understands for a legitimate IEI and how has evolved its definition across time. Because of the already mentioned intersubjective nature of legitimacy, the methodology that better suits the study of IO legitimacy is a survey. A survey on nine⁹ international environmental organizations has been developed that can serve our purpose.

My article shows that currently the most legitimate IEI is the United Nations Environment Programme¹⁰, of the nine IEI surveyed and second, it builds the argument that its legitimacy stems from the fact of acting as what I call an inter-generational arena for the contestation of authority. In practice entails an arena where two very different types of authority encounter: a) political authority granted by member states that rests on the consent of the governed in national contexts and exercised on the basis of power, and b) scientific authority that rests “on its claim to objective, disinterested, and verifiable knowledge.” (Litfin 2000: 122). As sociologist Lamo de Espinosa has pointed, we are currently embedded in the reflexive society that consists of “a social order that uses social science to get to know, manage and modify itself routinely” (Lamo de Espinosa 2003: 40). For Litfin, science has an “unrivalled status as universal legitimator in the modern era that may facilitate international cooperation” but precisely for that very reason “political actors on all sides have an incentive to deploy it [science] on behalf of their policy goals.” (Litfin 2000: 122) and so uncovering the close relationship between power and knowledge.

This paper is organized in the following manner: section 2 introduces and reviews three main strands of literature that account for IO agency and come to the conclusion that those approaches are able to tell us when IOs are less legitimate and not more legitimate. I attribute this theoretical gap to the fact that they do not include in their assumptions for the possibility of norm contestation i.e. policies devised within those institutions do not require from public consent. I call those approaches consequently ‘critical behaviourist’¹¹. Second, I introduce and briefly review a recent approach to the study of IOs as ‘transnational arenas for norm contestation’. I argue this approach is theoretically better equipped to assess when IOs are more legitimate, since it includes

⁹ See section 3 for details

¹⁰ Actually not officially an IO but a subsidiary body of the General Assembly that reports through the Economic and Social Council

¹¹ I borrow from Wiener’s classification to the study of norms in IR theory (2007)

a societal approach to norms, i.e. as both structuring and social constructed, that I argue can better cope with IEI dealing with Sustainable Development. Section three justifies and clarifies the methodology applied for the study of the legitimacy of IEI, namely a stakeholder survey, and lays the three functional areas along which IOs will be assessed, i.e. cognitive, executive and normative. Section four reveals which are the most legitimate organization(s) according to stakeholders and identifies the cognitive function as the one holding most explanatory power for accounting for IEI legitimacy. Later it discusses survey results by comparing on the hand, multi-issue organizations, and convention secretariats, on the other. The results are discussed from two perspectives from the bureaucratic one i.e. IEI as public non-state actors and as IEI as norms. I advance the interpretation that United National Environmental Programme is regarded more relevant than the World Bank since the former represents more 'scientific authority' and the latter holds more 'political authority'. Climate change receives more attention from stakeholders than responded the survey reflects that the intergenerational norm impinges more upon liberal notions of economic growth than inter-species responsibility.

2 Towards a Sociological Framework for Assessing IEI Relevance

In her critique of modern constructivist approaches to norms in international relations theory, Antje Wiener's (2007) distinguishes between a behaviourist and a societal perspective to norms. Based on her distinction I differentiate between a critical behaviourist and societal approach to the study of IEI relevance. While behaviourist approaches focus in explaining why IEI as agents attempting to illegitimately depoliticize rule-making, the societal approach regards IEI as transnational arenas for norm contestation. Furthermore, it is assumed that both approaches are deemed necessary to understand IEI as both agents and norms. Both approaches are non-exclusive.

The former is focused in explaining IEI' agency that determines the preferences of other actors; close to Joseph Nye's notion of soft power, understood as capacity of an actor to determine the preferences of another actor building on the former's ideology, culture and attractiveness of institutions (Nye 2002)¹². Complementarily, the latter contemplates the possibility that other actors with moral authority, such as Environmental NGOs (ENGOS) and other non-state actors, contest the validity of norms as put forward by IEI by their recognition as the competent actors. Similar to Richard Ashley's sociological-based definition of power that depends on its recognition within a community (Ashley 1984, cited in Guzzini 2000: 173):

[T]he power of an actor, even its status as an agent competent to act, is not attributable to the inherent qualities or possession of a given entity. Rather, the power and status of an actor depends on and is limited by the condition of its recognition within a community as a whole.

From here we can conclude that IEI relevance can be seen as a reciprocal relationship. The capacity of an IO to determine the preferences of other actors meet with the

¹² Soft power is a concept coined by Nye (2002) that appears in his book 'The Paradox of American Power' and that expresses the capacity of an actor to determine the preferences of another actor building on the previous actor ideology, culture and attractive institutions. For critical assessments on the concept of soft power see Ferguson (2003), Van Ham (2002) or reconstructions of the concept Lukes (2005)

recognition from norm followers as that specific IO as the competent authority. For instance, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) might be perceived generally speaking, as a 'credible' organization to many concerning recommendations on financial policies. IMF to the same stakeholders might not be recognized as credible when it comes to educational policies. The IMF is not, for the sake of this study, relevant organization for providing recommendations on educational policies. In short, while the IMF might be in the position by mandate and thus holding 'political authority' to make those recommendations, it lacks the expertise or 'scientific authority' to make them.

This paper advances a research framework for IEI assessment that integrates two differing, but complementary, views of IOs, first, as both public non-state actors (Bauer 2006) with agency stemming from "agenda-setting influence and important socializing influences" (Simmons and Martin 2002: 193) and, second as a transnational arena for norm contestation (Wiener 2007). Considering IOs as public non-state actors and as transnational arena renders the study of IO interesting since IOs with agency may intervene in the normative structure of world politics.

Three strands of literature classified as critical behaviourist have critically assessed the agency of IOs while those grant some type of agency to IOs they I argue focus on explaining when they act 'illegitimately' (Barnett and Finnemore 2004a) but they remain silent about when they are legitimate.

By conducting an external comparative study on IO performance I implicitly assume the possibility that IEI norms might be socially contested. In other words, my concept of IO legitimacy includes public consent. I consider the possibility that IEI are contested by non-state actors

My review of the critical behaviourist approaches comes to the conclusion those approaches are able to tell us when IOs are less legitimate but not when they are more legitimate. The logic of contestation provides theoretical grounds that allow understanding why and when some IEI are recognized more relevant than others. For that reason it is included in the research framework a perspective on IOs as transnational arenas for norm contestation that regard IEI as structuring and socially constructed.

2.1 Critical Behaviourist Approaches: When are IOs less Relevant?

Critical behaviourist approaches share, first, the granting of some sort of agency to IOs and, second, their assumption that the relationship between knowledge and power is too entrenched in IOs. I review the three strands of literature with an special emphasis to analysing the relationship knowledge-power and on case study methodology.

IO as Global Institution

Haas and Haas (1995) already pointed how knowledge plays a key role in IOs acting as creators and administrators of knowledge for the redefinition of the international

agenda¹³. Emmerij et al.'s in their publication on the United Nations intellectual history *Ahead of the Curve* (2001) stress how ideas that developed within the UN have contributed to the development of new policy approaches. One of their prominent examples is the advance of the sustainable development concept (Emmerij, Jolly, and Weiss 2001; Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 2-3):

[I]deas and concepts are the most important legacy of the UN. Such ideas arise and are developed in the interplay between the two domains of academia and policy making, but they derive their credibility from their basis in the former. Examples include the informal sector, sustainable development, governance and social capital-which have contributed both to the development of new policy approaches and to institutional change.

In the book *Global Institutions and Development: Framing the World?* Bøås and McNeill regard academic framing of policies as a source of consensus (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 2-3):

Multilateral institutions, often in association with academia, seek to establish global consensus around certain ideas that they see as important for their policy purposes and international image.

Bøås and McNeill discuss the role of multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank or the UN Development Programme, in shaping international development policy¹⁴(Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 3). Their main thesis is that multilateral institutions set global consensus on certain ideas that later inform development policy. Most importantly, those ideas arise and develop at the interface between academia and policy making (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 2-3). Their main research interest centres in exploring, in how far the technical and depoliticized approach that characterizes the academic discourse influences the use of ideas taken up by those institutions (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 4).

Their concept of framing entails an authoritative way of policy making since international institutions through their technocratic approach dilute contestation and generate consensus (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 2):

An effective 'frame' is one which makes favoured ideas seem like common sense, and unfavoured ideas as unthinkable. [...]. How and why does such 'framing' occur? A strong claim is that the most powerful multilateral institutions are controlled by the donor countries (and most particularly the USA), promote neoliberal ideas, and are dominated by an economic perspective; [...] A weak claim is that multilateral institutions are necessarily consensual and technocratic; [...]. What is common to both is 'depoliticization': ideas are drained of any overt political content, even if they are not wholly drained of their power.

¹³ Management studies recognize knowledge creation as an important organizational activity of organizations that strive to achieve greater effectiveness and responsiveness in increasingly turbulent global environments (Allard 2003: 367).

¹⁴ The concept umbrella of multilateral institution allows the authors to study under the same analytical framework organizations that are both international and regional, and within those individual case studies on organizations such as the World Trade Organization, banks like World Bank or the Asian Development Bank and specialized agencies of the UN such as the United Nations Development Programme are analysed (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 3).

Their book explores how the power of ideas may explain how hegemonic power within international institutions prevents rather permits that radical ideas pervade in those institutions (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 1-2):

We are concerned with multilateral institutions, and the exercise of what Gramsci calls hegemonic power. We suggest that powerful states (notably the USA), powerful organizations (such as the IMF), and even, perhaps, powerful disciplines (economics) exercise power largely by ‘framing’: which serves to limit the power of potentially radical ideas to achieve change.

The academic framing of policies acts as a soft power resource inasmuch as generates consensus about which policies and how those policies need to be implemented with the least amount of contestation (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 1-2):

The exercise of framing is composed of two parts: one drawing attention to a specific issue (such as the environment or urban development); two, determining how such an issue is viewed. A successful framing exercise will both cause an issue to be seen by those that matter, and ensure that they see it in a specific way. And this is achieved with the minimum of conflict or pressure.

They argue that international institutions draw from academic discourses in order to make an idea attractive concluding that ideas have power in the political world but their political force depends on the constellation of institutions and interests¹⁵.

The strength of their approach consists in conducting case studies on different international institutions about a contested issue, namely international development policy. Besides, they acknowledge how the same institution can be assessed differently, depending on the time and issue at hand, fitting our conceptualization of legitimacy as depending on the point of reference, i.e. time, observer, (Bøås and McNeill 2004a):

A comparison of Robert Wade’s discussion on the environment in the World Bank with Desmond McNeill’s analysis of the discussion on social capital in the same institution shows us how the World Bank has in the former case been more reactive, in the latter more proactive, in dealing with ideas that do not immediately fit the traditional World Bank problem definition of development.

In the IO as global institution approach ideas borrowed from academia serve to (illegitimately) depoliticize policy-making since serve the interests of specific groups. While this informs us about IO illegitimacy it is not so explicit about IO legitimacy. The methodology they follow of single qualitative case studies is not suited for our purpose of studying in a comparative manner the legitimacy of different IEI, because of the intersubjective nature of the legitimacy concept.

IO as International Bureaucracy

Rational-legal authority of modern bureaucracies rely on “legalities, procedures, and rules and thus rendered impersonal” (Barnett and Finnemore 2004b: 21). Borrowing heavily from Weber’s concept of bureaucracy, Barnett and Finnemore consider IOs as

¹⁵ Authors point that the taking of one idea by one international institution will depend as well on the bounded rationality of political groups that dominate those institutions and the survival of that multilateral institution: “[e]fficiency of multilateral institutions in a narrow sense needs to be balanced sometimes against the ‘keeping happy’ member governments” (Bøås and McNeill 2004a: 11).

“collections of rules that define complex social tasks and establish a division of labor to accomplish them” (Barnett and Finnemore 2004b: 18).

The power of IOs is produced by the authority that constitutes them. As bureaucracies, IOs are conferred authority, and this authority enables them to use discursive and institutional resources to induce others to defer to their judgment (Barnett and Finnemore 2004b: 29)

Modern bureaucracies, however, do not exclusively rely on rational-legal authority. IOs use their bureaucratic impersonality to get other actors to defer to them by use of discursive and institutional resources, based most notably on their expertise and moral standing (Barnett and Finnemore 2004b: 20). Stakeholders defer to international bureaucracies not only because they are ‘in authority’ but most importantly because they are ‘an authority’ as expert bureaucracies. Besides, IO’s moral standing manifests with IOs’ claims to act for the benefit of the international community and not from the narrow mindedness of interested states. In all those cases IOs appear neutral and impersonal to stakeholders.

For Reinalda and Verbeek bureaucracy is one basic element that characterises an international organization (Reinalda and Verbeek 2004: 12, 14):

It is thus important to realize that international organizations comprise at least two sets of actors: its member states and its organizational units, in particular the international secretariat.

However, differently from Barnett and Finnemore’s approach their analysis is not normative. They are interested in explaining autonomous policy-making by IOs without value judgements.

IO’s bureaucratic impersonality serves as authoritative resource and manifests when IO decision making can not be accounted only by the interests of powerful states (Reinalda and Verbeek 1998: 3). By drawing from Principal-Agent (P-A) models they are able to cope with the theoretical puzzle of explaining IOs autonomous policy-making (Reinalda and Verbeek 1998; 2004: 21)¹⁶:

Principal-agent theory aims at analysing the relationship between an actor-the principal-who delegates, but does not surrender, authority to a certain body- the agent- specifically designed to perform certain tasks.

IOs are set up by member states as an attempt to generate higher predictability of the behaviour of states and mitigate this way the negative consequences of international anarchy. However, ‘agency loss’ between the principal, that is, member states, and its agent, is used by the bureaucracy as a window of opportunity for affecting decision-making procedures.

The P-A model approach merely provides a list of case study situations¹⁷ where bureaucracies influenced decision-making. Besides, since the research framework is not aimed at *erklären* and not to *verstehen* their work is devoid of any normative judgement and it does not inform us about IO legitimacy.

¹⁶ Other examples are P-A model application to multilateral institutions, e.g. on the World Bank (Gutner 2004).

¹⁷ Leadership, consensus building, organizational dynamics, conflicts of loyalty, policy windows, and learning processes (Reinalda and Verbeek 2004)

The entrenched relationship between knowledge-power in their approach stems from the fact that bureaucracies tend to expand their mandates from based on their rational-legal authority (Barnett and Finnemore 2004a: 9):

“As IOs go about their business of defining tasks and implementing mandates, they tend to do so in ways that permit, or even require, more intervention by more IOs. This is not bureaucratic imperialism so much as it is a logical outgrowth of the nature of their authority. AS rational-legal authorities bureaucracies tend to value the technocratic impartiality that legitimates them and so tend to construct problems and solutions in ways that reflect those preferences.”

With regards to methodology, both strands conduct single case studies that hinder intersubjective comparability. Any how, in sociological institutionalism generalizations tend to be made about the opposite to IO legitimacy, namely IO pathologies¹⁸ (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Barnett and Finnemore 2004c).

IO as Multilateral Development Bank

Similar to Reinalda and Verbeek’s approach to IO as bureaucracy (cf. previous section), the literature on IOs as MDBs applies the P-A model, however, with a quite different analytical purpose. While in Reinalda and Verbeek’s approach the international bureaucracy plays the role of agent only, in MDB’s, IOs’ authority stems from the fact that an IO may act as either principal or agent depending on the stage of the policy process. According to Gutner, the P-A model “may be usefully calibrated to more precisely explain IO performance pathologies by better recognizing problems of antinomic delegation and the dual role of MDB [Multilateral Development Bank] as principal and agent” (Gutner: 3). To the already agency losses originated through delegation of tasks from member states (as principals) to IOs (as agents), one has to add additional opportunities for agency losses born from the recognition of the IO as principal delegating to recipient country i.e. agents (Gutner: 3). This author brings to light the fact that once policies have been agreed upon, previously IO-agent may now act as capacity builder, helping states to implement policies and from that point on IOs become ‘principals’ of other agents, i.e. national governments in need to implement policies so that loans from international institutions, such as the World Bank, are made available to them. IOs as principal lend or provide material resources to recipients, i.e. agents, in exchange of their behavioural change. The defined line between principal and agent in traditional IR P-A models blurs in the case of MDBs along the policy time line. The capacity of an IO to act in different stages of the policy process with contrasting roles is applied to the empirical case of the World Bank (Gutner 2004).

Examining the Bank as principal allows the analysis of a normally neglected aspect of IOs as putting policies and strategies into practice in a recipient country (Gutner: 20). The World Bank arguably acts as principal since it is able to halt the disbursement when agents, i.e. recipient countries, do not comply with rules agreed upon (Gutner: 20).

¹⁸ IO pathological behaviour is defined as suboptimal self-defeating behaviour (Barnett and Finnemore 2004b: 35)

MDB approach to IOs' vantage point is that acknowledges IO contested character of being a financial and development institution at the same time. This duality of roles may generate internal organizational conflicts. As a financial institution the organization is expected to generate revenues, but at the same time, as development institution, IOs effectiveness will be calibrated according to borrowing countries' welfare improvement. More often than not, to juggle with both organizational objectives will generate conflicts within the organization. Gutner's approach also implicitly acknowledges an organizational time perspective by distinguishing two contested roles, i.e. principal and of agent, depending on the stage of the policy process. Nevertheless, this approach has only been empirically applied to a single case study i.e. World Bank. Its application remains limited to only other MDBs but, needless to say, there are many IOs that are not MDBs. Besides, Gutner by pin pointing implementation problems derived from antinomic delegation is able to tell when IOs are less legitimate but remains silent about IO legitimacy.

2.2 Societal Approach: When are IOs for Sustainable Development More Relevant?

The approach that has mostly dominated the study of global environmental politics is the liberal institutionalist strand, centred on the concept of international regimes (Krasner 1983; Rittberger 1990; Levy, Young, and Zürn 1995). More recently, the concepts of private and public-private institutions (Brühl 2001; Pattberg 2005; Reinicke and Deng 2000) or institutional forces such as scientization or marketization (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006) have taken on the debate. Those approaches nonetheless have overlooked one key aspect of global environmental politics, namely the contested nature of the sustainable development concept¹⁹. By focusing their efforts on explaining whether international regimes and private institutions matter, scholars have neglected the inherent contestation of sustainable development norms. Those approaches focus on a non-contentious view to world environmental politics and can not account for tensions as depicted in the concept of the 'greening of sovereignty' (Litfin 1998). Those approaches, I contend, share a behaviourist approach to international environmental institutions by not regarding the dual quality of norms as both structuring and socially constructed (Wiener 2007). Those have centred so far instead in explaining cooperation, compliance and diffusion of environmental norms.

Studies on international environmental politics have started, for quite some time now, to take contestation seriously though. Sociological institutionalist approaches argue that a World Environmental Regime based on one discourse on the rationalization of nature has emerged (Meyer et al. 1997). However, commentators of climate change negotiations have recently identified at least three co-existing contested environmental discourses (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006) ²⁰. Articles reflecting

¹⁹ On the contestability of the sustainable development concept see Elliot (2004: 157-177) on contested environmental discourses see Dryzek (1997).

²⁰ The three discourses are ecological modernization, green governmentality and civic environmentalism.

contestation of type of norms (e.g. trade v. environment) or between different norm followers (e.g. climate v. biodiversity) as an integrating part to environmental regimes are flourishing. Literature that focus on the tensions or interactions between environment and trade/economic concerns in international institutions (Oberthür and Gehring 2006; Bernauer 2005; Zelli 2005) are cases in point. Notwithstanding that literature, approaches international environmental politics are still ill-equipped to account for such type of norm conflicts.

The concept “greening of sovereignty” (Litfin 1998) puts an emphasis on the interaction between the system of sovereign states and the transboundary and borderless nature of environmental problems. Since political authority is based on public consent of the governed (not only nationally but increasingly internationally), and those governed find that governors are not able to guarantee territorial integrity, wealth production plus environmental welfare we are going to witness a political authority crisis. This is what is actually happening now; scientific authority is contesting state authority in its ability to deliver those above mentioned ‘public goods’ i.e. territorial integrity, wealth and environmental welfare. By adopting Wiener’s approach I include “public consent” (not only recognition by other states) in my notion of authority, legitimacy and sovereignty of IEI. “Modern political authority rests upon consent of the governed, and consent refers not only to the deep constitutional principles of the state but also to the actual performance of governments. More concretely, the performance criteria according to which the modern state is judged derive from its dual role as guarantor of territorial integrity and wealth production.” (Litfin 2000: 121).

“Political authority based upon consent takes two forms: an acceptance of the deep constitutional principles of a polity, and popular support for (or at least acquiescence to) the governmental policies, a distinction that grows out of the distinction between state and government” (Litfin 2000: 121). The polity evaluates government’s performance in fostering security and prosperity. The environmental crisis can be conceived as a crisis of the state in providing wealth production, since in the conception of wealth current society considers not only material welfare but also environmental welfare. The contested nature of the sustainable development stems from the tensions between the wealth demand that in current society is linked to the liberal political notion of consent from living self-interested citizens with environmental concerns species (not only humans) and also next human generations. Claims about intergenerational responsibility are foreign to liberal notions of consent (Litfin 2000). What we are witnessing nowadays is the crisis of state capability in delivering the most valued public goods, social, economic and environmental public goods. The concept of sustainable development depicts quite clearly the contested nature, the implicit trade-offs that exist between those public goods.

That the sustainable development norm -like democracy- is contested can be supported with at least two arguments. First, many different definitions of sustainable development co-exist (e.g. Brown et al. 1987; Redclift 1992; Mitcham 1995). Sustainable development’s most referred definition is encompassing yet vague and defined as the capacity to meet “the needs of the present without compromising the

ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 43). The concept presumes a balance between economic, social and environmental concerns, which involve in turn, highly contested political implications (Luke 1995; Kuehls 1998) stemming from the inclusion of future generations decisions, which runs counter liberal political notions of consent i.e. we have responsibility for affecting the decisions of future generations.

Second, while the origins of the sustainability discourse can be traced back at least to the early 1970s when several publications appeared (Meadows et al. 1972), but a breaking point was the Founex meeting (1971), the first major conference gathering representatives from many parts of the world to discuss the relationship between the human environment and development. What is significant about the Founex meeting is that represents the first attempt to place environmental problems in the context of the needs of developing countries i.e. ‘ecodevelopment’ (Grasa and Sachs 2000: 91). In short, while Northern concerns centred on emphasizing the need to preserve the environment, Southern countries interpreted Northern demands as a condemnation to Southern countries’ use of natural capital (e.g. forest timber) of their sovereign territory for development purposes. The latent and sometimes more evident divisions between North and South have characterised international environmental politics ever since. It is not uncommon to find references on ‘biodiversity’ being viewed as a Northern topic, or how climate change is ‘responsibility’ from industrialized countries. Nonetheless, this inherent conflictual character of environmental and SD politics has been neglected by mainstream scholarly approaches.²¹

International environmental politics has tended to borrow conceptual tools such as international regimes that became established theory around the late eighties. Nonetheless, the concept of international regimes was developed first and foremost to explain ‘cooperation’ in an anarchic world of international states and contestation was not a primary theoretical concern²². Scholars of IR studying environmental regimes have tended to overlook tensions in the delivery of sustainable development by adopting the regime concept that is conceptually tailored to explain state cooperation mainly, but it does not conceptually allow for non-state, societal contestation. Instead the concept of environmental discourse appear more helpful in that regard (Dryzek 1997). However, in recent years IR discipline has broadened its analytical lens to include non-state actors. Along with this development in IR theory, Wiener has advanced a societal approach to norms theoretically equipped to cope with norm contestation. Wiener distinguishes between a behaviourist and a societal approach to norms. What mainly differentiates the behaviourist from the societal approach is that while the former is concerned with explaining compliance with norms, the second proposes the idea that “norm stability follows only if and when contestation regarding both type and the meaning of norms has been overcome” (Wiener 2007: 49).

The behaviourist approach attaches a structural role to norms as prescriptive, different from values which are individually held (Wiener 2007: 7). Norms operate

²¹ For exceptions see Biermann #

²² See for exception Keely (1990) on a Foucauldian analysis of international regimes

within a social environment and are defined by norm setters for norm followers to obeying them (: 54). This behaviourist perspective focuses on the “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1989). An extension to this approach has come with the problematization of normative validity as reflected in the “logic of arguing” that entails a focus on the contestedness of norm types (: 59-60):

[I]n order to be powerful, norms must acquire a degree of shared legitimacy for a significant group of negotiating actors. The shared validity of norm is established through communicative action during which different socio-culturally determined preferences are adapted and changed based on the willingness to be persuaded by the better argument.

Wiener critically assesses that contestation in the arguing approach takes place only along the type of norm (: 60-1):

[T]he flexible quality of norms remains limited to contestation over the type of norm in the supra- or transnational contexts of elite negotiations, i.e. which choice of norm is valid, say labour standards, human rights, minority rights, citizenship rights; leaving the contestation over the meaning of norms as an unknown factor.

In the logic of arguing, we lose oversight on the process of norm origin and change caused by the theoretical separation between norms and values (ibid.: 15). Under the behaviourist perspective the type of norm, e.g. human rights, environmental standards or minority rights is arguable, nonetheless contestation of a norm’s meaning, for example between norm setter and designated norm follower, between different groups of norm followers, or over time, remains analytically bracketed (ibid.: 55).

Wiener overcomes the structural conceptualization of the role of norms of modern constructivists by advancing the so called ‘logic of contestedness’. A societal perspective to norms is reflected in the fact that they are considered valid and just under conditions of interaction in one cultural context, but that perception cannot be generalised (ibid.: 64). Wiener emphasizes the fact that in transnational political arenas the validity of a norm cannot be assumed as stable a priori; instead, proving norm validity across transnational arenas requires empirical evidence. This author underlines the role of transnational arenas as potential units of analysis (e.g. European Union) (ibid.: 52).

The concept of sustainable development commonly understood as the balance between social, economic and environmental principles implies, I argue, a challenge to traditionally identified theories of social action, namely, the logic of appropriateness and the logic of arguing. While by the logic of appropriateness norm followers do what is appropriate, the adoption of the sustainable development norm in practice entails that social, economic and environmental principles enter into conflict as the World Bank’s Polonoeste²³ project exemplifies. Besides, the logic of arguing incorporates contestation about the type of norm that is applicable in a specific case since “the hierarchy of norm types is contested” (ibid.: 53). The concept of sustainable development however implies a balance and not a hierarchy between

²³ World Bank’s Polonoeste project that sparked the NGO Campaign against the organization that provided the loan for the project’s implementation cf. Rich (1994) and Wade (1997). The IO’s project aimed at improving Brazil’s economic situation entered, in practice, into direct conflict with the other two pillars of sustainable development, i.e. the social and environmental

different norms. By following the logic of arguing, argumentation would lead to the application of economic principles over the environmental or social or some other possible combination depending on the specific setting.

I argue the logic of arguing is well suited to deal with the liberal notion of political authority as currently living self-interested citizens, however, is ill-equipped to deal with sustainable development normative conflicts that embrace intergenerational responsibility as entailed for instance in the Kyoto Protocol or what I call 'inter-species solidarity' in the Biodiversity convention. The consecution of sustainable development as 'global governance' entails normative conflicts across types of norms (economic, social, environmental) (e.g. trade v. environment), across norm followers (biodiversity v. climate norm followers) and across time as institutionalised in IOs (World Bank v. UNEP). From the logic of arguing for instance it is not possible to conceive how come there are several 'environmental discourses', for instance, the archetypical ones depicted by John Dryzek, or why Karen Litfin talks about "Ozone Discourses" because from the logic of arguing, scientific authority and political authority that inform one another in a power-knowledge relationship i.e. that scientific authority as 'objective' knowledge is deployed for political purposes. In the logic of arguing contestation between two type of norms is bracketed (Wiener 2007)

To sum up, the logic of contestedness can cope analytically better with the situation of non-state actors contesting rules as diffused by IOs, breaking away from past sociological institutionalist approaches that conceived IOs as 'teachers of norms' (Finnemore 1993) or with arguing approaches that presume contestation only on the type of norm which implies a hierarchical order to norms.

3 Assessing the Relevance of Organization's Roles and Discourses

By assessing roles and discourses we are observing changes in the normative structure of world politics. By discourses I understand the construction of contested norms and by roles I conceive bureaucratic functions.

According to liberal institutionalists IEI act as knowledge-brokers i.e. assisting the generation of knowledge bases for regime creation and development, as negotiation-facilitators providing favourable political arenas for negotiation, and as norm-implementers, assisting in regime implementation by building-up capacities in member states for the implementation of international environmental agreements (Haas, Keohane, and Levy 1993; Biermann and Bauer 2005).

This is a comparative study with a single standardized survey conducted on nine international environmental agencies²⁴. The variable time thus remains constant and relevance is treated as a bi-dimensional parameter varies along organization type and observer. Organizational relevance varies along the variable observer i.e. stakeholders. A questionnaire was developed with the purpose of answering two main questions,

²⁴ The environment directorate of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the Environmental Department of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Ozone Secretariat, the Secretariat to the Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Secretariat to the Biodiversity Convention (CBD), and the Desertification Secretariat (UNCCD).

which international environmental organization stakeholders consider most relevant for their work and, second, which functions or roles does this organization fulfil.

The use of survey methodology is justified along the following lines: a) variability along the variable ‘organization’ can be expected in the case of IOs since different organizational environments affect the behaviour and performance of IOs; b) comparative studies in the political science tradition allow generalization of results and; c) external assessments on bureaucratic performance are justified inasmuch bureaucrats’ self-assessment does inherently suffer from a bias derived from the fact that bureaucratic power relies on bureaucrat’s self-effacement vocabulary (Barnett and Finnemore 2004b: 21). Organizational sociology applied to the study of international organizations has advanced that different environments affect the behaviour and performance of organizations (Ness and Brechin 1988: 249). Since it is plausible to assume that different IEI have different environments (i.e. organizational structure, bureaucratic culture, member states), then the study of IEI performance is justified in its own right:

The shift from closed to open systems in organizational sociology marked the important recognition that environments vary and can have a decisive impact on organizational behaviour and performance. Environmental forces shape goals, boundaries, and the internal activity of organizations.

Moreover, external assessments on the performance of IEI are required since bureaucrat’s self-assessments inherently suffer from an underestimation of the effects international bureaucracies have on world politics. Bureaucrats tend to use a self-effacing vocabulary in order to appear serving their creators i.e. member states that underestimates bureaucracy’s effects. So if we attempt to assess the performance of IEI, studies can not exclusively rely on performance self-assessments²⁵.

Last but not least, comparative studies allow generalization of what different stakeholders consider what makes IEI relevant.

3.1 What IEI Do?

IOs in international environmental politics fulfil three important tasks: a) acting as knowledge-brokers by assisting the generation of knowledge bases for regime creation and development, b) as negotiation-facilitators providing favourable political arenas for negotiation, and c) as capacity-builders, assisting in regime implementation by building-up capacities in member states for the implementation of international environmental agreements (Biermann and Bauer 2005) questions that cover all three functional areas were included in the questionnaire.

Table #: Variables of the survey questionnaire with corresponding indicator questions (for complete survey check Annex)

Variables	Indicators
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²⁵ Bas Arts from a political science perspective has put forward the Alter-Ego causal analysis to investigate the effects of NGOs in international environmental negotiations. External assessments are a necessary condition in order to infer causal connections between the influence of an actor and the subsequent political outcomes yielded (see Arts 2001 on the Alter-Ego causal analysis) thank Klaus Dingwerth for pointing this literature.

Knowledge-brokers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -decision-makers draw on information provided by international bureaucracies: annual reports, thematic studies, databases, scientific publications, personal contacts; -domestic impact of the information provided by the IO for the generation of scientific knowledge domestically; -scientific neutrality/political neutrality of the IO; -exchange of information on the environment with stakeholders (e.g. national reports). - lobbying
Negotiation-facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -discourse influence by IO's output through both public debate (e.g. press declarations, official strategy papers) and media coverage; -encouragement of stakeholders by IOs in engaging international political processes; -evolution over time of participation in international policy processes due to the work of the international bureaucracy: national governments, environmental non-governmental organizations, business associations and private corporations; -level of participation (with or without IO mediation) in the following activities in order to "characterize" the IO's stakeholders: international negotiations, public-private partnerships, international conferences, international fora.
Capacity-Builders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -stakeholders' participation in workshops; -cooperation with stakeholders in partnerships and provision of financial support provided by the IO; -participation of external actors in skills-oriented training-programs and demonstration projects provided by the IO; -participation in joint programs for technology transfer facilitated by IO; -adoption or reformulation by states of new laws, programs, instruments and practices to regulate economic and social activity affecting the environment; -creation of additional national organizations (e.g. advisory councils, ministry) -change of resource allocation in favor of existing organizations; -creation of new institutions (e.g. research institutions, environmental ministries and the like).

3.2 On-line Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to collect data on our research question(s): which organization is the perceived to be most relevant for our stakeholders, in the first place and second, which functions make IEI to the eyes of the stakeholders more relevant. The questionnaire functions as a 'snapshot' of stakeholders' perception on environmental IOs. A variety of question types were used varying from open-ended questions to multiple-choice type scales. There were overall twenty one questions gathering information about: a) the three functional areas, namely, cognitive, executive, and normative, and c) about the respondents' profile.

Regarding the questionnaire's format, the stakeholder survey was based on methods developed by Simsek and Veiga (2001) for internet organizational surveys and

consisted of an on-line questionnaire with largely closed-ended questions, that is, questions with defined alternatives for answers similar to multiple-choice questionnaires. The principal advantage of using a standardized survey was that the same questions were asked to all stakeholders for all international bureaucracies and, thereby, generated direct comparable data for our analysis. This was done, though, to the expense of having just a single standardized questionnaire for all bureaucracies, which implied that all questions needed a formulation that could fit the reality of all IOs. We could not be neither topic- nor bureaucracy specific but still questions needed to remain concrete and reader-friendly. Our research strategy was to design an on-line survey that was both user-friendly and accessible to an important number of respondents. The electronic format permitted a computerized treatment of the incoming data.

Being our concern to keep the questionnaire as brief as possible, the survey was designed to cover the maximum number of indicators that refer to our three functional areas. With both considerations borne in mind, single questions were formulated to provide information for several indicators by combining multiple choice and matrix type of questions. The questionnaire was structured in the following manner: (a) the respondent rated the relevance of the nine listed IOs, leaving also the possibility to fill in an open text box for other organizations not listed, later the respondent chose from the list of our nine international bureaucracies the bureaucracy she/he perceived as the most relevant for her work and for which they were asked to answer the rest of the questionnaire; (b) questions on the three functional areas; (c) information about the respondent's organization, such as, respondent's name (optional), and organization's name, country of origin, stakeholder group (i.e. government, environmental non-governmental organization, research institution, business corporation) and size.

Pre-tests of the questionnaire were done. The questionnaire was modified to reflect suggestions of the pre-test participants. Both a web-based version of the finalized questionnaire and a paper-based version were prepared and used to collect data. The way stakeholders were selected and approached is described in the next section.

3.3 The Sample

Potential respondents were offered, in return of participation, a summary of the survey findings. The selection of the stakeholders benefited from four different strategies described below.

To gain a broad range of stakeholder perspectives, it was necessary to identify multiple contacts for (a) four types of stakeholders, namely, national government officials, non-profit and for profit non-governmental organizations representatives, and researchers or scientists from (b) four selected countries (two from the South and two industrialized): India, Mexico, Germany and the United States of America. The main source for contacts consisted of the official website of the international agencies that contained published on-line data with details of organizations involved in the respective IO activities. The second was the direct inquiry for contacts to officials of

international bureaucracies²⁶ or via electronic mail communication (mainly when no contacts were provided on the respective international bureaucracies' web-site). The third consisted of an explicit written request to already identified stakeholders, and forth we used internet search engines with selected key words. This last technique permitted the inclusion of organizations not registered in official websites, which allowed for a more inclusive approach.

Stakeholders were mainly contacted via electronic mailing. A statement at the beginning of the questionnaire guaranteed the anonymity of the survey results. We avoided answers from non targeted respondents by both making 'invisible' our survey to internet search engines and by asking stakeholders to first contact our research team to provide details of potential respondents to be later contacted. Furthermore, the survey system did not allow filling in the survey more than once by the same person²⁷.

4 What Are Organizations doing to be More Relevant?

This study centres on nine international environmental agencies²⁸, namely, the environment directorate of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the Environmental Department of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Ozone Secretariat, the Secretariat to the Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Secretariat to the Biodiversity Convention (CBD), and the Desertification Secretariat (UNCCD).

The first section presents the results about the relevance of all nine international agencies. Second, questionnaire results for the best assessed organizations i.e. UNEP, Climate secretariat, World Bank and Biodiversity secretariat are presented and organized per functional area, i.e. cognitive, executive and normative. The assessed least relevant IEI according to survey results are not further analyzed²⁹.

From a total number of 600 contacts addressed, 147 answered our survey, accounting for around 25% response rate, which adjusts to the typical response rate (Simsek and Veiga 2001).

Table #: Number of survey respondents for each bureaucracy and by country

	Germany	India	Mexico	USA	Intern'l	Total
Biodiversity S.	6	4	4	3	5	22
GEF	2	3	1	7	3	16
IMO	-	-	-	-	4	4
OECD	-	-	-	-	5	5
Ozone S.	-	-	-	-	4	4

²⁶ During interviews conducted in the MANUS research project

²⁷ The system would recognize the Internet Protocol address of the respondent during a specific period of time.

²⁸ The same agencies are subject of study in the MANUS Project ##

²⁹ Possible competing hypothesis of why stakeholders perceive some IOs as not relevant or hardly relevant are provided in section 4.1

Desertification S.	2	4	3	-	1	10
UNEP	9	10	5	4	7	35
Climate S.	17	2	-	5	5	29
The World Bank	6	4	4	3	3	20
All	42	27	17	22	37	147

4.1 Which Organization(s) and Functional Area(s) are recognized as More Relevant? Overall Results

The two most valued agencies for the one hundred and forty seven respondents have been the UNEP and the Climate Secretariat. The GEF and the World Bank have been the next agencies most valued, followed by the Environmental Dpt. of the OECD and the Biodiversity secretariat. Finally, the assessed least relevant IEI have been the Ozone Secretariat, the Desertification Secretariat and IMO by this order³⁰.

Fifty eight and sixty respondents out of around hundred and fifty consider the UNEP highly relevant and relevant, respectively. Only five and two respondents considered this agency as either hardly relevant or not relevant. Besides, the UNFCCC sec. is considered by forty five per cent and twenty four per cent of the respondents as highly relevant and relevant, respectively.

Q1. From your perception how relevant for your work are the following listed international agencies?

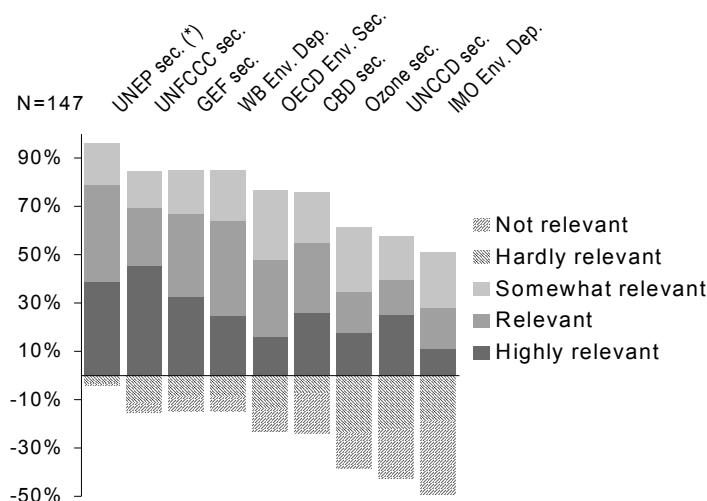


Fig. 1: Results from stakeholders in percentages “From your perception how relevant for your work are the following listed international agencies?”(*) see footnote ³¹

³⁰ When stakeholders regarded as “not relevant” or “hardly relevant” an specific IEI is interpreted as not playing an important role for the stakeholder, this may lead to one of the two following scenarios: a) the stakeholder already knows the discourse; b) stakeholder do not know that discourse and therefore it is not interested; .

³¹ UNEP=United National Environment Programme; UNFCCC Sec.=Secretariat to the Convention on Climate Change; GEF=Global Environment Fund; WB Env. Dep.=Environmental Department of the World Bank; OECD Env. Sec.=Environmental Secretariat of the Organization for Development of Economic Development; CBD

Question two asked stakeholders to choose which the most relevant agency is for them and to complete the rest of the questionnaire for that agency³². The four first international bureaucracies of our sample considered by the respondents as the ‘most relevant organizations for their work’ have been:

1) United Nations Environment Programme³³ (UNEP) with thirty five answers. The UNEP is the outcome of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm established in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1973 and whose main role is to coordinate within the UN family for coherent implementation of environmental accords.

2) Secretariat to the Convention on Climate Change³⁴ (UNFCCC sec.) with twenty nine answers. In 1992 governments had adopted the United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change, administered by the and whose ultimate objective is “to achieve, (...), stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (climate convention, article 2). The secretariat supports cooperative action by States to combat climate change and its impacts on humanity and ecosystems.

3) Secretariat to the Biodiversity Convention³⁵ (CBD secretariat) with twenty two answers that administers the Convention on Biological Diversity that addresses the challenges of the massive human induced loss of biodiversity that entered into force in 1993.

4) The World Bank³⁶ with twenty answers³⁷ is one organization established at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 and one of the largest international organizations of today, with an annual administrative budget of one billion USD (World Bank 2004, 33), and roughly 8,800 staff. Sustainable development and environmental protection became a policy goal in 1987. The establishment of an environment department shortly along with the launch of “core” environment projects makes the World Bank a prominent case among the world’s intergovernmental bureaucracies active in the environmental arena.

Results show that UNEP is the most relevant organization and World Bank is also relevant but to a lower degree. Similarly, the UNFCCC secretariat is perceived more relevant than the Biodiversity secretariat.

sec.=Secretariat to the Biodiversity Convention; Ozone Sec.=Secretariat to the Convention on Depleting Substances of the Ozone Cape; UNCCD Sec.=Secretariat to the Convention on Desertification; IMO Env. Dp.= Environmental Department of the International Maritime Organization.

³² Refer to annex for survey questionnaire

³³ For case study on the United Nations Environment Programme see Bauer(Forthcoming)

³⁴ For a case study on the Climate Change Secretariat see Busch (2006)

³⁵ For a case study on the Biodiversity Secretariat see Siebenhüner (Forthcoming)

³⁶ For more information on the World Bank see Marschinski and Berhle (2006)

³⁷ Answers for question two (Fig. 2) have a similar but not identical pattern to those in question one (Fig. 1).

Q2. Which of the following international agencies do you perceive as the most relevant for your work?

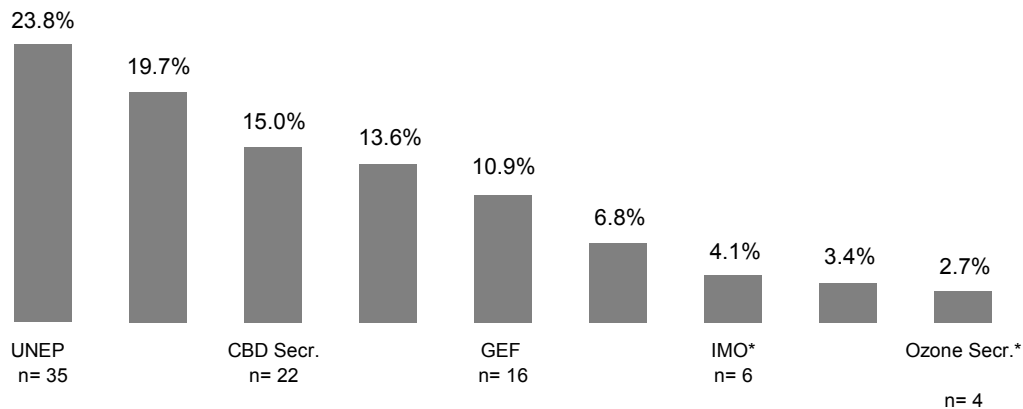


Fig. 2: Answers in percentage of stakeholders who responded to the question “Which of the following international agencies do you perceive as the most relevant for your work?”

Neo-institutionalist approaches regard IOs as effective knowledge-brokers, negotiation-facilitators and capacity-builders but can not account why some IEI are more relevant than others i.e. fulfil some functions better than others. Those roles or functions grant relevance to stakeholders. Nonetheless, World Bank an organization with 8,800 Bank staff at either Washington DC or in one of the more than 100 country offices than a UN programme that employs 456 professional officers supported by 405 staff in general service posts, and thus ostensibly with much fewer economic resources and staff is regarded as more relevant. It is justified then to ask what roles do the UNEP or the Climate secretariat play that grants those organizations more relevance.

While the assessed most relevant bureaucracy UNEP shines at the cognitive area, the UNFCCC sec. stands out in the normative area ³⁸and, finally, the World Bank excel in the executive. The Biodiversity secretariat is more active in the normative functional area³⁹

³⁸ (see Fig. #), (Fig. #)

³⁹ # (Fig. #).

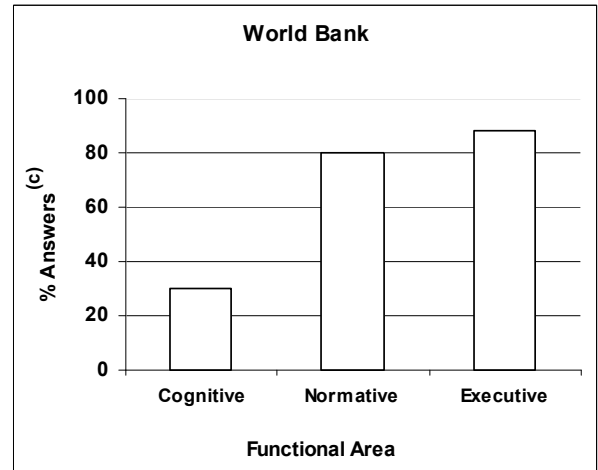
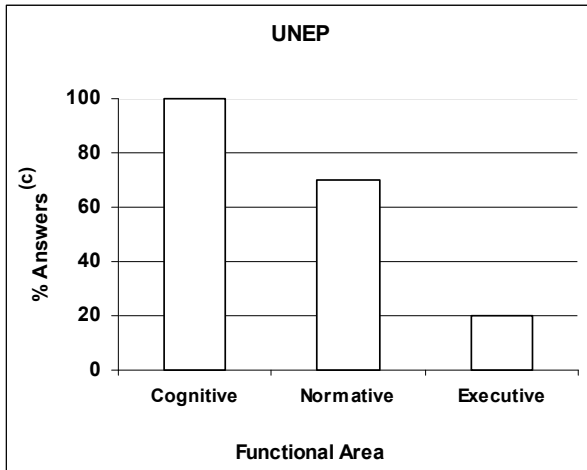


Fig. # N= 35; Positive answers with minimum 50 % positive answers per functional area

Fig. # N=20; Positive Answers with minimum 50 % positive answer per functional area

UNEP and the Climate secretariat are recognized as more active in the cognitive area than the rest of the bureaucracies⁴⁰. UNEP represents the role of norm entrepreneur and the Climate secretariat acts as norm interpreter.

Survey results for the cognitive area, function that explains most relevance variability, are separately presented for reasons of comparability, for the two multi-issue organizations i.e. norm entrepreneurs, on the one hand and, for the two convention secretariats i.e. norm interpreters, on the other.

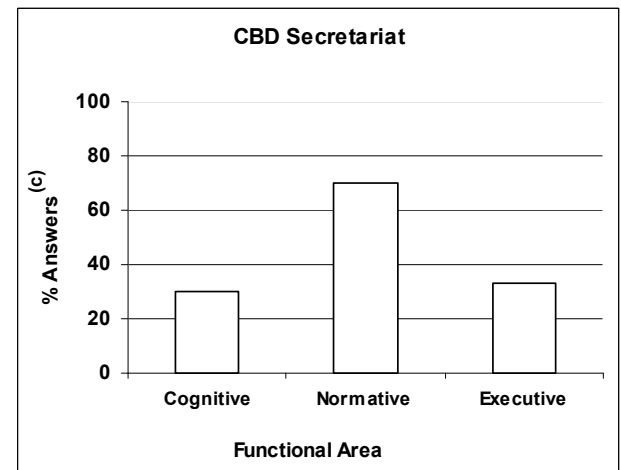
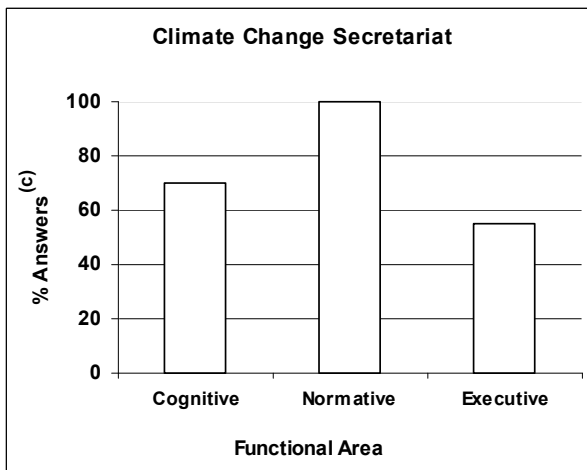


Fig. # N= 29; Positive answers with minimum 50 % positive answers per functional area

Fig. # N=22; Positive Answers with minimum 50 % positive answer per functional area

⁴⁰ (cf. Fig. #, #, #, #).

4.2 Scientization of Politics: Scientific Authority Contest Political Authority

Questions about positive effects of the generation of scientific knowledge by the IO; and perceived political neutrality of the information as provided by the IO are questions for which the greater differences are found between the UNEP and the World Bank on the one hand and, the UNFCCC secretariat and the CBD secretariat, on the other (see table below). IEI relevance is associated with scientific knowledge and political neutrality. Thence, scientific authority is perceived neutral in those IEI.

Table #: Comparative on three cognitive indicators for the four most relevant IEI.

Cognitive Indicator	UNEP % Answers N=35	UNFCCC Sec. % Answers N=29	World Bank % Answers N=20	CBD Sec. % Answers N=22
Positive effects of generation of scientific knowledge	63%	43%	32%	11%
Perceived political neutrality of IO information	68%	64%	21%	37%

Inter-generational Responsibility more Relevant than Trans-generational Responsibility: Comparing across norm followers

Convention secretariats⁴¹ outstand more for their normative functional area, than for their cognitive or executive areas⁴² (see Fig. #). Higher relevance of the Climate Secretariat can be interpreted as society regards more relevant to protect future human generations than current biodiversity i.e. animals and plants.

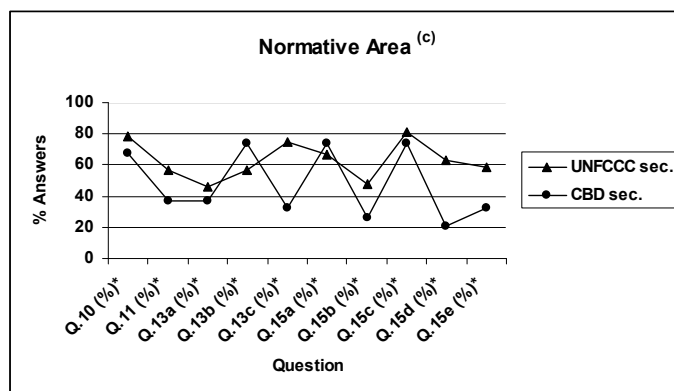
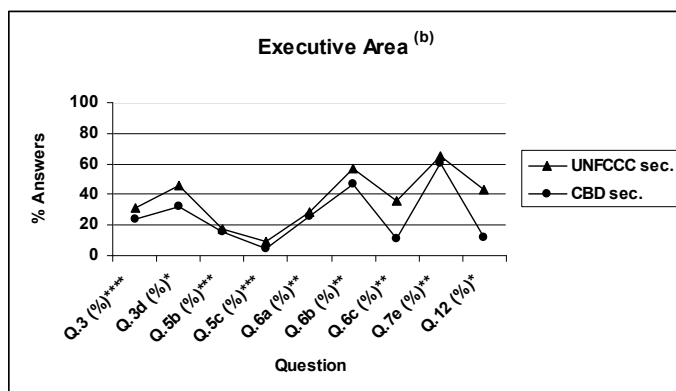


Fig. # Comparative on the Executive area for Climate Biodiversity secretariats

Fig. # Comparative on the Normative area for Climate Biodiversity secretariats

⁴¹ Worth noting is the percentage of the biodiversity secretariat for which fifty per cent of the answers came from governmental stakeholders.

⁴² The UNFCCC sec. is the only bureaucracy with three peaks above seventy per cent for the functional normative area.

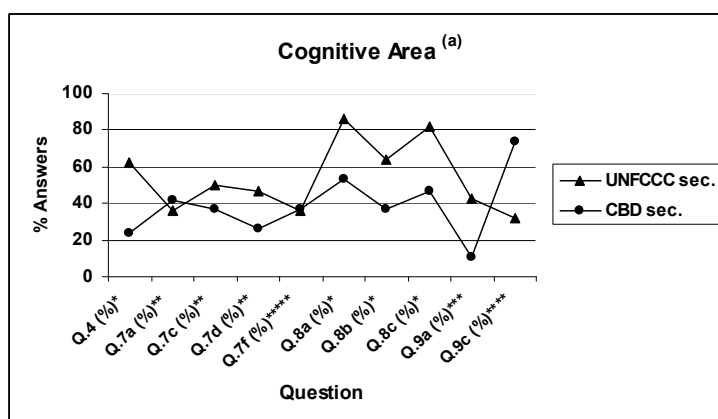


Fig. # Comparative on the area Cognitive for Climate Biodiversity secretariats

That more answers regard that the cognitive function is more relevant in the climate than the biodiversity case entails that stakeholders perceive more relevant inter- than trans-generational responsibility.

Both convention secretariats share a similar organizational design. Both have been created to administer an international convention, and are rather small compared to multipurpose organizations. They tend to be much more scrutinized by member states than bigger multi-issue organizations such as UNEP or the World Bank, but still most stakeholders recognize their contribution to the normative function area, as ‘climate discourse’ or biodiversity discourse.

Table # Cognitive Indicator questions with corresponding percentage of answers for Convention Sec.

Cognitive Indicators	Climate Sec. % Answers N=29	Biodiversity Sec. % Answers N=22
Secretariat has increased the media coverage on environmental issues	62	24
Stakeholder has used regularly Secretariat’s databases	50	37
Stakeholder has used regularly Secretariat’s scientific publications	47	26
The information provided by the secretariat is scientifically credible	86	53
The information provided by the Secretariat is politically neutral	64	37
The information provided by the Secretariat is relevant for the stakeholders work	43	11
Domestic impact of the information provided by Secretariat for the generation of scientific knowledge is positive	43	11
Domestic impact of the information provided by Secretariat on the identification of new environmental issues has been somewhat	32	74

positive		
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Survey results are in line with previous assessments by scholars: “[o]verall, environmental [non-governmental] organizations were more focused on the United Nations Conference for Environment and Development and the Climate Change Convention, than, for example, on the Biodiversity Convention” (Tamiotti and Finger 2001: 64).

The climate regime it has accomplished to rally international support for an international binding agreement for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, i.e. Kyoto protocol⁴³, even when one of the most powerful states and one of the main contributors to CO₂ pollution has not ratified such international agreement.

While the accomplishments of the climate negotiations are remarkable, the biodiversity convention has also had very remarkable achievements. First, pioneered in integrating conservation and economic use of biodiversity, to meet both conservation interests of the North and the development interests of the South (Rojas and Thomas 1992; Boisvert and Caron 2002). Second, the convention was the first internationally binding legal document that acknowledged the sovereign rights of nation states over their genetic resources and to determine access to them (Svarstad 1994; Kothari 1994). By adopting the convention parties have committed themselves to the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources (SCBD 2003; Swanson 1999). Third, negotiators included a passage about technology transfer to facilitate access and conservation of genetic resources targeted at development goals and that was partly conflicting with the interests of the emerging biotechnology industry⁴⁴.

That the climate regime receives nowadays much more media attention than biodiversity and not surprisingly it is seen as far more politicised. By politicised I mean that scientific authority is challenging political authority as wealth provider. The negotiation of the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions has clear implications for the economy of industrialized countries. Transnational companies and other economic actors have started to lobby such negotiations. Given that the climate regime can be considered as much more ‘politicised’ than the biodiversity, the success of the climate secretariat is thus to be perceived as both relevant⁴⁵ and politically neutral, as it is a ‘public non-state’ bureaucracy administering scientific authority (see table above).

On the other hand, the less publicized biodiversity convention has found ways to “manage genetic resources” that does not predominantly challenge existing institutions based on the sovereignty norm, quite on the contrary reinforces the sovereign system of states, since developing countries are getting in return to

⁴³ In 1997 governments adopted the Kyoto protocol, which specifies legally binding reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions in 38 developed countries. In 2001, they agreed upon the Marrakech Accords, which lay down implementation rules for the Kyoto protocol. The secretariat “supports cooperative action by States to combat climate change and its impacts on humanity and ecosystems”

⁴⁴ “See Siebenhüner for a case study on the CBD sec.

⁴⁵ Part of higher relevance granted to the UNFCCC sec. can be attributed to the increased attention given in world politics to the issue of climate change. It is very difficult in this case to tell apart the effects are of the bureaucracy on the one hand, from the regime itself, on the other. (Bauer and Biermann, Oberthür).

conserving their natural resources an economic incentive. In the biodiversity case the 'greening of sovereignty' has reinforced state authority. Policies forwarded provide a role for states. In this case political and environmental concerns are seen as a win-win-win solution and that is the main uncontested discourse⁴⁶. The perceived low political neutrality of the secretariat signals that the political authority and economic discipline (power-knowledge relationship) are seen as hegemonic. Economic discipline is used to reinforce state institutions and it is from that moment on not seen as "objective and disinterested" science. State economic interests for developing countries run in line with the conservation of genetic resources. As already pointed by Litfin "ecological integrity and state sovereignty are not necessarily in opposition" (1998: backcover).

In contrast, the measures proposed to in order to halt climate change have generated at least three contested discourses as it is exemplified by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand's article on pilot phase of the Activities Implemented Jointly (AIJ) and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)⁴⁷. The discussion of planting trees in the CDM to sequester carbon in tropical ecosystems have reflected three overarching discourses of global environmental governance, according to the authors, i.e. ecological modernization, green governmentality and civic environmentalism. First, while the predominant focus in ecological modernization is on flexible and cost-effective environmental problem solving, the justice dimensions of environmental problems are ignored (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006: 54). Second, green governmentality grants science and technology a central role in the management and control of environmental risks (ibid.: 55). Both discourses have dominated thinking and policy practice in tree-plantation in developing countries: a) the green governmentality discourse set the discursive frame for the negotiations by portraying forests as sinks and reservoirs of carbon subject to management and control; b) ecological modernization operates as legitimizing discourse; a blue print for action (ibid.: 67). Finally the third discourse the civic environmentalism discourse (ibid.: 68):

[R]epresents a critical counter-discourse that questions and resists the eco-modernist assumption of the mutually reinforcing benefits of CDM projects as well as the managerial ambition found in the green governmentality discourse. According to this discourse the technocratic idea of reducing forest ecosystem to carbon sinks ignores the complex ecological, cultural and social functions forests have for rural livelihood in most countries.

This third discourse has offered a more critical and grounded version of the win-win rhetoric of mainly ecological modernization by identifying and highlighting trade-offs between climatic, economic and social goals. The civic environmentalist discourse defends biodiversity but green governmentality and ecological modernization agree in perceiving more relevant climate science than biodiversity science.

In the case of climate negotiations sustainable development is contesting current lifestyles based on the consumption of fossil fuels that was previously regarded as

⁴⁶ In the case of the biodiversity secretariat most respondents came from governmental sources and less from NGOs can account for the reduced relevance

⁴⁷ For a classification of environmental discourses see Dryzek (1997)

appropriate and beneficial for economic growth. In short, climate change rules impinge more on traditional values of existing models of economic growth, based on fossil fuel consumption or as put by Litfin “the politics of global climate change, perhaps more so than any other international issue, highlight the emergence of new patterns of authority rooted in scientific legitimation and Earth stewardship” (Litfin 2000: 121).

Scientific Authority gaining Legitimacy lost by Political Authority: Comparing over time

In eight of the ten questions dealing with the cognitive area UNEP⁴⁸ receives better assessments than the rest of the bureaucracies, including the World Bank⁴⁹.

Fig. # Comparative Results for the Cognitive for UNEP and World Bank.

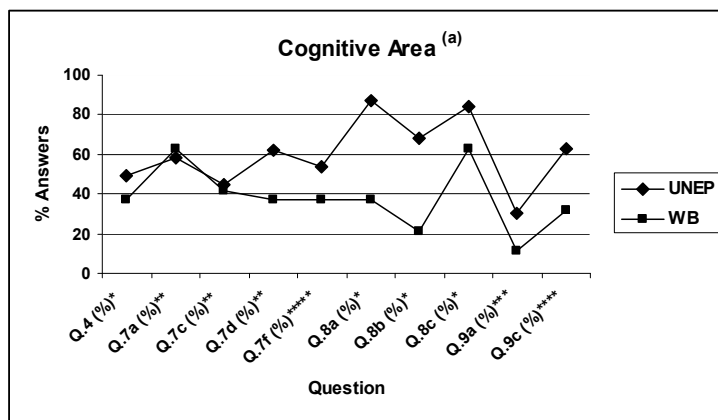


Table #: Percentage of responses for cognitive indicators in the case of multi-issue organizations

Cognitive Indicators	UNEP % Answers N=35	World Bank % Answers N=20
Organization has increased the media coverage	49	37
Information provided by IO is relevant to the work of the stakeholder	84	63
Stakeholder use regularly IO's scientific publications	62	37
IO has positively facilitated the generation of scientific knowledge	37	11
Domestic impact of the info provided by IO for the identification of new environmental issues has been somewhat positive	63	32
The information provided by this organization is scientifically credible	87	37
The information provided by this organization is politically neutral	68	21
Stakeholder holds frequent personal contacts with IO	54	37

⁴⁸ UNEP is the only IO that has four peaks above sixty per cent for the functional cognitive area.

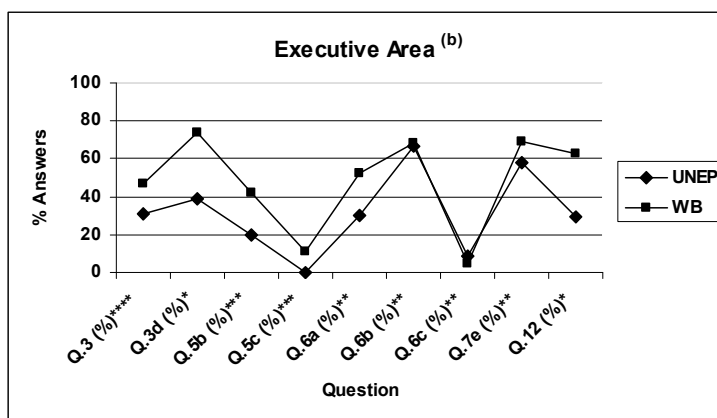
⁴⁹ More answers from NGOs (see page #) have been received than from any other stakeholder group.

Stakeholder use regularly IO's annual reports	58	63
Stakeholder use regularly IO's databases	45	42

In the case of World Bank stakeholders perceive this organization is more politicised than UNEP demonstrated by the eighty seven and sixty eight percentage of respondents that consider that the information provided by the latter is scientifically credible and politically neutral, in front of the thirty seven and twenty one of the former. This can be interpreted as that scientific authority is perceived more legitimate than political authority according to stakeholders.

The fact that the World Bank is assessed as champion in the executive functional area supports the idea that the cognitive area holds more explanatory power for accounting for IO relevance than the executive.

Fig. # Comparative Results for the Executive for UNEP and World Bank



Stakeholders recognize the executive role of political authority however the cognitive role of UNEP is regarded as more relevant. The cognitive role resembles Barnett and Finnemore's constitutive rules of bureaucracies that according to these authors hold the power to 'constitute the world'.

The World Bank has greatly invested in becoming a knowledge network and it is generally recognized as the 'Knowledge Bank' (Stone 2002, 2003). Nonetheless stakeholders recognize World Bank's work mainly the executive functional area⁵⁰.

The World Bank has popularized the "making the business case" approach towards the environment, is considered a "source and proselytizer of ideas" on economic, social, and environmental development (Gavin and Rodrik 1995, 332). According to the critical approach to global institutions reviewed above, IOs use economic academic discourses in order to frame policies that are later pursued those institutions (Bøås and McNeill 2004b). World Bank's knowledge policy is to produce knowledge in house and target special audiences by publishing in renowned academic journals (Marschinski and Behrle 2006). World Bank's has published academic articles generated by World Bank's specialists and diffused concepts of environmental management for building capacities in developing countries (e.g. Environmental

⁵⁰ World Bank is the only IO with three peaks above sixty per cent for the functional executive area.

Impact Assessments (EIA) (Gutner 2002). Nonetheless, World Bank's science relies nearly exclusively in the economic discipline, and what is most important, from one source of economic discipline, i.e. the Chicago School.

The marriage between economic discipline and state authority in the World Bank is reflected in the fact that this institution takes as a main unit of analysis for their reports, the map of states based on the sovereignty norm. UNEP instead uses satellite technology and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) devoid from state boundaries.

As put by Shafer and Murphy "the environmental activities of IGOs are fundamentally shaped by their underlying geographical ideas and assumptions" (1998: 268), that is reproduced (i.e. re-constituted) by the way they produce data as e.g. country reports⁵¹. World Bank's main scientific products on the environment are the annual World Development Indicators (WDI) publication and the derived from it Little Green Data Book providing data and indicators for over 200 countries (Marschinski and Behrle 2006). On the other hand the cores of UNEP's expert publications are Global Resources Information Database (GRID) and its Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS). Moreover, the Global Environment Outlook has evolved into the environmentalists' match of the World Development Report of the World Bank (Bauer Forthcoming).

The UNEP has served as arena that has allowed scientific authority⁵² enter in contestation with traditional diplomatic political arenas in World Conferences such as the series on Summits for Sustainable Development, being the last one in 2002 in Johannesburg. This is supported by abounding literature on the catalysing role of UNEP for the creation of IPCC formation and the formation of the Ozone regime (Bauer Forthcoming) assessed as one of the most successful environmental regimes. As Litfin's book on Ozone Discourses (Litfin 1994) stresses there is a power-knowledge dimension to this kind of international negotiations, a struggle for authority that is claimed by scientists as experts on environmental issues and by government representatives that are accountable to their voters⁵³.

It can be concluded that the World Bank is perceived less relevant for the following reasons: a) environmental policy making is used to justify economic interests according to the hegemonic approach of global institutions. While UNEP is a one country -one vote organization, the World Bank is 1 Dollar-one vote; b) the World Bank has expanded as a bureaucracy to take on new tasks i.e. sustainable development but its performance does not keep up with expectations, or c) antinomic delegation explains performance gaps, it can not deliver environmental policies since it is perceived as a political and not a scientific authority. The autonomy of the economic discipline is regarded as controlled by the state authority.

⁵¹ See Young (2002) on the problem of fit, scale and interplay . On the relation between knowledge-power in international negotiations that include natural scientists see (Litfin 1994)

⁵² On epistemic community see (Haas 1992)

⁵³ Worth to note that this regime is not as contested now and that explains the relative low relevance with which stakeholders have rated the Ozone secretariat.

5 Inter-Generational Discursive Arenas: Conclusions and Implications

UNEP as the 'environmental conscience' within the UN represents the inter-generational political conscience in the international system of states. UNEP helps revising the basis of political authority that under liberal notion of political authority entailed "consent of currently living self-interested citizens" (Litfin 2000: 119) to include other species and other human generations.

While "[p]olitical authority is generally conceived as the recognized right to make rules or to wield power legitimately"(Weber1947: 153 cited in Litfin 2000: 121); Scientific authority rests upon the recognition of role played by non-state actors including .next human generations and biodiversity. While intergenerational responsibility is granted increasing relevance, the trans-generational is perceived less relevant, so it will take some time to recognize it in the conscience of the world polity. Discussion of results has attempted to show that critical approaches alone can not account for IO relevance. For understanding why IO matters for international governance there is the need of borrowing from theoretical approaches that account for norm contestation. Only then we can understand why different IOs are perceived to be more relevant than others.

General findings with potential policy implications that can be drawn from survey results can be summarized as follows international environmental agencies:

- differ in their level of relevance;
- some tend to outstand in some role. So for instance while UNEP is more active in the cognitive area, the UNFCCC sec. stands out in the normative area and the World Bank in the executive;
- most relevant IOs do not excel in all roles, nevertheless the ones that outstand in the cognitive area tend to be perceived more relevant.
- From here it derives that international sovereignty is based upon scientific authority, discursive autonomy and political control. Applying Litfin's conceptualization of sovereignty.

The fact that UNEP is more active in the cognitive area than World Bank, and the same for UNFCCC secretariat in front of the Biodiversity secretariat, has been attributed to the capacity of those agencies to act transnational arenas where more different contested environmental discourses meet that challenge traditional understandings of the sovereignty norm as control over a state's territory and economic policies.

On the other hand, UNEP and UNFCCC sec. make available scientific information that is based not in economic discipline but draw from other sciences, e.g. natural science that base their analysis not on the geographic map of states to base their working assumptions but, we make the argument here that based on the geo-physical maps that can potentially be regarded as 'depoliticized' more than environmental studies based on the economic discipline.

Nor liberal institutionalist nor critical approaches solely can account why UNEP is more relevant. Other approaches are needed to account why UNEP and UNFCCC are more relevant than their counterparts. Societal approaches are helpful in this sense.

From an 'transnational arena' e.g. negotiation treaties, agenda setting, IOs act as arenas reconstructing the meaning of sovereignty traditionally understood as the state's exclusive authority within its territorial boundaries towards what Litfin calls the 'greening of sovereignty' understood as sovereignty democratisation through scientific authority. However as she points "although a number of international relations scholars have assumed that transnational environmental organizations and institutions are eroding sovereignty, [...] ecological integrity and state sovereignty are not necessarily in opposition. It shows that the norms of sovereignty are now shifting in the face of attempts to cope with ecological destruction, but that this greening of sovereignty is an uneven, variegated, and highly contested process" (Litfin 1998: backcover). Therefore discussions on further world bureaucratization of international environmental politics should take into consideration, when envisaging institutional reform, to maintain and attempt to encourage discourse contestedness.

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Annex Survey Questionnaire

Question	Answer
1. From your perception, how relevant for your work are following listed international agencies? (*)	Highly relevant; relevant; somewhat relevant; hardly relevant; not relevant; other (specified in text box)
2. Which of the following international agencies do you perceive as the most relevant for your work?	(*)
3. How do you assess the influence of this agency on discussions (media coverage, public debate, policy agendas) related to the environmental issue(s) that agency is addressing in your country?	Very high; high; medium; low; no influence; I do not know
4. Do you think the media coverage of environmental issue(s) has increased in your country due to the activities of this international agency?	(*****)
5. How often does your own organisation interact with the international agency? (**)	-Exchange of information (e.g. through reports, scientific publications) -Co-operation (e.g. in partnerships, training programmes, financial support) -Other (please specify)
6. In which of the following activities by the international agency have members of your own organisation participated and how often? (**)	-Joint programmes to support technology transfer -Skills oriented training programmes, workshops or demonstration projects -Other (please specify)
7. Which of the following sources provided by the international agency are used by your own organisation, and how often? (**)	-Annual reports;-Thematic studies; -Databases;-Scientific publications;-Workshops;-Personal contacts
8. Do you consider the information provided by the international agency as... (Please consider all options) (***)	...-Scientifically credible ...-Politically neutral ...-Relevant for your work
9. How do you assess the domestic impact of the information provided by the international agency on the following items?	(****)
10. Has the work of the international agency encouraged your own organisation to engage in international political processes (e.g. participation in negotiations, conferences, public –private partnerships, lobbying)?	-Yes; -No; -No engagement
11. Has the international agency facilitated the creation of new institutions in your country (such as governmental agencies, research institutions etc)	-Yes; -No; I do not know
12. Has the international agency influenced the amount or allocation of resources in your own organisation?	(*****)
13. Has the international agency facilitated the adoption of any of the following measures?	-New national laws and decrees; -New policy programmes (e.g. technological, educational); -New

(You may choose more than one category)	policy instruments (e.g. market-based, command-and-control. Voluntary);-New practices (e.g. energy audits, pollution abatement technologies, procurement).
14. Did the work of the international agency lead to the following changes in your corporation/organisation	-Adoption of environmental strategies;-Adoption of voluntary standards;-Introduction of environmentally friendly technologies;-New research and development activities;-New environmental training activities;-New assignments of environmental responsibilities within the corporation;-Engagement in political processes.
15. In your view, has the participation in international policy processes of the following stakeholders increased (over the last 10 years) due to the work of the international agency? (****)	-National governments; -Provincial or local governments;-Non-governmental organizations; Business associations;-Private corporations
16. In which of the following international policy processes has your own participated and how has its participation evolved over time? (*****)	-International negotiations;-Public-private partnerships;-International conferences, ad-hoc meetings, workshops, dialogues;-International fora (e.g. United Nations Global Compact; World Social Forum; World Economic Forum);-Lobbying
17. In which country is your organisation based?	
18. To which of the following actor groups does your organisation belong?	-National government;-Provincial or local government;-Non-governmental organisation; Business association/corporation; Research institution; -Other
19. What is the name of your organization (optional)	
20. What is the size of your organisation (including permanent and non-permanent staff at all locations)	-1-5;-6-25;-26-50;51-100;101-200;201-300; more than 300 people
21. For how long have you been working for this organization?	-less than a year;1 to 3 years;3-5 years;5-10 years; more than 10 years

(*)List of studied international agencies: (**)Every day; Every week; Every month; Every two to six months; Every six to twelve months, Never.(***)Yes; Somewhat; No; Not applicable. (****) Negative; Somewhat negative; No impact; Somewhat positive; Positive. (*****)Yes; -No; I do not know. (*****)Increased, Stagnated, Decreased, No participation