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A Public Administration Perspective on International Organizations

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Abstract

This is a book on international public administration. The introductory chapter sets the stage by defining international bureaucracy as an object of scientific inquiry. It is explained why it matters, what questions preceding studies on the phenomenon have raised and why there is a research gap both from the perspective of Public Administration and International Relations research. The chapter further introduces the contours of a public administration perspective on international organizations as pursued by this book and briefly summarizes the central conceptual perspectives on international public administrations as outlined by the volume's contributions.

Introduction

Resolving climate change, combating transnational terrorism, fostering democratic practices and human rights, fighting contagious diseases, providing stability on the financial market, establishing fair rules for international trade, channeling migration—few decisions with significance for the future of our societies are taken without the involvement of international organizations (IOs). The more IOs are needed to design and sustain policy solutions for global governance, i.e., the more they are involved in key state tasks like regulation, stabilization and redistribution, the more attention needs to be paid to their organizational foundations. This is so because political organizations, like any organization, once given a legal mandate and provided with financial and personnel resources to do their job, tend to become actors in their own right. It is against this background that this volume is concerned with what we conceive as international public administrations (IPAs), the bureaucratic bodies and administrative interactions of IOs.¹ IPAs can be described as bodies with a certain degree of autonomy, staffed by professional and appointed civil servants who are responsible for specific tasks and who work together following the rules and norms of the IO in question.

One does not need to go as far as to see bureaucracy as the new defining feature of global politics. There is however no doubt that international bureaucracy is becoming ever more important. For example, international organizations have been delegated a growing number of tasks and, in order to fulfill these tasks, their administrative apparatus have grown considerably over recent decades (Lenz et al. 2015, 147). These international administrative bodies, the people populating them, and their procedural routines and organizational structures have consequences for how modern global governance works. Whatever the perspective chosen to analyze global governance and transnational policy-making, international bureaucracy must be a central part of the discussion.

Once the importance of international bureaucracy is recognized, it should be recalled that studying the organization of government, administrative structures and officials, and the impact of said organization on policy-making and implementation, is already the prerogative of Public Administration (PA) as a scholarly discipline. Thus far, however, PA has been largely neglected by those studying international bureaucracy. This has two unfortunate consequences. First, international bureaucracy scholars miss the insights that a more systematic application of a PA perspective to international organizations would be able to produce. Second, for their part, PA scholars miss out on the opportunity to develop further that field's analytical concepts and thus forgo potential theoretical advances regarding the transformation of modern statehood.²

It is the objective of this volume to address this double challenge. The following contributions seek, first, to assess the value of PA concepts for studying the bureaucratic dimension of global governance; second, they also consider to what extent observable governance transformations and organizational innovations at the international level suggest the need for analytical and theoretical recalibration of PA scholarship at the national level. In other words, the pieces in this collection explore how a PA perspective on IOs might serve both ends of addressing how IPAs matter for global governance and how insights regarding IPAs may productively inform national PA research.

Perspectives and gaps

IPAs have so far remained outside the PA focus. The study of public administrations has traditionally been linked to national contexts and the cross-national comparison of national administrative systems. This neglect of IPAs has become more problematic, however, as they have begun to play an ever larger and more visible role in domestic and international policy-making (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Busch 2014; Dingwerth, Kerwer, and Nölke 2009; Hooghe and Marks 2015). In addition, international bureaucratic elites have become a focus of International Relations (IR) scholars and students of the European Union (Hooghe and Marks 2001; Kassim et al. 2013; Xu and Weller 2004), who highlight phenomena as diverse as bureaucrats' role in indirect and soft forms of governance (Abbott et al. 2015), organizational change (Barnett and Coleman 2005), the design of offshoot organizations (Johnson 2013), the management of regime overlap (Jinnah 2010), and the solidification of supranationalism (Posner 2009). The growing size and competences of international bureaucratic bodies thus beg the obvious question of to what extent a Public Administration perspective on IOs could add descriptive, analytical, or theoretical insights.

Yet these questions have remained open, while the gap between national and international PA scholarship has been growing. At the national level, PA research has advanced our understanding of the organizational structures of ministerial bureaucracies and their impact on national policy-making (Page and Jenkins 2005; Schnapp 2004), but corresponding questions regarding the international level and international bureaucracies have been raised only sporadically (e.g. Bauer, da Conceição-Heldt, and Ege 2015; Bauer and Knill 2007; Bauer and Ege 2016; Knill, Eckhard and Grohs 2016). Consequently, key concerns of PA research—namely, whether and through what mechanisms administrations have an autonomous impact on the formulation and implementation of policies and programs (Heady 1998; Liese and Weinlich 2006; Ness and Brechin 1988), and what role professionals and organizational dynamics play in the 'working' administration (Trondal 2010)—have remained under-researched at the international level and with regard to transnational constellations. Even where individual studies have emerged (regarding, for example, the role of international bureaucrats), they have not led to more systematic, comparative empirical examination of the issues, let alone to comprehensive research programs.³

To be sure, the neglect of developing a genuine PA perspective on IOs does not mean that their organizational features have remained completely unexamined. Research combining IR and organization theory has indeed fueled renewed interest in studying IOs 'as organizations' (Ness and Brechin 1988), recognizing that their internal structure and political personnel can be the source of policy change (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009) or organizational dysfunctions (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). These lines of inquiry go back to the 1970s, at least (Cox and Jacobson 1973; Weiss 1975). Their main contribution was to highlight that IOs and their secretariats are not just epiphenomenal and instrumental (Mearsheimer 1995), but wield a certain level of influence—particularly where no substantial interests of powerful states are at stake. It is, however, fair to underline that while these works highlighted 'organizational features,' they were not particularly interested in following an intra-organizational agenda in general, let alone a PA perspective that examined the nexus of

administration and politics, particular bureaucratic features and their effects, or the precise and varying impact of specific administrative cultures, routines and entrepreneurship.

Fortunately, this picture has begun to change. Since Barnett and Finnemore's (2004) seminal publication on the authority of IOs' secretariats, a growing number of studies, inspired by organizational theory, sociological institutionalism, and principal-agent approaches have adopted a new perspective on the administrative bodies of IOs (Biermann and Pattberg 2012; da Conceição-Heldt 2013; Dingwerth, Kerwer, and Nölke 2009; Ege and Bauer 2013; Goetz 2014; Hanrieder 2014; Johnson and Urpelainen 2014; Liese and Weinlich 2006; Nay 2012). The findings regarding the actions, influence, and outside relations of IPAs, however, remain fragmented (see Eckhard and Ege 2016) and to the extent that a more systematic PA perspective on IPAs has begun to emerge, its contours are still being worked out.

Historically, there has been a kind of mutual disregard preventing interdisciplinary debates. PA was not interested in international bureaucratic issues, while IR did not look systematically at the intra-organizational or public administration features of IOs. The organizational perspective on IOs—being a more inter- than an intra-organizational agenda anyway—remained a somewhat isolated (and not very influential) debate. However, these historically disconnected research programs have recently begun to converge. Following Barnett and Finnemore's 2004 book, scholars have (re-)discovered organizational and bureaucratic perspectives on IOs and this shift, in turn, has coincided with efforts in the PA community to come to grips with the challenges posed by internationalization and globalization (Bauer 2015). The time has thus come for PA as a discipline to revisit its own conceptual and theoretical potential for 'going international.' Demonstrating the added value and innovation when PA concepts are further developed and applied to international bureaucracies is the prime aim of this book.

Contours of a public administration approach to IPAs

What might a specifically PA approach to IPAs look like? We argue that the comparative method constitutes the key to a PA research agenda for IPAs. Cross-national comparative research has advanced our understanding of variation in administrative systems across the world. Comparing administrations across levels holds similar potential for innovation if the focus changes from the horizontal to the vertical. Oriented by comparative PA research, we can outline four sets of questions relevant for analyzing IPAs.

The first set of questions concerns international organizational features. What characterizes administrative actors, processes, and structures at the international level and to what extent are these features distinct from what we already know about national administrations? Research in this area would focus on the internal functioning of IPAs and take administrative actors (at different hierarchical levels), their roles and behavior, as well as the organizational structures of public bureaucracies as its central analytical categories.

The second set of questions is concerned with the nexus between administrations and their political masters. Research often focuses on the relationship between elected policy-makers and bureaucracies with the presumption that administrations will tend to use their superior expertise to escape close control by those elected to lead. The fear that administrations will lose their instrumental character and begin to act on their own accord and in their own interests has long constituted one of the central concerns of political and social science studies of public organizations.

The third set of questions puts the boundaries of PA center-stage. Where does a particular administration end and other actors' domains begin? What are the effects of such formal or informal demarcations? What kinds of exchanges take place between administrative actors of different kinds and at different levels? What structures determine the relationship between a public administration and its environment—particularly with regard to its 'client' relations to civil society and organized interests?

The fourth set of questions encompasses the previous three as it inquires into the effects of administrative structures, processes, and behavior on public policy. The central issues raised here are whether and through what mechanisms an administration is able to shape public policy-making in particular ways (especially in terms of implementation and budgeting), and how the linkage between administrative variables on the one hand and policy output on the other should be theoretically conceived and empirically studied.

These questions are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they establish the analytical starting points for studying the particularities of IPAs from a comparative perspective. The questions highlight how key concepts from the discipline of PA can be taken from their traditional national context and used to analyze internationalized structures, configurations, and actor relationships. As such, the questions are meant only to guide analytical efforts and spark discussions, not to confine empirical research or definitively settle any debates that are just about to be conducted.

Central conceptual perspectives on IPAs

Any attempt to address the questions as formulated above presupposes the development of analytical concepts that guide empirical analysis. We identify six concepts customarily used in PA studies and explore them with a view to analyzing IPAs from a comparative perspective and addressing the questions formulated above. These concepts include bureaucratic autonomy, administrative styles, bureaucratic entrepreneurship, administrative expertise, bureaucratic budget-making, and multilevel administrative coordination. Together, the concepts cover the central theoretical and analytical advances of comparative PA research.

Each of these concepts offers important insights in terms of theory development for international public administration. At the same time, we expect that applying these concepts to IPAs has the potential to reflect back on traditional 'national' PA scholarship. Through this process, we hope to improve our conceptual toolbox by developing more general frameworks that can be applied to public administrations at various levels (international, national, subnational) and in different contexts. Only such

an empirically broad and comparative perspective, we argue, will eventually allow getting the gist of public administration.

Each of this book's chapters takes one of the above-mentioned concepts as its central point of analytical departure. As such, the chapters follow a similar structure. All chapters reflect the chosen central concepts in terms of previous accomplishments and in terms of their potential for studying IPAs. In a second step, these concepts are applied to the study of IPAs, including the identification of new conceptual and theoretical insights gained from empirically studying IPAs through distinctive analytical lenses. Finally, the chapters also reflect systematically on what can be learned from their analysis of IPAs for the study of PAs more generally. In the concluding chapter of the book, these analytical achievements and findings will be summarized and discussed more generally.

In chapter 2, Michael W. Bauer and Jörn Ege study intra-organizational features via a classical focus of public administration: bureaucratic autonomy. The authors propose that international organizations are not organized the same way as national political systems, and therefore it is likely that international bureaucracies develop specific capacities and exploit different structures and actor constellations, eventually reshaping the balance between autonomy and control at the international level. The autonomy structures of IPAs are informed by what we know about how to keep national public administration 'in check,' but whether and to what extent these control structures are effective for international configurations is the topic the authors seek to address.

In chapter 3, Christoph Knill, Jan Enkler, Sylvia Schmidt, Steffen Eckhard, and Stephan Grohs look into the informal procedures and routines shaping international administrative behavior. To do so they use the concept of administrative styles. The styles concept helps to focus on procedures and routines that define the de facto ways in which international administrations try to achieve their objectives within the opportunities and constraints of their structural and institutional context. The authors develop a new typology of administrative styles and a theoretical framework accounting for variation in administrative styles that can be applied to any bureaucracy, regardless of the institutional level at which it is located.

In chapter 4, Helge Jörgens, Nina Kolleck, Barbara Saerbeck, and Mareike Well study bureaucratic entrepreneurship in the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements. They re-visit entrepreneurship theories and conceive these relatively small international secretariats as brokers able to exploit their privileged information access and their function as a hub of communication exchanges during ongoing international negotiations. The authors analyze attention-seeking and brokerage as mechanisms through which IPAs can successfully seek political influence—with particular focus on the early stages of the international policy-making process.

In chapter 5, Per-Olof Busch and Andrea Liese re-visit the concept of administrative expertise with a view to developing a tool to comparatively study the role of IPAs. They focus on expert authority and how it can be empirically studied, particularly in the area of social exchange and organizational reputation. The authors develop the expertise concept as an important feature of IPAs and precondition for IPAs to wield policy influence.

In chapter 6, Ronny Patz and Klaus H. Goetz look at an area too often neglected in comparative organizational analysis: the politics of bureaucratic budget-making. They

conceive of budgeting as a core organizational process that involves and concerns all actors within an administration. They argue that the struggle over safeguarding needed financial resources leads, especially in times of retrenchment, to particular administrative response strategies and adjustment processes. Patz and Goetz show how complex principal-agent constellations in budgeting, efforts to secure voluntary funds, and the motives of IPA administrative leaders affect administrative reaction patterns to budget pressures.

In chapter 7, Arthur Benz, Andreas Corcaci, and Jan Wolfgang Doser look into the connections between international and national administrations. They study coordination patterns and develop a concept of multilevel administrative coordination distinct from the broader frame of multilevel governance. They focus, in particular, on the mechanisms and patterns by which these administrations de facto interact. Vertical administrative relationships, according to their findings, are characterized by the absence of coercion and subordination; multilevel administrative coordination therefore is relatively voluntaristic, coined more by exchanges at an equal footing and less by clear-cut types or structures than in purely national contexts.

In chapter 8, Michael W. Bauer, Christoph Knill and Steffen Eckhard take stock of what we have learned about International Public Administrations in view to identify general patterns as well as to improve our understanding of potential implications for further PA research. They argue that international public administrations constitute a genuinely new type of bureaucracy. The structures and processes of IPAs may be familiar in many important respects. However, it is the conjoint occurrence of distinct contextual factors and their effect on the behavior and strategies of international administrations that make up for transforming international bureaucracies in something new. This becomes especially visible in a set of peculiar behavioral patterns. Chapter 8 hence argues that the analysis of international bureaucracies constitutes challenges and reassurances for a PA perspective on the current transformation of the state and its institutions focusing IPAs.

What follows are the individual chapters. We hope that the analytical concepts and their application will help appreciate what is special about IPAs, how IPAs are made up, and how they matter for global governance. We will eventually make the case for how the insights of analyzing IPAs may productively feedback to traditional PA research.

Notes

¹ We are of course not the first to acknowledge the bureaucratic nature of IO secretariats. Barnett and Finnemore (1999, 2004), in particular, were instrumental in triggering a rich and fruitful stream of academic research (Larsson and Trondal, 2006; Liese and Weinlich 2006; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Dingwerth et al. 2009; Benner et al. 2011; Ege & Bauer, 2013; Hawkins et al. 2006; Trondal et al. 2010; Zürn et al. 2012; Eckhard 2016).

² Other PA approaches dealing with the challenges emerging from ongoing processes of internationalization and globalization include literature on multi-level governance (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2003), the European administrative space (Trondal 2010), and on transnational administration (Stone and Ladi 2015).

³ PA research on international secretariats is not an entirely new development. Over the last eighty years, a substantial number of scholars—often former employees of these organizations themselves—have written extensively about the challenges the international civil service has faced over the years (see Ranshofen-Wertheimer 1943; Beigbeder 1988). This research culminated in a special issue of *Public Administration Review* entitled ‘Towards an International Civil Service’ (Mailick 1970). However, while these early studies advanced our knowledge by pointing out how the international civil service works and why it is an important precondition for successful multilateral cooperation, they were mostly normative and descriptive in nature and lacked a clear theoretical programme. In the shadow of the Cold War and the growing relevance of realism as the predominant paradigm in IR, the debate lost momentum. Consequently, this strand of research did not develop into a more analytical research agenda that would make it compatible with the changes and developments within (national) PA.

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