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## The Changing Nature of International Organisations – An Argument for Eclecticism STEVE BIEDERMANN

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# **The Changing Nature of International Organisations – An Argument for Eclecticism**

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## **Abstract**

Since studying international organisations (IOs) became a field of increasing interest, the need for a comprehensive approach to analyse them and their importance for International Relations (IR) became evident. Mainstream IR theories treat IOs following their varying theoretical frameworks. As a consequence, IOs can be regarded as instruments of states (neorealism), arenas for decision-making processes (neoliberal institutionalism) and actors in international politics (social constructivism), but there is no approach combining these different concepts. This opens the door for using eclecticism to answer the question of how IOs can be studied in a more comprehensive fashion in order to include the different roles that are ascribed to them. The understanding of the dynamic character of IOs roles helps to determine their relevance, influence, and abilities. To illustrate the changing nature of IOs, the United Nations (UN) will be used as an example.<sup>1</sup>

*Keywords:* International Organisations, International Relations Theory, Organisational Change, Research Methodology, United Nations

## **Why Studying International Organisations?**

Studying IOs has become a field of increasing attention in the last decades. The most important reason for this attention is the phenomenon of globalisation and its consequences, which can be understood as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that

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<sup>1</sup> In this article the term United Nations is closely associated with the main bodies of the UN. Especially the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Secretariat. Other UN bodies, programmes, and specialised agencies are named explicitly.

local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1991: 64). Globalisation seems to have an influence on nearly all dimensions of human life (Appadurai 1990: 296-301, Waters 2001: 17-21). On the one hand, humans can profit from the processes of globalisation, for example in the area of trade, communication, infrastructure, and cultural exchange. On the other hand, growing interdependencies between states and societies can create a lot of difficulties whenever national policies are not able to solve international problems in areas such as trade (for example transnational black markets), communication, infrastructure, and cultural relations (for instance terrorist networks) (Bauman 1998: 45-47). Therefore, the consequences of globalisation are unpredictable (Bauman 1998: 38; Beck 2002: 40). Measures, which could enforce international law, have to be taken on the international level, where no legitimate monopoly of force exists. Therefore, states are reaching the limits of their scope of action (Bauman 1998: 37-43; Held 2000: 394-397). Examples of these limits are the attempt to ensure international peace and security, the fight against international organised crime and terrorism, the management of refugee flows, climate change, and many more (Nohlen 2010: 335-338; Griffiths & O’Callaghan 2002: 2-4, 126-129). Therefore, the need for alternative “*modi operandi*” became clear.

One of these alternatives are IOs that can provide more room for action because they are less constrained by state borders and the policies of a singular state. Whether the claim of IOs is regional as in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union and the African Union or global as in the case of the United Nations, they are sometimes able to influence the relations between states (Hurd 2011: 7, 9-10). This is where IOs became relevant for the study of International Relations, for example by asking to which extent IOs can influence interstate relations. One of the most important factors here is the actor quality of IOs, which indicates the degree to which they can act independently from their member states, pursue their own interests, and shape their environment including the behaviour of states. By analysing the roles and actor quality of IOs, different limitations of their power and authority have to be recognised. Firstly, the power and authority of IOs are given by states and can also be taken back by them (Putnam 1988: 433-441; Wolfram 2012: 72-73). Secondly, in many cases IOs are missing effective enforcement mechanisms. This makes it easy for some states (mostly for powerful ones) to disregard the decisions of IOs through ‘cheating’ or free riding (Kuhn 2014).

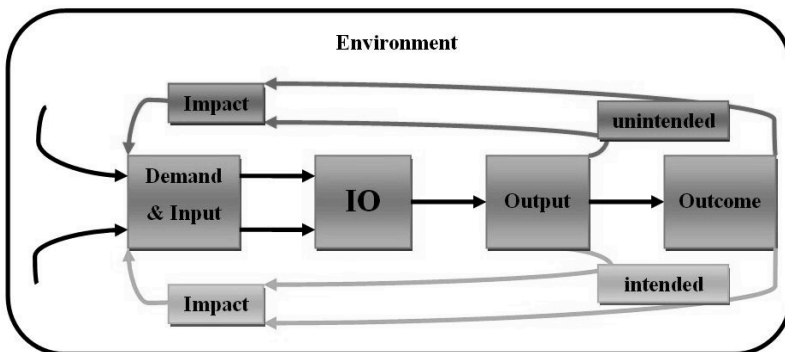
Considering these developments, this article concentrates on the different roles that were ascribed to IOs and how these roles can be explained through IR theories. Here arises the question of *how international organisations can be studied in a more comprehensive fashion to include the different roles that are ascribed to them*. The argumentation, why eclecticism is adequate to generate an appropriate approach to study IOs in a more comprehensive manner will be presented in four steps. At first, some general assumptions

about IOs and their place in the international system will be described. Secondly, the different roles of IOs and their theoretical origins will be explained. Thirdly, in support of the argumentation, the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, the Secretariat, and some selected specialised agencies will be used as an example to demonstrate how the roles of IOs can change over time and why an approach, which combines the introduced roles of IOs is necessary. Fourthly, eclecticism will be introduced as a method which helps to combine different theories and it will be illustrated how a comprehensive study of IOs is possible.

## **International Organisations in the International System**

How IOs are recognised depends on many factors, which can be found inside and outside the concerned IO (Hurd 2011: 14, 19). Based on David Easton's approach of political systems, IOs have to react on demands or other input from their environment (including state and non-state actors) and need to make decisions or take any other actions or inactions. These actions referred to as output then influence the environment and create a feedback for the IO (Easton 1965: 30-32). Over the years this approach was extended in some respects, for example the categories "outcome" and "impact" were added. The consequences of the actions or inactions for the environment are defined as outcome. Impact means the degree to which an output has influenced the former situation. Both, outcome and impact can occur in intended or unintended ways (Kahl 2013: 37). What is left open is the process of decision-making within IOs, which are viewed as a "black box" following the approach of Easton (Easton 1965: 30-32). Therefore, theories of International Relations can provide useful insights to open up these "black boxes" and help to understand what influence IOs can exert on world politics.

*Figure 1: International Organisations in the International System.*



*Source:* Illustration by author, based on the approach of Easton (1965).

## **The Three Roles of International Organisations**

In the following chapter usual roles, which are ascribed to IOs by IR theory, will be presented. This includes the role of IOs as instruments of states (neorealism), arenas for decision-making processes (neoliberal institutionalism) and actors in international politics (social constructivism). After explaining the core assumptions, which form the basis of different roles, the similarities and differences between the underlying theories will be explored. Finally, one guiding question for each role will be stated for the later analysis of the chosen United Nations bodies.

By analysing the interplay between IOs and their member states, IR theories differentiate between three general approaches, concerning the ontology of IOs. IOs are regarded as instruments, actors or arenas (Archer 2015: 114-130; Hurd 2011: 8-14; 2014: 29-36). Depending on the perspective, the influence IOs can potentially exert in the international systems varies a lot (Hurd 2011: 8-14).

The way to regard IOs purely as instruments descends mainly from neorealism, which was primarily introduced by Kenneth N. Waltz in his well-recognised book "Theory of International Politics" (1979). The claim that IOs are just regarded as instruments is a consequence of the neorealist core assumptions about the international system:

- The ordering principle of the international system is anarchy,
- States are the most important actors in the international system, and
- Because of the uncertainty in the international system states are acting rational and pursue their own interests (Waltz 1979: 102-128).

Following the neorealist perspective, cooperation is only possible through the will of a hegemonic state, which dominates the international system and tries to bind weaker states to increase its power (bandwagoning), or through the creation of counter alliances of weaker states against a hegemonic state (balancing) (Griffiths & O'Callaghan 2002: 1, 12; Donally 2005: 35-36). As a consequence, IOs are just instruments to fulfil the will of states that try to enforce their interests, make relative gains, and spread their values (Waltz 2008: 48; Mearsheimer 1995: 7). Furthermore, it is assumed that IOs are founded for the same reason (Hurd 2011: 11-14).

In contrast to the neorealist perspective, neoliberal institutionalism was developed mainly by Robert O. Keohane in his popular work "After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy" (1984). In his work he concludes that IOs are more than just instruments. Neoliberal institutionalists, who agree with the neorealist core assumptions, assume that cooperation among states is possible even without the aim of bandwagoning or balancing. The explanation for this lies in complex interdependencies, which restrict the behaviour of states, for instance international trade relations. These interdependencies are incentives for cooperation and can decrease the uncertainty within the international system, if states pursue common interests. Here IOs can help states to deal with problems of cooperation

and collaboration, while they are treating complex interdependencies and help them to accomplish absolute gains as an arena for communication and the exchange of views. The underlying logic is that IOs help to reduce the uncertainty of interstate relations, the costs of cooperation, and they help to postulate long-term benefits (Keohane 1984: 4-6, 67-69, 78-109; Martin 1992: 765-768; Ruggie 1992: 576-583). Concrete mechanisms for enabling cooperation are monitoring agreements, issue linkages and side payments during negotiation processes, and transparency initiatives (Martin 1992: 765-768).

While neorealism offers the explanation how IOs serve as instruments and neoliberal institutionalism states that IOs can be treated as arenas, social constructivism regards IOs as actors in the international system. Constructivists claim that reality is socially constructed and that the perception of reality is shaped by the way social entities interact. Key factors for the creation of reality are shared belief-systems, which are specified through norms, values, perceptions, interests, and ideas (Reus-Smit 2005: 194-201; Ulbert 2010: 427-431). Thus, constructivists use an approach to analyse the structure of the international system and the behaviour of states. One well known representative of this school is Alexander Wendt who gained attention with his article „Anarchy is what States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics“ (1992) and then became one of the reference authors of social constructivism with his book “Social Theory of International Politics” (1999). The most evident difference between neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism on the one hand and social constructivism on the other hand is that interests are not taken for granted following the constructivist approach (Wendt 1992: 393-394). Therefore, constructivists question the behaviour of states, which was identified by neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists. Because interests are not regarded as given, a self-help system does not necessarily have to be developed. If it is in accordance with their interests, which are formed through identity, states can also cooperate (for instance through institutions) and therefore eventually change the structure of the international system (Griffiths & O’Callaghan 2002: 50-51). IOs are treated as actors because they can build identity through creating collective belief systems. Within IOs states are exchanging their beliefs and interests, which can be influenced by IOs especially through the classification and organisation of information and knowledge. Therefore, the actor quality of IO lies in their legal authority, their technical expertise, their ability of fixing meanings, and the diffusion of norms (Barnet & Finnemore 1999: 701-715). Finally, IOs can clarify their self-image and the expectations of other states. Exactly during this process of social definition, IOs fulfil the role of an actor because they determine identities and vice versa (Wendt 1992: 396-422). In addition to the interests of a singular state (neorealism) and the common interests of a group of states (neoliberal institutionalism), social constructivism includes the aims, interests, and belief systems of people who are serving as members of states or IOs as an influential factor of international relations. In addition,

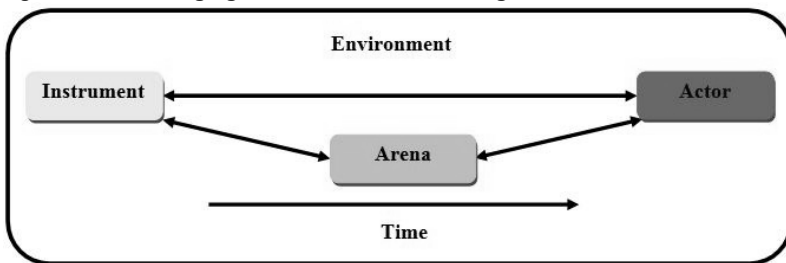
IOs are able to pursue their own interests, for example by trying to protect or extend their own mandate (Barnett & Finnemore 1999: 707-715).

After having recapitulated the three general roles of IOs and their theoretical background, one guiding question of each role will be addressed in the analysis of the United Nations as a case study. These questions are related to the most varying feature of IOs with regard to the introduced theories of International Relations: the degree of actor quality. While neorealists assume that IOs have no actor quality, neoliberal institutionalists claim that IOs have some actor quality, because they are able to execute actions following the will of their member states to solve problems, and social constructivists suppose that IOs can become full actors, when they are able to use their own resources independently of their member states. Hence, the three guiding questions for the analysis of the roles of the IOs are the following:

1. *Is a singular state or a minority of states able to use the IO to pursue its own interests?*
2. *Does the IO offer solutions for problems of international coordination and collaboration?*
3. *Is the IO able to act independently of the will of its member states?*

Finally, it is important to stress that the introduced conceptions of IOs, in their pure form, cannot be found in reality and that these roles have to be regarded as ideal types. Mostly, IOs appear in a mixture of the described roles. However, the relevance of time as an influencing factor should not be underestimated. While analysing IOs, their role can change over time from one type to another. There is no fixed evolution or some generic process, which directs the process of role change (see Figure 2). Furthermore, it is possible to associate more than one concept to a singular IO at the same time.

*Figure 2: The Changing Roles of International Organisations.*



Source: Diagram by author.

### **Case Study - The Changing Roles of the United Nations**

The following passages are divided following the three introduced roles of IOs. In each passage, it will be analysed if the United Nations, with regard to

the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretariat as an example for IOs, is fitting into the role of an instrument, arena and actor. The reason for focusing on these three main bodies of the UN is twofold. First, the UN is with regards to its membership and range of activities a special international organisation and there is nowadays a huge interest in studying the UN. Second, assembly, council (or executive board), and secretariat are basic bodies of current and past international organisations. The answer to the guiding questions introduced above will be presented at the end of each passage. In addition, relevant factors, which contribute to the process of role change, will be explored. At first, it will be explored if the UN is fitting in the role of an instrument by answering the question of whether a singular state or a minority of states is able to use the UN to pursue its own interests.

### *The United Nations in the Role as an Instrument*

After World War I, the failure of the League of Nations, and the experience of World War II, it seemed that the time had come to give peace a new chance and to construct an encompassing international order. As one part of this order the UN was created in 1945 and became part of international law through the ratification of the UN-Charter by 51 states. Since then, the major aim of the organisation is the protection of global peace and security (United Nations 1945: Art. 1).

Hence, like many other organisations the UN was created by their member states to fulfil a specific task, which is the main reason to regard the UN as an instrument of its member states. Apart from the declared goals of the UN, which are written down in the Charter from 1945, the member states of the UN are mostly trying to pursue their own interests (Ruggie 1992: 578). Examples illustrating that the role as an instrument is fitting to the UN can be found through the whole time of its existence. The aim to pursue own interests within the framework of the UN is not limited to the member states. In recent years the civil society has become a stronger player on the international stage and therefore has become a stakeholder in many of the UN's areas of activity. One good illustration for that trend are the Conferences of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the engagement of civil society actors during the so called UN World Conferences (Böhmelt 2013: 698-717; Friedman, Hochstetler & Clark 2005: 31-68).

The UN had already been instrumentalised before it was founded formally. During the wartime conferences of the allied states, especially the ones who later became permanent members of the UN Security Council, tried to ensure their national interests. The USA tried to bolster its new position in the international system and to minimize the possibilities of influence for the Communist Soviet Union, whereas the Soviet Union was anxious to secure its own position in the light of the western majority within the UN (Pietz 2007:



7-11). This beginning confrontation finally led to the creation of the veto as a possibility to block unwanted decisions (Ruggie 1992: 584-593; Pietz 2007: 7-11).

The upcoming rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union, which later manifested itself in the Cold War, paralysed the UN from 1948 until 1985 (Gareis 2012: 25-32). During this period, both superpowers tried to enforce their own interests and disabled cooperation most of the time. Examples can be found in the events in 1956, when in Poland, Hungary, and Georgia demonstrations against the Soviet reign took place and were suppressed forcefully, without any crucial reaction of the international community (Kramer 2006: 8-18; Tischler 2006: 16-24). Another example for the instrumentalisation of the UN is the intervention of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1979, where Soviet troops tried to defeat the mujahedin regime, which was supported by the USA and other western states (Steininger 2003: 43-51).

With the end of the Cold War, the paralysing of the UN ended and gave the UN the ability to fulfil its original task. Moreover, the activities of the UN could be expanded (Gareis 2012: 31-32). Despite the increasing activity of the UN since 1989/90, and the decline in the use of the veto, the possibility to instrumentalise the organisation is still given, especially in the UN Security Council. Developments like the intervention in Libya 2011 and the deadlocks of the Security Council concerning the Syrian Civil War (since 2011) and the Ukraine Crisis (since 2013) illustrate, that singular states are still able to instrumentalise the UN. In the first case the western partners, United States, Great Britain and France, were able to convince Russia and China, countries that were very suspicious of the situation, not to use their veto on military actions against the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi.

In the Aftermath of the actions in Libya, which led to a regime change, a discussion stated on whether the western allies had overstretched the mandate of the Security Council. The two latter cases illustrate how the Security Council can be blocked by the use of a veto, in these cases mainly by Russia and China (Bellamy 2011; Dag Hammarskjöld Library 2015; Fröhlich 2011: 135-150; Türkmen 2015: 3-9; S/RES/1973). Whereas the Security Council seems to be an obvious example for the instrumentalisation of IOs by its member states it has to be noted that instrumentalisation takes also place in other UN bodies. The UN General Assembly, which is used as an example of the role of IOs as an arena in this article can be used as an instrument too. In the assembly, each member state has the possibility to speak to the community of states and to express its views. This opportunity can be utilised to make allegations or to improve the image of the own state. This usage of the General Assembly is for instance ascribed to the former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Landler & Fathisept 2009; The Guardian 2009).

The answer to the question of whether a singular state or a minority of states are able to use the UN to pursue their own interests, seems to be clear. The possibility that the UN is used as an instrument is omnipresent, but in contrast to the neorealist assumption, that powerful states can enforce their

interests through an IO, states have only the ability to disturb or block processes within the UN, which are not in accordance with their own interests. However, no singular state is able to use the UN as a tool to push through its individual interests. This makes no difference for particular decisions, which are blocked, but shows that the ability to use the UN as an instrument is restricted.

### *The United Nations as an Arena*

The UN's role as an arena will be analysed guided by the question: Does the UN offer solutions for problems of international coordination and collaboration?

The UN's role as an arena remained often unexploited during the Cold War, for instance the Soviet Union boycotted the UN Security Council at the end of the 1940s. But when the situation deteriorated, for example during the Cuba Crisis (1962) or the second oil crisis (1979) and the first Gulf War (1980-1988), the UN functioned as arena (S/RES/582; S/RES/598). Some exceptions were possible through alternating phases of cooperation and confrontation during this period. For instance, in questions of nuclear disarmament and human rights cooperation could be generated and the creation of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (1946), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Limited Test Ban Treaty (1963), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968), the SALT process (1969-1979), and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972) could be achieved.

What strengthens the picture of the UN as an arena was the beginning of decolonisation. Especially during the 1960s and 1970s, the number of UN member states grew rapidly. More and more, former colonies became independent and joined the UN. This led to a shift in the membership composition of the organisation. The former dominance of states from the northern hemisphere (mostly industrial states) was questioned by the increasing number of states from the southern hemisphere (mostly developing countries from Africa and Asia). Therefore the Cold War overlapped with the so-called "North-South-Conflict" (Gareis 2012: 32-33).

A consequence of decolonisation was not just the numerical growth of UN member states, but rather the attempt of the new members to influence the organisation's agenda. New themes and questions in the fields of development, sustainability, environment, healthcare, poverty, discrimination and so on were taken on the UN's agenda. Regarding these new topics, the institutional setting of the UN changed further including more recent institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (Gareis 2012: 31-32;

Varwick 2014: 51-72). Furthermore, the “new” international community was able to change the institutional design of the UN Security Council in 1965. Until today, this was the only reform concerning to the composition of the UN Security Council. With their majority in the General Assembly and notwithstanding the refusal of some Security Council members the member states of the UN enlarged the number of non-permanent members of the Security Council from five to ten (United Nations General Assembly 1953: A/RES/1991A/XVIII).

For the role of the UN as an arena, the end of the Cold War marked a major turning point, just like it was for the role as an instrument. Today the UN offers a wide range of arenas for different themes and problems, which also include non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations (DESA NGO Branch 2016). Examples for this can be found easily. The most important arena of the UN is the Security Council, which is responsible for the protection of international peace and security. After the end of the Cold War, the Security Council began to work with much more regularity and continuity (Gareis 2012: 31-39; Wolfram 2012: 106-107, 112). Other arenas like the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council of the UN were not so strongly influenced by the Cold War and functioned with more continuity compared to the Security Council. In addition to the arenas of the main bodies of the UN, there are a lot of summits and conferences, which illustrate the UN’s role as an arena, for instance the UN Earth Summits, which started in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, the UN World Summit from 2005 or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which includes regular conferences like the one in Lima (Peru) in December 2014.

The answer to the question, whether the UN offers solutions for problems of international coordination and collaboration, also seems clear. Within the UN, agreements on cooperation and collaboration are mostly translated into resolutions, conventions or declarations. During the Cold War, especially the Security Council showed shortcomings for discussing international coordination and collaboration problems. Despite this ‘defect’, the UN served as an arena in many other respects until today. With the end of the East-West conflict the Security Council shows up as an arena again. Although there are not always decisions taken, the possibility to discuss things seems ever present, as the examples Syria and Ukraine illustrate (Dag Hammarskjöld Library 2015).

### *The United Nations as an Actor*

This section addresses the question whether the UN is able to act independently of the will of its member states.

Most decisions that are being taken in the UN are highly dependent on the will of its member states. Even the UN Security Council which is the only body of the UN system that has supranational rights and is regarded by some

authors as the most powerful international body, is highly dependent on the interests of its members, as mentioned above (Hurd 2014: 112).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the UN is able to influence international relations according to its own interests through other channels.

The biggest source for independent actions of the UN lies in its Secretariat, whose employees are free to act without any restrictions by national politics (Göthel 2002: 77-121; United Nations 1945: Art. 100). The Secretariat with the Secretary-General as its head fulfils many administrative duties, concerning all bodies of the UN. These duties include the well-known reports of the Secretary-Generals, who therefore function as agenda setter (Wolfram 2012: 133-153; Fröhlich 2005: 41-63), the different special issues reports, which are carried out by the relevant subordinate bodies of the UN, for example in the field of human rights or sustainable development, and the administration of political and peacekeeping operations, to mediate international disputes and so on. The staff of the Secretariat (approximately 43,000 persons) also informs its environment, through contact with the media about the work of the United Nations and it organises international conferences on different issues (United Nations Secretary-General 2014: A/RES/67/329). The three examples below will illustrate how the UN can be an actor in international politics.

The United Nations refugee agency, with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as its head, was founded in 1950 through a resolution of the UN General Assembly (A/RES/5/428) and is still operating today. Founded by the member states, the agency became a hub in the field of refugee relief. Its experience and expertise finally gives it some authority and makes the UNCHR an actor in the field of refugee matters, for instance in defining the term "refugee" and by setting up refugee camps, which illustrates the powers of IOs presented by Barnett and Finnemore (Barnett & Finnemore 1999: 710-715).

The International Criminal Court (ICC), which was founded in 1998 and began its work in 2002, is another example of how the UN can be an actor on the international level. The creation of the ICC again, as in the case of the UNCHR, depended on the will of the UN member states, but after having reached the required number of ratifications in 2002, the ICC has started its work as an independent international organisation (Deitelhoff 2009: 147-172; Hurd 2011: 9-10; ICC 2011: Art. 4). Today, the ICC is independently responsible in the field of international criminal law, especially in the cases of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity (ICC 2011: Art. 5-9). What weakens the actor quality of the ICC is that some influential states such

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<sup>2</sup> The UN Security Council can decide whether a situation constitutes a threat to the international peace and security (United Nations 1945: Art. 39) and determine how this situation can be resolved by using nonviolent means (for instance sanctions) and coercive means including the use of force (United Nations 1945: Art. 39-42). The decisions of the UN Security Council are binding documents following international law.

as the USA, China, and Russia, which are permanent members of the UN Security Council, but also India, Israel and others have not ratified the Rome Statute yet.

The last example here will be the concept of human security, which was mainly introduced by the Human Development Report “New Dimensions of Human Security” of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994. This was the first relevant attempt to define what human security means. The concept was well recognised by the international community and was the origin for many further efforts to specify human security. Some later initiatives for the implementation of this concept were the Commission on Human Security, established in 2001, which was created by the government of Japan, and the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, which submitted its report in 2001 and introduced the concept of the “Responsibility to Protect” (International Development Research Centre 2001). Both purposes were highly supported by the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and today’s Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (A/54/2000; A/59/2005; A/63/677; A/64/701; International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect 2015). Progress with respect to the acceptance of the concepts was made with the 2005 Millennium Summit Outcome Document, where the member states of the UN recognised the concepts of Human Security and the Responsibility to Protect (A/RES/60/1: Par. 138–40, 143). Later the General Assembly and the Security Council referred to both concepts in their decisions (A/RES/66/L.55/Rev.1; S/RES/1653/2006; S/RES/1674/2006; S/RES/2139/2014 etc.).<sup>3</sup> Besides the continuing discussion of the two concepts, some institutional changes occurred, for example with the foundation of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security in 1999, the creation of the Advisory Board on Human Security in the UN Secretariat in 2003 and the establishment of the Human Security Unit at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2004 (Fröhlich 2007: 11-22). In this case, the Secretary-General as an independent international civil servant played a crucial role in taking the lead to achieve an implementation of the Responsibility to Protect by the UN member states and to keep the topic on the political agenda (Bellamy 2014: 4-11).

Overall, the answer to the question, whether the UN is able to act independently of the will of its member states, seems to be quite unclear. On the one hand, the UN is almost unable to act when its member states are unwilling to support the UN. On the other hand, the UN’s staff, especially the personnel of the Secretariat and the Secretary-General, who are independent of national interests, can undertake independent activities and pursue own interests. Here the dilemma of international organisations becomes visible.

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of all Security Council resolutions concerning the Responsibility to Protect see: Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016. *UN Security Council Resolutions Referencing R2P*. Online: <http://www.globalr2p.org/resources/335> [17/02/2016].

The political will, interest, and recognition are inevitable factors, which influence the actor quality of IOs. Therefore, it seems improbable that the UN acts as a genuine actor, its actor quality is too much depending on other factors. But in the end, IOs are sometimes able to achieve goals, which states could not achieve on their own (Hurd 2011: 9).

### **How to manage a comprehensive study of International Organisations?**

After having portrayed the roles, which are ascribed to IOs and having analysed how these roles occur in reality one question remains open: *how can IOs be studied in a comprehensive fashion?* As mentioned above, IR theories are convincing in explaining singular roles of IOs. Neorealism enables to understand how IOs can be instruments, neoliberal institutionalism made a plausible explanation of how IOs can fit in the role of an arena and social constructivism gives insights in how IOs can be regarded as actors in international politics.

Each theory presents its own view of IOs and their relevance for the international system, but none of them provides a comprehensive approach on the study of IOs. For that eclecticism offers a way out of the restricted thinking that occurs when scholars follow established research traditions very strict. Following Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein (2010a: 10), eclecticism means:

*“Any approach that seeks to extricate, translate, and selectively integrate analytic elements – concepts, logics, mechanisms and interpretations – of theories or narratives that have been developed within separate paradigms but that address related aspects of substantive problems that have both scholarly and practical significance.”*

Eclecticism is based on the following three features. First, it follows an open-ended problem formulation with regard to the complexity of social phenomena. Secondly, it takes a middle-range causal account incorporating multi causality and different ways of thinking obtained from more than one research tradition. Thirdly, it focused on results that pragmatically engage both academics and practitioners. This does not mean that eclecticism is a practice of pick and choose the best fitting parts of different theories, approaches or paradigms for solving any theoretical problem. It is more the accurate consolidation of different parts of varying theories. One precondition for doing this is to have comprehensive knowledge of the theories concerned. To avoid the problem of incommensurability, which can arise because of the different epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying to the used theories, it is essential to eliminate all relevant incompatibilities. Two suggested ways of doing this are:

1. To translate related theoretical components of one theory into the language of another one, or

2. To raise the degree of abstraction, as long as the substantive relationship between indicator and phenomena are not changed (Sil & Katzenstein 2010a: 14-16).

Does this help to obtain a comprehensive approach to the study IOs which is based on neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism? On the one hand, the three theories have some common assumptions like the international system, as a starting point of their theories or the assumption that states are the most important actors in international relations and that there is no monopoly of force within the international system. More difficult to answer is the question of how the aims of states seeking security following neorealism (by gaining power) and neoliberal institutionalism (by cooperation) can be combined with the aims of states following social constructivism ("anarchy is what states makes of it"). As mentioned earlier, constructivists are not taking interests for granted, but seeking security (through gaining power or through cooperation) is one possible constructed interest of states (Reus-Smit 2005: 193-194). Therefore, the interests of states can be translated from neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism to social constructivism.

Neorealism wilfully neglects the internal constitution of states, whereas neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism include the internal constitutional factor of international relations (Pappenheim 2001: 244; Waltz 1979: 99; Wendt 1992: 400-401). To overcome this difference, it is necessary to include the internal constitution of states into the realm of neorealism. This is possible since neorealism does not deny that the internal constitution of states can affect international politics, it just ignored this for most of the time. Waltz argues that the impact of human nature ("first image") and the domestic constitution of states ("second image") are a description of the forces of world politics but only the system of states ("third image") enables the assessment of their impact (Waltz 1959: 238; 1979: 71, 112, 144). Therefore, the elements to overcome the described gap between neorealism on the one side and neoliberal institutionalism and social constructivism on the other side were already perceived by Waltz, even when he regarded them not as essential for his theory of International Relations. The ongoing development of neorealism, in which the concentration on power capabilities shifted towards threats and thus opened the door for offensive (Mearsheimer 2001) and defensive realists (Grieco 1990) supports this view. With this expanded neorealist perspective, it became possible to include different interests of states into the theory of neorealism, and this finally enables the use of eclecticism to combine neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, and social constructivism to a comprehensive approach to the study of IO (Donally 2005: 40-44).

Sil and Katzenstein also identify theoretic approaches that have an eclectic character to show that eclecticism takes already place in the current scholarship (2010b: 421-425). One that should be named here is the bureaucratic approach to the study of IOs introduced by Michael Barnett and Martha

Finnemore (2004) that contributed much to the understanding of IOs. In "Rules for the World" Barnett and Finnemore combine the insights generated by state-centred research with a bureaucratic approach. For example while explaining the powers of IOs, Barnett and Finnemore draw on regulative mechanisms (for instance classification) which origins rest in rational choice theory and through which IOs are able to order the world via "rationalisation" and constitutive mechanisms (for instance norm diffusion) which are based on social constructivism that are used to construct reality (Sil & Katzenstein 2010b: 422-423; Barnett & Finnemore 2004: 29-34; Drori, Meyer & Hwang 2009: 21-26).

Not mentioned by Sil and Katzenstein, but still an additional example of the use of eclecticism is the transfer of the Principal-Agent Theory from economics to political science. Primarily developed to explain and improve the relationship between principal (employer) and agent (employee), the theory can be used to analyse and understand the relationship between member states (principals) and IOs (agents). The transfer from economics to political science is possible because the theory really concentrates on the relationship among principal and agent and is not embedded in assumptions about the environment in which principal and agent come together (Tamm & Snidal 2014: 134; Hawkins et al. 2006: 7). Following this approach IOs can be regarded as actors because of their expertise and their advanced information concerning specific policy fields (Hawkins et al. 2006: 35). Member states which delegate authority to IOs, so that IOs are able to perform an arranged task, are mostly not able to control all activities of their agent (Hawkins et al. 2006: 8). Therefore IOs are able to blur their abilities and interests to ensure that the related principal regards IOs (or one of them) as suitable to fulfil its will, even when the selected IO is not able or willing to fulfil this task in the sense of the principal (that is, adverse selection). Furthermore, an IO that is currently engaged in fulfilling the task of a member state, is able to decide to take an alternative way to complete the task given by the member state, even if this alternative contains negative consequences for the principal (that is, moral hazard) (Tamm & Snidal 2014: 135-136). Finally, IOs are able to reflect about their situation and try to influence the interests of the concerned member states (Hawkins & Jacoby 2006: 210-212). Principal-Agent Theory, like neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism as well, is based on rational choice assumptions, but again it is possible to include these assumptions under the umbrella of social constructivism as explained above.

## **Conclusion**

It has been argued that each theory of International Relations, which were described here on a rudimentary level, presents its own strengths and weaknesses, but does not enable a comprehensive study of IOs. These theories were formed out of a certain historical context, with the aim to deal with a



specific subject and to simplify complex processes in order to gain a better understanding of IOs, but they were not designed in an inclusive manner. In some ways these theories are connected and therefore knowing the similarities and differences is very important. This knowledge opens the door to use eclecticism as a methodological approach and to combine different theories. The advantage of eclecticism is the possibility to overcome boundaries of a singular theory, through the consolidating of different approaches and by generating new useful theoretical and empirical insights through a broader and deeper analytical perspective.

The analysis of different case examples within the UN system has shown that IOs can fit into different roles, also at the same time. The UN was established through a group of states which tried to achieve a common goal and to fulfil the will of its member states, and until today some states, especially the five permanent member of the Security Council, are able to prevent processes within the UN, if they are not in accordance with their own interests. Nevertheless, it is wrong to assume that the UN is a pure instrument of its members.

Since its foundation, the UN was also fulfilling the role of an arena. Through the high degree of institutionalisation and the permanent work of the Secretariat, additional bodies, funds, and programmes, there is an ongoing possibility to work together with other states and actors from civil society. What is more questionable here is the effectiveness of these arenas. With special regard to the UN Security Council, the problem of deadlocks should be noticed.

The actor quality of the UN, measured by its ability to act at least partially independent of its member states, seems very fragile. On the one hand, the UN is a very strong body, which is responsible for fulfilling crucial tasks in international politics. On the other hand, there are many internal and external factors related to the international context (for example the end of the Cold War), overlapping or conflicting interest of member states (for instance the use of veto), the amount of own resources, the social recognition of external and internal actors, the degree of unity within the organisation, and leadership that is taken by key figures like the Secretary-General, which influence and potentially weaken the actor quality of the UN and therefore facilitate the change of the assumed role (Hurd 2011: 9-10; Bellamy 2014: 4-11).

The current situation, especially with regard to the Syrian Civil War and the Ukraine Crisis, is giving much room for the neorealist perspective and the importance of power politics, but it is also observable that negotiation processes are taking place (neoliberal institutionalism). Whether the UN will be able to use its actor quality (social constructivism) depends mainly on the will of its member states and thus remains to be seen.

- I reflect -

While analysing different IOs in several settings is one major concern of my studies, the lack of a comprehensive framework in IR theory for doing this became obvious several times. In comparison to other disciplines like economics (e.g. organisation theory) and sociology (e.g. neo-institutionalism), a general theoretical gap in regard to the study of organisations can be observed in the field of political science. The three typical roles – instrument, arena and actor – are still very prominent in this area, and without a doubt a useful heuristic. The problem with these roles is that they are mostly treated as exclusive concepts because they originate from different IR theories and in these theories, IOs mainly constitute not the main research interest.

Starting from that position, I became aware of the approach offered by Sil and Katzenstein while I had to write a mid-term paper for a seminar dealing with IOs. The use of “analytical eclecticism” to study IOs seems to be a very useful and interesting method for reaching a more comprehensive framework to the study of IOs. From a personal point of view, I really like the practically oriented approach for several reasons. It enables the creation of an IO-focused analytic procedure that is not restricted to a singular paradigm and therefore combines the insights of different theories. Furthermore, it allows the study of IOs in a more flexible fashion that is more appropriate to reality. Finally, this method is applicable to other theories and thus can be useful for numerous other situations. Nevertheless, the method of “analytic eclecticism” needs to be practiced with attention to the theoretical differences that can rest in the used theories. That is why it should not be regarded as cherry picking but rather as a method for overcoming restrictions of classical research traditions.

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