Shifting Visions of Development: International Organizations, Non-Governmental Actors, and the Rise of Global Governance, 1945-1990

Veranstalter: Marc Frey / Sönke Kunkel / Corinna R. Unger, Jacobs University Bremen
Datum, Ort: 29.09.2011-30.09.2011, Bremen
Bericht von: Samuel Misteli, Department of History, University of Lucerne

Over the last sixty years, international organizations and their non-governmental counterparts have played an ever more important role in international politics. They have acted as promoters of globalization, as global transmitters of ideas and knowledge, and as influential stakeholders in a wide range of fields, e.g. human rights, health, agriculture, labor, demography, or ecology. The growing importance of international institutions has gone along with a similar rise to prominence of the concept of „development", which – although often lacking a precise definition – has worked as a major catalyst for expanding activities in the international realm.

Historians' growing interest in international and global phenomena in recent years has brought a rediscovery of the long neglected history of international organizations. A considerable amount of this research has focused on the concept of development, its meanings and its use by international stakeholders. However, despite efforts by historians, political scientists and anthropologists alike, there is much territory left to cover in the quest for explaining shifting visions of development and the role of international organizations in shaping the contemporary world. The conference therefore intended to take a systematic look at the state of the research and to assess the tasks that still lie ahead.

In the conference's first panel, JENS STEFFEK and LEONIE HOLTHAUS (both Darmstadt) tracked the rise of International Organizations by shedding light on the thinking of two early theorists of international administration. In the interwar years, James Arthur Salter and David Mitrany developed notions of rational public administration and planning that proved to be influential both for political science and for international organization. Salter, a British diplomat and League of Nations official, and Mitrany, the founding father of the functional theory of International Relations, both endorsed rational planning and transnational administration as means of overcoming political struggle and the danger of political and economic anarchy. According to Salter and Mitrany, de-politicized governance by functional international organizations should bring about effective political solutions which would produce – among other things – economic development. To this end, planning was best left to experts.

The rule of experts was also at the core of DANIEL SPEICH's (Lucerne) paper, which connected the proliferation of international organizations after the Second World War to the concurrent rise of macroeconomics as a scientific discipline. In the 1940s, Speich argued, macroeconomic expertise was established as a generalized medium of communication in international relations, insofar as it provided a shared analytical framework which reduced the complexities of world politics. Thus, economics became a *lingua franca* in diplomatic negotiations which allowed for articulating differing interests and connecting diverse backgrounds. Focusing on European-African relations from the 1940s to the 1960s, Speich showed that economic concepts like the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) helped establish new modes of communication in the context of declining empires.

MATTHIAS SCHMELZER (Frankfurt/Oder) linked the power of macroeconomics to the conference topic of shifting visions of development. He did so by tracking changes in the understandings of the concept of economic growth and by connecting these shifts to parallel changes in development thinking. Schmelzer claimed that the concept of economic growth lies at the heart of modern societies' discussions about progress and well-being, and that its shifting understandings and meanings closely parallel changing paradigms of what is considered to be the desired path for the development of the Global South. An exemplary case are debates within the OECD during the late 1960s and early 1970s: The OECD discussions about the need for qualitative and sustainable growth had their counterpart in a critique

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

of dominant notions of industrialization and modernization of the global South, and the subsequent introduction of a new focus on „basic needs" in development thinking.

Economic considerations do not only matter in shaping international discourse, they are also important for the „survival techniques" of international organizations, as HEIKE WIETERS (Berlin) showed by looking into the „mindset" of the humanitarian organization CARE. Since its founding in 1945, the New York based NGO managed to grow into a significant international player thanks to an entrepreneurial culture which guaranteed CARE's competitiveness in a challenging environment. The rise of the Western humanitarian community, Wieters demonstrated, was in no small part rendered possible by the fact that nonprofit organizations' business techniques were not really that different from the ones employed by their for-profit counterparts.

Several papers dealt with the notion of „failure" of international organizations. FRANCINE MCKENZIE (Western Ontario) highlighted the emergence of a development agenda in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). „Development" did not figure on the GATT's agenda when it was founded in 1947, but in the 1950s and 1960s the GATT was increasingly facing criticism from developing countries seeking to change the rules of world trade. Vilified as a „rich man's organization", the GATT's secretariat tried to incorporate development concerns into its agenda, but largely failed. The 1964 founding of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was a direct challenge to a GATT hesitant to seriously enhance its goals beyond trade liberalization.

Like the GATT, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) missed the opportunity to be a leading agency in promoting development. RUTH JACHERTZ (Berlin) delivered a bleak picture of one of the oldest of the UN specialized agencies' efforts to fulfill its mandate of combating world hunger and bettering the lives of rural populations. Far from being able to establish itself as an organization with wide-ranging policy-making functions, FAO became an arena for the North-South conflict in the 1960s. Tensions between G77 countries, which held the voting majority, and OECD countries, which held the power of the purse, provoked lasting paralysis of FAO. The failure of the FAO secretariat to act as an efficient governance body further contributed to FAO's decline to an organization which increasingly saw its mandate reduced to publishing reports and statistics.

VINCENT LAGENDIJK's (Leiden) and ANTOINE ACKER's (Florence) papers dealt with ruptures in development thinking. They examined how formerly uncontroversial development visions were increasingly confronted with criticism. Lagendijk did so by looking at growing opposition to dam-building, Acker by analyzing a farming development project run by the Volkswagen company in the Brazilian Amazon region. Dam-building went from being a consensual project and an integral part of the development paradigm to being a contested undertaking from the 1980s onward, when increasingly vociferous and better organized opponents started to highlight possibly damaging consequences of dam-building projects. Similarly, the development of the Amazonian area ceased to be a widely unquestioned vision of progress when, during the 1980s, it became clear that the promise of universal welfare failed to consider the environment and various previously voiceless actors.

A separate panel was dedicated to looking into the way international food and health organizations approached the development concept: CORINNE PERNET (St. Gallen) explored how the Central American Institute of Nutrition (INCAP) acted as a place for the creation and transfer of development knowledge. In the process, she advocated a „de-centered" understanding of development: Governments and international organizations in the Global North should not be seen as sole „senders" of development ideas; instead, the complexity of exchanges and transfers between actors in the „center" and the „periphery" should be seriously considered.

The call for the „de-centering of development" was taken up by CLAUDIA PRINZ (Berlin) and THOMAS ZIMMER (Freiburg). Prinz stressed the importance of multi-directional knowledge transfers in global ef-

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

forts to control diarrheal diseases during the 1970s and 1980s. The policies of the global Diarrheal Diseases Control Program (CDD) were shaped significantly by the medical knowledge produced by the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research in Bangladesh (ICDDR, B) which in 1978 had been established under the slogan „take the science where the diarrhea is". Prinz also showed the benefit of looking into global programs instead of focusing on particular organizations, claiming that the former approach can be rewarding in disentangling interactions and connections in global knowledge production. Thomas Zimmer, on his part, delivered further evidence against the notion of the Global South being simply an object of project ideas conceived in the West. He illustrated the crucial part Indian actors played in the installation of the Indian branch of the WHO's global Malaria Eradication Programme (MEP) in the 1950s and 60s. While the Indian MEP was shaped to fit the Indian government's agenda, the global program was closely linked to international development discourse: Combating malaria and fighting human suffering was not seen as an end in itself, but as a means to promote economic development through the conservation of a healthy and therefore productive workforce.

In the conference's final panel, the view was broadened once more, this time to include gender perspectives. EILEEN BORIS' (Santa Barbara) paper dealt with the category of „women in developing countries". In the 1970s, rural women in the Global South became central to development discourse, as they were no longer perceived as unproductive parts of developing societies. Instead, a reconsideration of reproductive labor made them emerge as a significant workforce in development thinking. Third World women became chief targets for the ILO in an effort to end poverty through world employment. Boris sketched the discursive construction of this doubly secluded target group. She also made a general methodological statement by advocating a history of international organizations that is sensitive to how gender makes a difference.

The final discussion stressed the continuing importance of international organizations as facilitators and agenda-setting actors in an interconnected world. At the same time, participants agreed on the need for analysis of IOs that takes into account the larger context – e.g. relations with nation states, civil society, or with knowledge producing actors. As BOB REINALDA (Nijmegen) emphasized, one should not forget the role of a beneficial hegemon (the United States) during the founding period of the UN system. In addition, while affirming the lasting significance of international organizations, conference discussions had also exhibited limits to IO agency. Thus, taking up the notion of failure that had surfaced repeatedly during the conference, SÖNKE KUNKEL (Bremen) pointed to the fact that the transformative promise of international organizations also carried a potential for frustration.

Participants agreed further that the concept of „development" and its shifting meanings are as hard to grapple as the forces shaping the role of international organizations in the contemporary world. However, participants identified the scientization of global development as an obvious trend – as various papers had dealt with this phenomenon. Looking closely into this process may indeed be a rewarding perspective for future research. KLAUS SCHLICHTE (Bremen) outlined another possible research path by suggesting to track the shifting power structures behind perceived changes in development thinking.

In sum, it became clear that two days of fruitful discussions had not been enough to entirely disentangle the highly complex discourses of development thinking and global policy-making. However, conference contributions together resulted in a comprehensive kaleidoscope of a dynamic research field, and interchange between different professions disclosed potentially promising pathways for future research.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: A New Role for International Organizations?
Chair: Jost Duelffer (University of Cologne)

Jens Steffek/Leonie Holthaus (both Technical University of Darmstadt): Planning, Development and the Functional Design of Internatio-

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

nal Organizations

Daniel Speich (University of Lucerne): Macroeconomic Expertise and International Organizations: Generalizing Knowledge in the Relations between Europe and Africa, 1940s to 1960s

Panel 2: Changing Structures of Governance
Chair: Welf Werner (Jacobs University Bremen)

Vincent Lagendijk (University of Leiden): From Dam-Age to Damage? The International Governance of Dams and their Environmental Impact since the 1960s

Heike Wieters (Humboldt University Berlin): CARE: A Study in the Economization of Humanitarianism

Panel 3: The New Politics of Productivity
Chair: Rainer Tetzlaff (Jacobs University Bremen)

Ruth Jachertz (Humboldt University Berlin): A Global Food Policy? The UN Food and Agriculture Organization and Attempts at Global Governance

Antoine Acker (European University Institute, Florence): Like Development Aid? VW's „Feed the World" Project in the Amazon (1973-1986)

Panel 4: Providing Health and Calories
Chair: Corinna Unger (Jacobs University Bremen)

Corinne Pernet (University of St. Gallen): INCAP (Instituto de Nutrición de Centro América y Panamá) as a Place of Transfer

Claudia Prinz (Humboldt University Berlin): The Global „Diarrhoeal Diseases Control Programme" and the Production, Organization and Politics of Health Knowledge

Thomas Zimmer (University of Freiburg): Fighting Malaria in the Name of World Health and Development: The World Health Organization in India

Panel 5: Development and the Global Economy
Chair: Sönke Kunkel (Jacobs University Bremen)

Francine McKenzie (University of Western Ontario): The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and Development in the Third World

Matthias Schmelzer (European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)): Growth and Its Limits: The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development

Panel 6: Humanitarianism, Gender and Development
Chair: Marc Frey (Jacobs University Bremen)

Eileen Boris (University of California, Santa Barbara): „Mothers, Household Managers, and ... Productive Workers in the Economy": The International Labor Organization and „Women in Developing Countries"

Panel 7: Final Discussion: International Organizations and the Rise of Global Governance. Mapping the Field
Chair: Corinna Unger (Jacobs University Bremen)

Bob Reinalda (Radboud University Nijmegen)
Klaus Schlichte (University of Bremen)
Marc Frey (Jacobs University Bremen)

Tagungsbericht *Shifting Visions of Development: International Organizations, Non-Governmental Actors, and the Rise of Global Governance, 1945-1990*. 29.09.2011-30.09.2011, Bremen, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 18.11.2011.

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.