'People fail to coordinate on the optimal equilibrium'

Gianluca Grimalda, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, on collective action problems, game theory, and cooperation on COVID-19

'Polycentric systems adapt and mitigate failure'

Senior Research Fellow Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre argues for adaptation, innovation, and learning during global emergencies

'Diseases are ranked according to their perceived costs'

Benjamin Quasinowski, Institute of Sociology and IN-EAST, University of Duisburg-Essen, on metaphors of war in the health discourse and cost-benefit calculus in national health planning

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Umberto Mario Sconfienza, 'Tracking Post-sustainability Narratives', on p. 22
Initially, this issue was planned to focus on the topic of ‘Communicative Power and Global Cooperation’, in combination with our 2nd Annual conference. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to minimize social contact have led us to postpone the conference. Luckily, Martin Wolf, our editor, had already planned a special section on global health issues for the June edition of the magazine, parts of which we are including in the present issue. We are very grateful to the contributors who have agreed to refocus their articles on the issues of global cooperation related to the pandemic. While it is still too early to encompass the full implications of the corona crisis for global governance, articles in this magazine address some of the attempts by states and non-state actors to cope with this global emergency. The corona crisis highlights the relevance of communicative power in debates about pathways to deal with the pandemic in polycentric governance arrangements spanning across national and global arenas.

This magazine therefore aims at contributing to emerging debates about global cooperation in the current crisis, as well as reporting about current and upcoming projects and publications in the Centre’s established research and policy fields. Articles range from reflections on modelling interpersonal and international coordination games at the time of the pandemic (Grimalda), applying polycentric governance analysis to global health challenges (Deloffre) to analyzing the role of metaphors (Quasinowski, Gadinger/Freistein), normative claims (Groth) and narratives (Sconfienza) in technical discourses and political communication. In our Special, Anna-Katharina Hornidge, the new director of the German Development Institute, talks about her research agenda for studying knowledge regimes, development and cooperation, and discusses implications for the current corona crisis.

Enjoy reading!

Sigrid Quack

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On 23rd of March, Matt Hancock, the British Health Secretary, publicly accused people who were socializing in the streets of Great Britain of being ‘very selfish’. Some days before, the UK government had issued the advice that British residents should preferably stay at home in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease, or, if going out, should stand two meters away from each other. The advice was not enforced either by a decree or police intervention. Hence, it relied only on people’s cooperation. Was Mr Hancock right in telling these people off? Was he morally justified in reprimanding their behaviour? Was his expectation that people would follow such an advice empirically grounded?

During the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen cooperation in action at many levels, between people, between countries and even between regions within each country. Cooperation ‘proper’ is part of a broader range of collective action problems that are also normally referred to as ‘cooperation’. And yet, incentives and expected outcomes are completely different among these types. In this article I will use the tools of Game Theory (GT) to account for these differences and analyze them through evidence coming from the behavioural sciences.

The social dilemma

The advice to stay at home during the course of a pandemic is a textbook example of what social psychologists call a social dilemma. Suppose that everyone stays at home. If I think just for myself, I then have a massive incentive to flout the advice and go out. First, I do not risk any infection because nobody else is around. Second, I can do many enjoyable things being the only one around. But if everyone reasons in the same way, everyone will go out. By doing this, they will put their own health and everyone’s health at risk. Compliance with the advice to stay at home requires cooperation. This is defined as an action in which an individual sacrifices her self-interest for the benefit of others.

Is this outcome to be expected? Yes and no. Hundreds of experiments in behavioural social science show a clear pattern: Many people – but not all - cooperate at the beginning of the interaction; then cooperation unravels but never reaches a situation of complete absence of cooperation (Gächter et al, 2010). Why is this the case? Typically, in a cooperation problem we can identify a small group of ‘good Samaritans’. They cooperate regardless of what others do. We then have a larger group of purely selfish people. Finally, the majority of people are ‘conditional co-operators’, that is, they are motivated to cooperate only if they expect others to cooperate as well. According to economist Samuel Bowles, the biggest challenge for policy-makers is to discipline the selfish people without ‘crowding out’ the altruistic incentives of co-operators.

Experiments and evolutionary biology have taught us that cooperation can be upheld by several mechanisms (Rand & Nowak, 2015), including endogenous peer punishment and reputation. The former relies on individuals punishing each other. Typically, the presence of a few vigilantes is enough to discipline the selfish, but not in all cultural contexts. Reputation relies on people’s incentive in keeping a good social image towards society, because typically those who help others today will be helped by others tomorrow. A third mechanism is enforcement by law. Cooperation may simply be a legal obligation and everyone caught not cooperating would be fined or jailed. When state intervention is lacking, other authorities may step in. In Brazil, drug traffickers are enforcing curfews in favelas, given President Bolsonaro’s inaction. In practice, though, law enforcement can never be complete. Not even a totalitarian state-police can control all its citizens’ behaviour. Ultimately, every law requires cooperation. As noted by Bowles and Polanya-Reyes (2012), a law has two functions: enforcing the behaviour object of the law, and informing the public that the government deems this behaviour as worth of support. In the current crisis, policy-makers seem to have neglected this second aspect. Presumably,
many citizens have thought that the advice to avoid social contact was not to be taken too seriously, precisely because it was not enshrined in law. In Western countries lockdowns could not be as strict as in China, where people were de facto jailed in their homes. Governor Andrew Cuomo said that it was ‘anti-American’ to forbid New Yorkers from leaving their state, and issued a stay-at-home order that was in fact no more than an advice, as it is not enforced on individuals. President Donald Trump never issued a nationwide lockdown. As a result, people have reduced their movements much less in the US than in other highly affected countries (see Figure 1). This compliance with libertarian values is going to be paid for with thousands of human lives being lost.

Figure 1: Variation, by country, in residents’ mobility as of 5th of April in comparison with baseline values (Source: Google maps)

In sum, reality will fall in between the two extremes of the ‘moral’ solution of universal cooperation and the selfish prescription of universal defection. The nature of incentives at play, the cogency of the social norms upholding cooperation, and the strictness and effectiveness of government enforcement will determine whether we end up closer to the moral solution or to the selfish one. One word of warning comes again from behavioural sciences: when moral norms and empirical norms – namely, people’s actual behaviour – conflict, people will tend to follow the latter, not the former (Bicchieri & Xiao, 2009).

The weakest link game

The COVID-19 crisis also proposed other types of collective action problems. The UN Secretary General recently stated that ‘We are only as strong as the weakest’. The problem of eradicating a virus is indeed known in GT as a ‘weakest link game’ (WLG). Each country can put in different levels of ‘effort’ in fighting the virus domestically – for instance the lockdown imposed on citizens may be hard, medium, soft, or absent. But diseases know no borders. For this reason, in a WLG, a country has no incentive to put in more effort than that provided by the country that is putting the least level of effort. But a country that is currently the weakest link would have a massive incentive to scale up its effort to the level of the country that is up at the next level. Finally, arguably the costs and benefits of the interaction make the situation where every country puts in the highest effort the best outcome for everyone. Unlike the social dilemma, the collective and the individual optimum coincide. Nevertheless, GT teaches us that all other outcomes in which countries put in the same levels of effort are also ‘equilibria’ of the game.

This interaction is a puzzle for game theorists because one equilibrium is clearly the best for everyone, but there is no certainty that a sub-optimal equilibrium will not be selected. This outcome is confirmed in experiments. More often than not, people fail to coordinate on the optimal equilibrium. It suffices that some people do not pay enough attention, or that they willfully act as saboteurs, for a suboptimal outcome to emerge (Riedl et al., 2016).

How are countries faring in this ‘game’? Figure 2 plots the government’s strength of response to the crisis, based on Oxford University’s COVID-19 tracker. The higher the Stringency index the stronger the response. Figure 2 shows some evidence of convergence over time, but significant differences still persist. While Italy, France, and Spain are close to the top of the index, the US and the UK rank more than 20 points below, Germany lying in between.

Of course, reality is always more complex than what the application of a simple TG model entails. However, Figure 2 suggests that countries are not really acting as team players, either because they have not fully internalized the consequences of their actions for other countries, or because they perceive their costs of intervention to be different, or because they are acting plainly irrationally. Another dimension to this

Figure 2: Evolution of ‘Stringency index’
game, however, is the possibility that countries shut their borders to other countries to contain the spread of the disease. This has been an all too common response in the current crisis, although the political goal of blaming other countries for the spread of the virus was probably a stronger motivation than the purely medical one. In a specifically designed experiment, Riedl et al. (2016) show that this strategy will bring about the most efficient outcome, because agents who are initially excluded eventually converge to the efficient equilibrium. This may mean that our lives are going to be conducted in a situation of semi-Apartheid in the near future. The fact that lockdowns of the type we have seen in Western countries will be unsustainable in developing countries (DCs) is also worrying, and adds equity and humanitarian concerns to efficiency concerns.

The chicken game
A final class of collective action problems applies to the process of finding a vaccine against COVID-19. At first sight, this interaction goes under the name of ‘chicken game’ (CG) in GT. A CG is still a coordination problem like the WLG, but this time of an asymmetric nature. It is certainly the case that the benefits to find a vaccine for each country exceed the costs. Moreover, a vaccine seems to be a pure public good, because consumption is non-rival and, in principle, non-excludable. In an interaction between only two countries, both outcomes in which one country finds the vaccine and the other does not are equilibria of the game. However, the country that did not have to spend money to find the vaccine is better off with respect to the other country. The situation in which no country invests to find the vaccine is catastrophic and is not an equilibrium. But even the situation where both countries invest is not an equilibrium, because a country could be better off by not investing and free riding on the other country’s effort. Like the WLG, experiments conducted on the CG find that coordination on one equilibrium is not a foregone conclusion (Milinski et al., 2008). Inequality aversion, or just selfishness, may prevent the achievement of the most profitable outcome.

At the moment, we see few collective initiatives to find a vaccine, while most countries are acting alone. This suggests two things. First, once again countries are not acting as team players. The probability of finding a vaccine would be much higher if this game was not played as a chicken game but as a collective effort game, in which laboratories around the world coordinated their research to find a vaccine. Second, this race makes me fear so that some country leaders see the vaccine not as a global public good, but rather as a private good, which should be put to the use of ‘my-country first’, possibly to gain some kind of competitive advantage. This, if true, would be a failure not only for cooperation but also for human-kind as a whole.

In this article I have illustrated three types of collective action problems connected with the COVID-19 crisis. Cooperation, or coordination, between countries seems to be lacking, while cooperation at the individual level has been significant, though not universal and for sure higher when backed by formal enforcement. It is to be hoped that country leaders adopt the dispositional cooperative attitudes that we see in their citizenry. They should also appreciate that not all interactions are zero-sum games, but rather, that there are significant collective benefits to reap, even if the hurdles to achieve them are undeniable.

References

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Failed or Failsafe? Global Pandemic Response as Polycentric Governance

Maryam Zarnegar Deloffre

As scholars of global politics grapple with the Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic and its implications for the world order, they stress the failure of centralized policy response at the global level. Analyses of the death of multilateralism, the decline of American hegemony, and the end of a global neoliberal order abound. A polycentric approach to global governance shifts our mindset to look beyond the failure of centralized action and instead consider how multiple actors, working across different scales provide global emergency governance, which includes humanitarian crises and pandemics. These failures spark adaptation, innovation and learning, which then become the architecture of global governance and provide a failsafe for ensuring emergency response. To understand how global emergency governance works, we need to shift focus from centralization and efficiency, to examining the actors, mechanisms, and scales that build redundancy and resilience to failure.

Governance Myopia
Global governance scholarship often centers on inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), such as the United Nations (UN) or the World Health Organization (WHO). IGOs were founded to foster global cooperation on issues where states might shirk moral obligations and place their countries’ self-interests ahead of collective global goals. IGOs are bureaucracies organized around rules, routines and standard operating procedures that increase efficiency and generate predictable responses. IGOs are made up of member states which gives them legal authority and political legitimacy to pursue policies for the collective good, but at the same this composition causes political gridlock when states disagree on how to define and achieve the greater good.

In an essay published in early April, I detailed the challenges to global cooperation and the unlikelihood of a decisive, coordinated pandemic response by multilateral institutions. In response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2177 which declared the crisis a threat to international peace and security and created the first-ever UN emergency health mission (Deloffre 2016). The UN Resolution and mission were indeed unprecedented, this type of centralized response is not typically how emergency governance occurs—it’s the exception, not the rule.

Polycentric Governance
Polycentric governance views the “global” not as action orchestrated by IGOs but as the activity of multiple actors working across layers or scales of governance to address global problems such as pandemics. Complex emergencies, like recent Ebola outbreaks or the COVID-19 pandemic, start with an acute medical emergency then spillover to the economy, affect access to food and education, and slow down development. Global emergency governance therefore involves mobilizing and coordinating the activities of UN agencies, governments, and non-state actors working in multiple sectors of activity across different scales of governance (Held et al 2019).

By contrast to arrangements where a central authority oversees governance, in polycentric governance a mix of private, public, and hybrid authorities engage in governance across overlapping jurisdictions and various scales—local, national, regional and global—to provide public goods in a given policy arena (See Ostrom and Ostrom et al. 1961). Three features of polycentric
governance help us understand how global emergency governance works: adaptive capacity, institutional fit and mitigation of institutional failure (Carlisle and Gruby 2017).

**Adaptive Capacity** Multiple authorities working on a policy area or problem bring different perspectives and diverse experiences, their interactions lead to experimentation, learning and creative problem solving and thus improves the ability to adapt to unforeseen challenges and events (Morrison et al 2017; Carlisle and Gruby 2017; Jordan et al 2018).

**Institutional Fit** Polycentric governance systems are dynamic; public goods are delivered by different configurations of actors coordinating across multiple scales to optimize service delivery (Sovacool 2011). The scope and scale of the problem determines which actors are involved.

**Mitigate Failure** The plurality of actors means that more organizations provide public goods and services, which broadens and deepens coverage, and serves as a safety net to ensure delivery of goods and services (Morrison et al 2017; Carlisle and Gruby 2017). This redundancy in activity and resources mitigates governance failures, although it can also increase competition and transaction costs.

**How does polycentricity help us understand global emergency governance?**

Examining efforts to stem the next wave of the pandemic in crisis and conflict-affected countries, including Haiti, Venezuela, Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Ethiopia helps illustrate the polycentric nature of global emergency governance. Crisis-affected and developing countries have weak health care systems and capacity and face additional challenges like fragile economies, large vulnerable populations, and food insecurity that could exacerbate the effects of the pandemic. In terms of institutional fit, the impending humanitarian crisis requires a multilateral response, a surge of capacity (medical staff, supplies, expert teams) and financial resources for the emergency response. However, political gridlock, international travel bans, worldwide shortages of medical supplies, and economic crises in donor countries mean a multilateral, centralized humanitarian response is unlikely. A polycentric lens helps us see the failsafes in the system that mitigate failure.

Although a key capacity of global actors is to mobilize support and financial resources for emergency response, global emergency governance is chronically underfunded (ALNAP 2018). The WHO’s efforts to raise funds has produced dismal results as have the UN’s attempts to secure contributions through the UN COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). The Global HRP remains unsupported with merely 19.7% of total requirements funded. The WHO recently innovated a direct, crowd-funded Solidarity Response Fund to generate revenue for its COVID response. In the humanitarian sector, flexible funding mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), pool funding before a disaster happens, positioning resources for quick allocation when necessary. These funding mechanisms improve responsiveness, decrease response time, and decentralize decision-making by authorizing local actors and humanitarian country teams to allocate funding as needs arise (Deloffre 2020). Financial innovation such as CERF, which is currently the second highest donor to the COVID-19 Global HRP, means valuable time is not lost waiting for funds to arrive.

Regional, national and local actors provide specialized expertise, knowledge, staff and coordination in pandemic response. The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an important post-Ebola reform, was founded to provide regional leadership on health and is an example of how polycentric systems adapt and mitigate failure. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak, bureaucratic politics, miscommunication, and a lack of coordination between WHO headquarters and its regional office in Africa contributed to a slow, ineffective response (Kamradt-Scott 2016). Africa CDC therefore provides an extra failsafe at the regional level to enhance pandemic response. In February it established the Africa Task Force for Coronavirus, to coordinate preparedness, disease prevention, clinical management, diagnostics and supply chain management across the continent. Together with the African Union, it issued the African Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak to coordinate a regional response. Given the worldwide demands on the WHO’s capacity and resources, Africa CDC may be the critical factor in ensuring an effective regional response.

A polycentric approach to pandemic response reveals the adaptation, innovation, and learning that emerge during global emergencies and form the architecture of global emergency governance. For scholars, adopting such an approach means examining how governance occurs beyond states and multilateral organizations and understanding how systems adapt to provide global public goods. For policymakers, polycentricity encourages thinking about how to build policies and systems resilient to shocks even if that entails higher transaction costs and redundancies.

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Can Metaphors of War Motivate Cooperative Action in Global Health? – A Comparative Look at Cardiovascular Diseases and SARS-CoV-2

Benjamin Quasinowski

Although there is a full fledged academic field concerned with strategies of communication in healthcare settings, viz. ‘health communication’, there are still many puzzles concerning the question of how communication about diseases and health risks can be done effectively, i.e. in ways such that behavioural changes on a population regularly follow suit or measures taken by public health authorities are met with acceptance. I came across some of these questions when I investigated the spread of professional knowledge about cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) during my work within the project ‘Travelling knowledge: the glocalization of medical professional knowledge and practice’ (www.udue.de/know). In particular, it got me thinking about links between health policies in the domain of CVDs and rhetorics of war. I had noticed that many policy documents issued by organizations in the arena of global health often make use of figurative language in their health communication. For example, a WHO webpage on the top ten causes of deaths worldwide says, ‘Ischaemic heart disease and stroke are the world’s biggest killers, accounting for a combined 15.2 million deaths in 2016’ (WHO 2018). The World Heart Federation positions itself as the organization ‘leading the global fight against cardiovascular disease’ (WHF 2016: 5), and Sandoz, a division of Novartis, similarly sees itself ‘fighting the world’s biggest killer’ (Sandoz 2020). Many other health organizations, medical associations, patient organizations, and governments use similar framing devices. Thus, efforts to take actions against CVDs and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are regularly described in terms that are borrowed from martial language.

What are the motives for the use of this kind of figurative language in public health discourses? The increased significance of NCDs is certainly part of an answer to this question. While infectious diseases have dominated international and global health politics over many decades of the twentieth century, in recent years the agendas have been taking a somewhat new turn, increasingly allocating a more prominent place to NCDs. The WHO seems to have been one of the most relevant actors driving this change, not just through financial and technical means, but also on a policy and thus communicative level (Weisz/Vignola-Gagné 2015). This shift of attention has largely been due to the introduction and global spread of new methods to measure and quantify diseases and health risks. In particular, the introduction of the concept of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) in the Global Burden of Disease study (Murray 1990) has changed the perception of diseases in global health circles.

As Adams has noted (2016), universal metrics such as the DALYs offer new possibilities for making comparisons on a global scale. These new metrics link health
to the economy in ways that have led to an increasingly fiscalized understanding of diseases and health risks. In effect, it is common now to think of them in terms of, on the one hand, the costs (or burden) they pose, and, on the other hand, the benefits that particular interventions are deemed to have. On a national level, cost-benefit calculi thus make individual diseases and disease groups comparable with others, so that public health planners and politicians can set health priorities on a presumably more rational and efficient basis. Moreover, since DALYs and other metrics are constructed with the aim of being universally applicable, they can easily be scaled to a global scope.

Aside from sheer mortality statistics, metrics like DALYs thus serve as platforms allowing diseases to be ranked according to their perceived costs. As previously mentioned, NCDs, and in particular CVDs, occupy top positions in these rankings. Interestingly, however, the financial allocation to programmes concerned with NCDs are regularly out of step with the significance that these diseases should have, were they to be judged according to the relevant metrics (Stuckler et al. 2008). The divergence between the ostensibly worldwide significance of NCDs and the actual funding that programmes directed to these diseases receive may be one reason for framing health risks through martial concepts. One of the rhetoric devices used in this discourse are metaphors. The use of concepts such as ‘killer’, ‘enemy’, ‘fight’, etc. in the domain of global public health clearly points to the attempt to convey certain features from the source domain of these concepts, i.e. from the language of war. In part, these features convey the impression of a state of emergency, implying an urgent demand for action. Moreover, these concepts are often used hyperbolically. As scholars in communication studies (Burgers et al. 2016: 422) have suggested, the combined usage of figurative framing devices such as metaphor and hyperbole, in public discourse, is likely to occur in cases where topics are new to an audience or have been unduly neglected. Some observers of global health argue that this is exactly the situation with NCDs (Horton/Sargent 2018). As yet, however, the persuasiveness of these figurative devices, as measured by global efforts to tackle NCDs, remains questionable.

What is it, then, aside from the persuasiveness of fiscalizing numbers and rhetorical devices, that makes global health concerns more compelling? A brief comparative look at SARS-CoV-2, which entered the global health scene in the beginning of 2020, may be instructive. Very similar to the linguistic framing of NCDs and CVDs, public discourses with regard to the virus have utilized a martial rhetoric. On March 26,
the director-general of WHO addressed the leaders of the G20, who were meeting virtually at an extraordinary summit, with the following words:

You have come together to confront the defining health crisis of our time: we are at war with a virus that threatens to tear us apart - if we let it. (WHO 2020)

Many others, amongst them presidents like Donald Trump and Emanuel Macron, have been using similar figurative language when addressing the public on the threat of the virus, partly with the aim of legitimizing some severe restrictions of civil liberties, and partly also with intentions similar to those of the general-director of the WHO, i.e. to encourage joint and coordinated global action to fight the virus. Despite some voices warning against national isolation and global disintegration, there are some indications that the globally coordinated efforts to tackle the threat of SARS-CoV-2 will be rather prevailing (Mesfin 2020).

At this time, it is already safe to say that the financial means that have been raised to take up the fight against the virus are enormous. On the other hand, of course, the threat posed by the virus seems to be larger and much more immediate and urgent than that of NCDs. Thus, with regard to the martial language that is utilized in both cases, the fit between the source domain (war) and the target domain (global health) might be better in case of the current pandemic. Moreover, whereas in case of NCDs, estimations about health risks can be based on empirically grounded statistical patterns, in case of SARS-CoV-2 simulations and projections based on estimated guesses seem much more relevant. Actors in global health are thus confronted with much higher levels of uncertainty, in terms of projected costs, casualties, and the further developments in general. This, in turn, is akin much more to a war-like scenario and forbids collective procrastination. As a tentative conclusion: metaphors of war certainly can be suitable framing devices to motivate global cooperative action, but they might not be the right choice to communicate the risks of CVDs compellingly.

References


Kippers and Dreams of Empire: Populist Communication Styles

Frank Gadinger and Katja Freistein

What a fish has to do with politics

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson likes to bring a fish to his speeches and public performances. He does not eat it, but uses it as an important prop from his symbolic repertoire. He adapted this ritual from Nigel Farage, the former leader of the Brexit party and UKIP campaign, who also used fish to demonstrate his solidarity with British fishermen. In showing the fish, Johnson strategically plays with a narrative that worked well in the UKIP campaign: honest men (like British fishermen) find their existence under threat because of unjust EU politics. Letting fishermen down is of course only one part of a bigger betrayal of EU elites against the British ‘people’ and threatens the loss of British national identity in the future. This narrative was exemplarily visualized in a famous poster of the UKIP campaign, in which the symbolic figure of the elderly fisherman Tony blamed the EU (‘Gutted. Tony’s business has been ripped apart by the EU’) for not caring about the lives of normal, patriotic men who represent the lost, but true spirit of the ‘body of the people’ and deserve more respect.

In one exemplary scene before the House of Commons in mid-2019, Johnson made the (fictional) claim that the EU ruined British fishermen on the (non-EU) Isle of Man through rules to keep fish fresh in a plastic ice pillow (in fact a regulation issued by UK government). He held up a fish (like Tony) to complain about ‘pointless’ kipper rules in a rather blatant show of seeming solidarity with British fishermen. He joked ‘We will bring the kippers back. It’s not a red herring’, one of many fish puns used to keep the issue political and funny. Regarding the broader issue of communication, the example shows how using populist rhetoric undermines the idea that political communication operates with rational arguments and truth claims. Instead, the power of political narratives is embedded in a variety of storytelling practices such as imaginations through metaphors, provoking fantasies, mobilizing emotions, bodily performances and rhetorical skills. Many British people, who voted for Brexit, did not want to hear the story of British benefits of being part of the EU, difficult cooperation and complex problem solving. They preferred the dystopian fantasy of a battle against the EU and the dreams of reactivating the glorious past of a British Empire. The narrative of becoming part of an empire is more pleasing and appealing than the reality of the EU; and laughing about a political dispute feels better than testing the viability of arguments. In a recent article, we demonstrate how right-wing populists operate with fantasmatic logic in their storytelling practices through a detailed ‘visual narrative analysis’ of two campaigning posters. Our empirical findings support the more general claim that such forms of communication building on symbols, irony, humour and not truth, rationality or actual capabilities are often characteristic of populists, whose central aim seems to be pleasing their audience.
Symbolic politics and practices of populist storytelling

However, it would be misleading to claim that only populists operate in their practices of political communication with symbolic politics. As pioneers of this field of research such as Murray Edelman observed some decades ago, there is a broader development among politicians and established parties in liberal democracies as well to reach their audience through symbolic politics. Think of politicians who wear the typical working gear of steel and coal workers when they visit their industrial sites to symbolically consolidate their commitment.

The difference between mainstream parties and populists is a matter of degree, albeit not simply a small degree. Politicians like Merkel believe more obviously in the exchange of arguments, political programs and finding agreements through comprise in democratic practices. As an effect of transformations in the relationship between media, politics and public, politicians from mainstream parties have also complemented their communication practices with symbolic elements, which critical observers interpret as the ‘shadow of populism’ (Margaret Canovan), which play on similar affects and effects as more openly populist ones. Most of the (mainly right-wing) populists, however, do not seem interested in solving complex political problems and searching for common solutions but rather in challenging or even undermining existing democratic institutions such as the rule of law and the separation of powers.

One trait of populist political communication that has been identified by such well-known populism scholars like Cas Mudde is anti-elitism. Johnson’s silliness, expressed in ironic language and buffoon-like personal habits (mussed hair, slightly negligent style of dressing, brash behaviour etc.) are geared towards appearing harmless and apolitical; former Eton boy Johnson is, of course, part of the same elite that has strategically cultivated displays of flippancy and fatuity for decades (already popularized in Wodehouse’s depiction of Bertie Wooster). The symbol of the kipper, a staple food in British culture, helps Johnson appear down-to-earth. Similarly, Johnson’s admission in a TV interview that he liked to build buses from wine boxes, furthermore, resonated with a public that preferred to talk about his eccentricity instead of his (lack of) political prowess.

Yet, this strategy of communicating mainly in this manner has societal repercussions. When US President Donald Trump fought the Twitter battle against the NFL sportsman Nick Kaepernick (and other sportsmen) who kneeled during the national anthem to express their critical voice against racism in the US society for weeks on end, this seemingly reverted around the issue of how to practice patriotic values, but effectively served to silence criticism and bury substantive debates about racism.

Crisis tests

The danger of reducing political communication to a largely symbolic, humoresque and polemic mode now becomes visible in the face of our most recent crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. While the failure of many governments dominated by leaders that communicate in populist modes, such as the US, the UK or Brazil, to adequately respond to the crisis cannot be reduced to their communication styles, it nevertheless becomes clear that these leaders cannot play out their main strengths now. The strong need of the public to get serious information by politicians and the media, based on scientific expertise and transparent procedures, does currently not resonate with populists’ reluctance of uncomfortable political realities and the betrayal narrative of fake news. Moreover, the major populist mode of destroying trust in democratic institutions by pushing feelings of anti-politics has been fallen out of time in urgent situations of crisis-management and legitimate decision-making. This does not mean that populism is in any danger to be overcome, but it means that this reality test for populist politicians will show what they have to offer beyond symbolic or ironic gestures.

Notes


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Technical Discourse and Normative Affirmations: Implicit Justice Claims in Multilateral Negotiations

Stefan Groth

The public view of multilateral negotiations on pressing issues is often paradoxical: On the one hand, they are accompanied by a hyper-moralization of topics, finding its expression in protests, media coverage and far-reaching demands for immediate action. Issues are, e.g., highly morally charged with references to human rights or linked to catastrophic scenarios if no measures are taken. On the other hand, negotiations themselves are – to some participants and observers frustratingly so – at times mostly about technical details or void of moral claims. Accordingly, multilateral negotiations have often been critiqued for not sufficiently addressing issues of justice and for rendering contentious issues ‘technical.’ The contrast between high hopes in global fora and toned-down technical debates with meagre procedural outputs can, understandably, lead to frustrated stakeholders and a decline of confidence in the potential of multilateral organizations to alleviate current problems. But is a ‘dejustization’ of discourse, i.e. negotiations seemingly avoiding addressing issues of justice, indicative of the absence of moral issues and arguments? And does a ‘technization’ of discourse which shifts the focus away from questions of justice and toward issues of legal harmonization or technical standards necessarily exclude the voicing of normative claims? Are multilateral negotiations only about moral claims if they are explicitly voiced? A number of findings and approaches from linguistic anthropology suggest that the answers to these questions is rather ‘no’ than ‘yes.’

Normative claims, i.e. utterances that include value judgments, specifically those pertaining to issues of justice, can come in many forms. This holds true for communication in everyday settings as well as for multilateral negotiations. Research on communicative indirection and conversational implicature has shown that in many contexts, it can be favorable to phrase claims in an indirect manner. As anthropologist Don Brenneis illustrates in his work on Indo-Fijian communities, in political settings overtly direct and explicit demands and statements can be regarded as inappropriate – in such situations, ‘sweet talk’ is preferred over ‘straight talk.’ This is the case for diplomatic settings as well: While it might occur that actors openly accuse or blame other actors in multilateral fora, it is a practice that is both frowned upon and an exception to communicative rules of interaction. Normative claims need to fulfill a number of conditions to be successful (and fitting), among them that utterances must be conventional in the given context, be appropriate in terms of circumstances and audience, have a propositional content directed at a future act, or be sincere. Philosopher John Langshaw Austin termed such conditions ‘felicity conditions’ of performative utterances. They have been shown to be highly specific regarding cultural and situational contexts rather than universal properties of communication.

In multilateral settings, context as a central factor in analyzing and understanding linguistic performances can be configured in ways that deter actors to use explicit normative claims. Rather, the communicative modalities of negotiations can lead to situations in which a shift to implicit justice claims is ad-
vantageous, e.g. in multilateral fora or negotiations which have been set up as an answer to normative pressures. Recurring statements on these normative pressures can then be seen as a hindrance to substantial progress and can be easily countered as they form the common or self-evident basis for deliberations. An example for this is a special committee of the World Intellectual Property Organization on the protection of traditional knowledge. Here, normative arguments about perceived global injustices resulting from the current patent system and about the lack of protection for the intellectual property of indigenous peoples are often met with blanket affirmative statements about the importance of the committee’s goals. In the committee, statements about the lack of progress or about deadlocks in negotiations, e.g. by indigenous observers, are bolstered by references to human and indigenous rights or moral obligations. This explicit voicing of normative claims is, in many instances, countered by non-consequential normative affirmations: ‘Yes, we agree that this is important, and we should continue to work towards finding solutions. But we need to clarify the technical details.’ Having been set up after normative pressures from developing countries, the mere existence of the committee and its meetings can be portrayed as a general willingness and consensus to cooperate and is used to counter such justice claims.

In the WIPO committee as well as in other multilateral fora, felicity conditions can often disadvantage overtly explicit claims for justice. Yet, in such cases, the apparent absence of such claims (the ‘technization’ or ‘dejustization’ of discourse) does not mean that discourse is only technical and excludes issues of justice; it can also signify a shift toward a strategically favorable diplomatic register in which normative stances are implied but not made explicit. The condition for such a strategic shift is a reflexive use of language and its pragmatic features (something which has been termed ‘metapragmatics’ in linguistic anthropology). Actors can accordingly try to translate their claims into more technical discourses or to encapsulate them in policy. Being aware that explicit justice claims are, in terms of communicative strategy, comparably weak, framing claims in an implicit manner and tying them to specific policy recommendations is advantageous in at least two regards: It cannot be countered easily with general affirmations with no implications, and it opens up the possibility to build coalitions with other actors with similar policy goals (but not necessarily with similar normative claims).

While it can be rightly critiqued when issues are prevented from being discussed by focusing on procedural and technical issues, this can be used as an advantage as well. Yet, it requires specific communicative competence to identify felicity conditions or to translate explicit normative claims into implicit claims. From the perspective of research on multilateral negotiations, this highlights the necessity of contextualizing utterances and scrutinizing the relation between normative and nonnormative statements to tease out the implicit normative contents of communication. The apparent absence of normative claims in negotiations does not preclude a technization or dejustization of discourse. Rather, it can also signify a strategic shift toward a diplomatic register in which normative stances are only implied – not as a way of masking or concealing the normative content of utterances but as a strategy for communicating them more effectively. One reason for this is that implicit justice claims are often more successful or appropriate than explicit claims, because they prevent direct confrontation and leave room for open exchanges. Indirect speech is used as a deliberate strategy that considers felicity conditions. Although technical or procedural arguments can lack explicit normative content, the respective positions can be based on normative claims. In this respect, seemingly neutral expertise is often used politically or strategically and is accordingly based on or tied to normative claims and intentions.

Furthermore, there are often other communicative situations in multilateral negotiations which are used to mediate normative claims. In these, felicity conditions are configured differently and allow for explicitly voicing normative claims. Bilateral and less formal exchanges between actors from member states or organizations, cafeteria meetings, informal hall talks, information sessions, for example, are often used to mediate normative views. These exchanges, however, do not appear in official meeting reports or transcripts. Ethnographic research that also includes these less formal, undocumented exchanges and pays attention to communicative modalities generally and specifically for felicity conditions is needed to grasp the full extent of normative claims – implicit and explicit, on the record and informally.

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Knowledge Regimes, Development, Cooperation, and the Current Corona Crisis

Interview with Anna-Katharina Hornidge, the new Director of the Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and Professor of Global Sustainable Development at the University of Bonn

QM: We wanted to begin with a question regarding your work on knowledge societies. How do you envision the link between knowledge regimes (KR), and global cooperation and globalization?

A.-K. Hornidge: A knowledge regime (KR) is a regime that structures what we define as worth knowing, and for that reason, worth preserving and worth creating more of in our ‘centres of calculation’, in the words of Latour, meaning our centres of scientific knowledge production, our laboratories, lecture theatres, libraries, and so on. A knowledge regime is defined by the standards that we employ for deciphering what we regard as knowledge, as worth knowing and worth passing it on to other generations. At the same time, we are guided in these decisions by the knowledge regime(s) we operate in. As such, knowledge regimes are foundational for any form of international cooperation. They determine the topical, regional focus and type of cooperation, the epistemological and ontological premises. And of course, transregional knowledge cooperation always also affects the further shaping of the knowledge regimes involved.

QM: What challenges do you see developing in this arena in the coming years?

A.-K. Hornidge: World society is characterized by substantial economic, social, cultural and political differences, which result in very different outlooks onto our planet, its limited carrying capacities and our role in finding sustainable pathways into planetary futures. While it is very clear that we have to find a joint answer to the environmental and social challenges ahead, the epistemological premises that we come from in imagining these futures and negotiating the pathways towards them are fundamentally different. The outlooks on ‘reality’ and ‘future’ range from hyper-modernist visions to ideas of returning to a state of ‘pristine environment’, just to give one example. The UN Agenda 2030 depicts this tension between finding one voice, while acknowledging the multitude of priority settings. Yet, what we also observe here, is the gap between a formulated joint vision and actual implementation. Nation-states and societal sectors (i.e. politics, religion, education and research, economy, etc.) substantially vary in how
they interpret the Agenda and take steps towards it. Thus, major challenges in the future are the continuous negotiation and renegotiation of the questions of how we define reality, which realities are being pursued globally, and how they speak to each other in a way so that a joint sustainable and planetary future can be achieved. We are not talking of finding one way to one sustainable future. But we are talking of never-ending local, national, regional, transregional, international, global dialogues and negotiations – across political borders, sectoral, status and religion-based, disciplinary and hierarchical boundaries.

QM: In what ways do you think developing countries in particular could benefit from an understanding of global knowledge regimes?

A.-K. Hornidge: Taking the example of western science, and how it has extrapolated industrial and economic gains made through scientific interventions into more investments back into education and scientific research, I would suggest, perhaps even a little controversially, that a focus on science and education policy in developing countries would in the long run bring much more substantial growth than a lot of other traditionally development-related policy fields. I believe that science and investment into education and research is absolutely key to development. The data shows a very clear, direct correlation.

QM: How do you then, in the same vein, imagine a sustainable exchange of knowledge in today’s world?

A.-K. Hornidge: Knowledge is always also a resource. A free and unlimited sharing thus is unrealistic and probably also organizationally speaking hardly possible. Further, we need actually a high degree of diversity in knowledge production and transmission. Only this diversity assures a flexibility in being able to deal with rapidly accelerated change processes. Or with sudden decelerations, as we currently observe due to the Corona-pandemic. A sustainable exchange of knowledge thus means that we reduce hierarchies between knowledge systems. An important step here is the development and further fostering of science systems all over the globe. There is not one type of science, i.e. Western/Northern science in a Kantian tradition, but there are many. And that’s exactly what we need. Together, in close cooperation and dialogue with each other, they then bear the potential to act as a telescope for understanding human-nature interactions and what they mean for a sustainable, planetary future. The ocean, or any global common, here offers a uniting focus that brings actors into a tangible conversation with each other.

QM: In this equalizing initiative for long-term development, where would you place the role of the
state, and how important are non-state actors like transnational NGOs in building KRs in the view of global cooperation?

A.-K. Hornidge: In shaping a KR, the most crucial role still belongs to the state, as they are the ones responsible for allocating budgets for secondary and tertiary education and research, sometimes also for religion, which is in many countries an important knowledge actor. Innovation and science policies are largely in the hands of nation states, or, for instance in the EU, regional organizations. Nevertheless, transnational actors, like international NGOs are important, as they substantially contribute to opening the container space of the nation state, and their initiatives create the space and platform for the cooperation and exchange of knowledge across levels, sectors, social groups.

QM: In that vein, what trends do you identify in the coming years, in the space of international development cooperation?

A.-K. Hornidge: Crisis management is currently an obvious one, in addition to what a crisis means for the widening of existing social disparities. We are observing a lot of crisis-related conversations with regard to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, not all the conversations can be transferred to other crises or ‘creeping disasters’ we have been facing, like climate change and environmental degradation. But in relation to our response to slower, longer-developing crises, the way in which we deal with the current crisis and how that affects the ways in which we assess liberal democracies versus other forms of political organization, are worth reflecting on. We are observing currently that the perception of the crisis substantially determines how we are dealing with it, i.e., a sudden crisis like this pandemic elicits a sudden response, while creeping disasters have in the past not shown to produce the same governance responses. The sense of urgency seems to determine substantially political responses. This sense of urgency nevertheless also suggests that we post-Corona have to invest substantially into strengthening the resilience of societies in preparing for diverse forms of crisis. Directly linked to this, are increasing social inequalities, between countries and within societies that substantially undermine the societies’ capacities to prepare for and respond to crises.

QM: On that note, finally, in what ways do you envision the possible synergies growing between the DIE and our Centre in the coming years?

A.-K. Hornidge: I see a number of direct links and mutual interests between your Centre and DIE in the fields of (a) transnational and global cooperation, the role of knowledge in these kinds of cooperation, and how that affects development around the world, as well as (b) political order and disorder, fragile societies and questions of social cohesion as the foundation for peace. As such, I am very much looking forward to discuss these and other points of joint interest. Once the Corona-pandemic has started loosening its grip on our everyday lives, I would love to come for a visit, give a talk and identify avenues for further cooperation!

QM: Professor Hornidge, thank you very much for this interview.

Interview conducted by Mouli Banerjee

Anna-Katharina Hornidge

Prof. Dr. Anna-Katharina Hornidge has been Director of the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) since 1 March 2020 and holds a professorship for Global Sustainable Development at the University of Bonn. A graduate in Southeast Asian Studies, she earned her doctorate in sociology on the social construction of knowledge societies in Berlin and Singapore. In 2014 she habilitated on ‘Global Discourses of Knowledge with Local Consequences in Central and Southeast Asia’ and took over the position of director and professor of the Social Science Department of the Center for Development Research in Bonn. In 2015 she was appointed Professor of Social Sciences in the Marine Tropics at the University of Bremen and became head of the research group ‘Sociology of Development and Knowledge’ at the Leibniz Center for Marine Tropical Research in Bremen. From 2016 to the beginning of 2020 Anna-Katharina Hornidge headed the department ‘Social Sciences’ there.

https://www.die-gdi.de/en/anna-katharina-hornidge/
Tracking Post-sustainability Narratives in Perceptions of a COVID-19 Climate Change Nexus

Umberto Mario Sconfienza

Climate change is a wicked problem, which means that one scholar’s solution for it is the other scholar’s problem. Here I am not talking about the phenomenon of climate skepticism fuelled by a veritable climate denial machine which still contributes to the lack of ambition in tackling climate change, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries. I am referring here to the irreconcilable positions of scholars who genuinely believe climate change to be a problem. As per other complex issues at the crossroad of policy, economics and science, problems, solutions and risks are never simply given. Instead, they are part of complex discourses shaped by cultural and ideological worldviews. For example, degrowth supporters (Latouche, Kallis, and the scholars of the Institute of Science and Technology at the University of Barcelona) frame the problem of climate change in terms of un-economic growth which strips the earth of resources which would be more valuable where they are and which mostly benefits the already well-off, thus fuelling inequality. Ecomodernists (a group of scholars affiliated with the Californian Breakthrough Institute) respond by claiming that humanity can solve climate change by accelerating the trends towards the increasing dematerialization of the economy which, they claim, are already visible in the more advanced economies. As I began by saying, one party’s solution - accelerating the current trends in advanced economies - is the other’s problem.

Want yet another proof of this? Let’s take the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Satellite data on pollution shows that where COVID-19 commanded radical measures of economy-wide lockdowns, air quality improved, sometimes in quite impressive ways. According to the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), the forced closure of economic activities in Hubei produced a cut in CO2 emissions equivalent to more than half of UK’s annual emissions (200 million tons). Similarly in Italy, the pollution monitoring stations in one of the most polluted areas of Europe, the pianura padana, have registered a drastic cut (50%) in nitrogen dioxide (NO2) emissions. In Venice, canals have turned transparent for the first time in ages; in fact, no one knows precisely since when.

From this, two radically different conclusions can be drawn for the way humanity should approach the climate problem and this confrontation has played out in the past few weeks, as it nowadays happens, on Twitter. According to the first conclusion, the forced closures of economic activities and the related improvements of environmental indicators show that tackling environmental problems is only a matter of political will. The underlying problem structure of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change are, in fact, quite similar. First, to avoid avoidable loss of life, economic activities should be slowed down or halted, contacts should be limited (per se in the case of COVID-19, and for the consequences they have on flying or driving around and other polluting activities in the case of climate change). And, in a global system, global supply chains should be disrupted and reconfigured along more regional, national, and local arrangements where on-site additive manufacturing could supplement the reduced needs of the population. It’s only the specificities of the current pandemic which made possible muscular political actions now rather than later: a visible and imminent crisis (the people dying from it this time are closer to home, they are our parents and grandparents), highly mediatized (with daily infographics tracking the number of people infected, cured, or deceased), where those with vested interests in the continuation of business-as-usual did not have the time to prepare and offer an alternative account of how economies could adapt to the pandem-
ic. Initially, the UK government tried to offer such a vision but the political gamble would have been so dire that it risked to make Cameron’s previous history-making miscalculated gamble pale in comparison.

On the other hand, according to the second conclusion, the specificity of the pandemic is all that matters, to the point that the two issues are not really comparable. Could an economic crash caused by anxiety, the fear of losing loved ones, and the suspicion towards everyone who simply sneezes really be used to argue that climate change requires the same recipe? Pollution kills but so does poverty. The fact that climate change is a slow-moving problem should not be viewed as the element which prevents us from taking reasoned and evidenced-based policy measures, rather the opposite.

Both reasonings come with heavy baggage of presuppositions, disingenuous parallelism, and straw man arguments against the opponents. Some climate activists have been too quick to point out the relationship between the slowdown of economic activity and reduction of carbon emissions; in fact, no serious scholar would argue that the current measures are exactly what we need to solve the climate problem, even though some form of planned economic slowdown has to be on the table, if for no other reason than this, that everything else which has been tried has, so far, failed. Rather, the improvement in environmental indicators should compel us to rethink which ones of the measures which have been taken to face this pandemic we would like to carry forward in a world facing climate change. Re-arranging supply chains, smart-working, video-conferencing, etc. To this end, what has been recently proposed by the economist Mariana Mazzucatto makes a lot of sense: now that corporations whose business model is not yet in line with the reality of climate change, i.e. airline companies or fast-fashion apparel retailers, are suffering and asking for expensive bailouts with public money, governments have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to transform the sectors they are saving - by imposing conditions attached to the money handed out - and to structure them in a way which are in line with societal goals.

My project during this year at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research focuses on the different and incompatible ways of framing environmental protection. I focus, in particular, on what I have called the post-sustainability narratives - ecomodernism, degrowth, and environmental authoritarianism - and I argue that they provide three alternative accounts of environmental protection whose normative presuppositions are fundamentally incompatible to the point that they form a trilemma. Whereas the narrative of sustainable development promised and failed to deliver both economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice (the so-called “three pillars of sustainable development”), the post-sustainability narratives focus on a subset of these three policy goals: economic growth and social justice for ecomodernism; social justice and environmental protection for degrowth approaches; and environmental protection and economic growth for authoritarian environmentalism.

The recent associations made by scholars and pundits between the ongoing pandemic and climate change offer an interesting angle from which to expand my analysis of the ways in which cultural and ideological worldviews shape the policy responses to the problem of climate change.

Dr Umberto Mario Sconfienza joins the research group ‘Global Cooperation and Polycentric Governance’ as a Postdoc Research Fellow from January to December 2020.

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On 11 February 2020, the Centre hosted its 35th Käte Hamburger Lecture, on ‘Engagement All the Way Down – Practice and Critique in International Politics’, by Marieke de Goede, Professor of Social Science at the University of Amsterdam. As it gets increasingly impossible to imagine our world disengaged from technology, this talk brought in a much-needed interdisciplinary perspective. It opened up the space to discuss the myriad practices and forms of critique that are possible at the intersection of Science-and-Technology Studies (STS) and the critical study of security politics.

After the welcome by our Centre’s Katja Freistein, and Taylan Yildiz, Research Associate at the chair ‘Political System of Germany’, NRW School of Governance, University of Duisburg-Essen provided the introductory remarks.

Beginning with Latour’s intervention regarding the appropriation of his works in political debates to ends they were not intended, De Goede ventured into the ways in which the data derived from what Jef Huysmans calls ‘little security nothings’, like programming algorithms, information from a CCTV surveillance feed, and so on can be utilized and understood within the spaces of critical studies. A key message of the lecture was derived from Isabell Stengers’ argument that critical practice is ‘engagement all the way down’. Through her lecture, de Goede pushed the boundaries of STS as well as International Relations by reading its puzzles through the lenses of theorists from other disciplines. She suggested, through Stengers’ lens, that the individual practitioner’s critique can be augmented into creating a broader, public critique of issues within the STS space. For political scientists and IR scholars, she concluded, this implies that to practice critique, they must actively engage outside of theory and within spaces of governance and policy making.

The preliminary comments on the lecture were provided by Florian Kühn, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre. He observed the difficulty in academia about preventing a theory from being appropriated. He supplemented de Goede’s reading of critique with an understanding of subversion as an inherent part of critique in practice. Moderated by Yildiz, the lecture’s final section comprised questions and comments by the audience. It brought up further questions of the extent to which critique can be liberating, and in relation, if there is such a thing as too much critique. The event was made lively by the very active participation of the audience, making this a great dialogue on the efficacy of academically formed critique, and how it can make a traction in the active world of policy practice.

(MB)
Global migration with its different facets is one of the policy fields that is at the core of the Centre’s research agenda, and our Global Migration Lecture Series reflects that. The 2nd Global Migration Lecture, organized by the Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (InZentIM) in cooperation with our Centre, was held on 21 January 2020. The lecture, delivered by Eleonore Kofman, Professor of Gender, Migration and Citizenship at the School of Law, Middlesex University London, was titled ‘Familial Migrations: Class, Gender, and Global Inequalities’, and shed light on the interlinkages between migration, class, gender and inequality, especially in relation to family-related and skilled migration.

The lecture began with introductory remarks by our Centre’s Volker Heins, who is also Affiliate Professor of Political Science at the UDE. Following that, Kofman began by laying the ground with an understanding of class and how it operates through the field of familial migration. While traditionally, family migration was conceptualized as a separate form of migration from labour migration, increasingly, socio-economic criteria (labour market participation, language competence, financial resources, independence from welfare) are applied to family migration policies in Europe, and are harder to fulfil by those with a weaker labour market position. Hence class now plays an increasingly significant, and yet understudied, role in stratifying the right to family migration. However, class is not the only stratifying element: gender, age and ethnicity interact with and reinforce the effects of class. Kofman showed how family members in case of transnational families interact as policy units with variables such as care, access to residential rights and so on, and how class often changes the output that these dynamics produce, especially in countries that enforce a minimal basic income. These processes also create, Kofman showed, a category of the ‘model migrant’ at the intersection of labour policies and migration policies.

The commentator on the lecture, Anja Weiß, Professor of Sociology at the UDE, began by observing that the economic logic of class is a concept relative to different societies and states. She added that Kofman’s framework could be useful in contributing to the general debates on inequality. Following her comments, the floor was opened for audience participation. This added to the debate with perspectives on how religion too, like Kofman’s analytical unit of the family, plays a role in social reproduction, in cases of highly skilled transnational migration, the need for perhaps gender mainstreaming in migration policies, and on the important alternative pattern of circular migration which calls for an analysis of interaction between state policies across borders as well. The lecture thus lent itself to a very fruitful conversation, and opened up threads of debates that hold promise and relevance for migration studies as a discipline.

(MB)
How is it possible to reconcile sustainable behaviour and individual happiness?

Panel Seeks Reconciliation of Individual Well-being and Inclusive Sustainable Development

Sustainability as a barrier to or catalyst for happiness? This question was discussed at the 16th Käte Hamburg-er Dialogue, jointly organized by GCR21 and Volkshochschule Duisburg as part of the event festival 'Duisburger Akzente'.

To start off the event, philosopher and author Dr Ines Eckermann read from her current work conveniently titled ‘I don’t need more - Consuming with serenity and achieving happiness sustainably’. In this book, Eckermann treats the philosophical phenomenon of pleonexia - human’s deeply enshrined desire to own ever more and, perhaps, more even than a ‘fair share’ allows. The book’s key message is that in order to overcome pleonexia today, we will have to choose to only consume truly essential goods and services, which serve to satisfy our basic needs. In her presentation, Eckermann focused on everyone’s personal responsibility to contribute to the sustainability of our society by adjusting their own behaviour, instead of pointing at others’ flaws and mis-haps. Such individual adjustment of (consumption) behavior would need to be flanked by state regulation, however, to be effective in the long run.

Professor Christa Liedtke (Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy) pointed out that the German social market economy was never intended to grow infinitely. According to her, former chancellor Ludwig Erhard’s influential book ‘Prosperity for Everyone’ is actually an early example of a call for moderated consumption. It insists that, once the post-war aftermath was overcome, the heavy support programs for the domestic economy would gradually have to be substituted by a re-engagement with society itself. Yet, this part seems to have been forgotten, so that wellbeing continues to be closely tied to economic success - albeit the finding that beyond a certain minimum, increasing material wealth does not lead to higher satisfaction rates among the population. One explanation Liedtke gave, was that displaying possession of status symbols serves an important function. Namely, it signals belonging to a certain social group and is thus conducive to our orientation in a capital-driven culture. Actively renouncing possession, on the other hand, might reinforce feelings of social exclusion by less fortunate groups, since it can be perceived as an act of moral arrogance from those who can afford it.

Bringing in a global perspective, Elisabeth Schumann, owner of a local fair-trade store in Duisburg, supported the hypothesis that sustainability is not forcibly tied to renouncing consumption entirely. Instead, she emphasized that through responsible production and monitoring of labor conditions, it is even possible to bring greater happiness to a row of people along the value-chain. This, in turn, could also be beneficial to end consumers, since they get to experience their own leverage by contributing to improving livelihoods through their decisions. Of course, this system depends on trust in the assurances of quality standards by fair-trade and eco labels, which are sometimes problematic in their own right, as Sascha Ivan, founder of a fair-wear clothing brand, noted. An even bigger obstacle to wellbeing along the global value chains for him was a general misconception about the reality of workers in producing countries. From his experience, it was much more helpful to humanize the manufacturing process by getting consumers in touch with the people behind the product, using visual aids and personal profiles.

In the end, the panel agreed that sustainability requires a re-evaluation of the value we attribute to certain actions and products. Hence, sustainability and economic benefits are not mutually exclusive, but in the right combination may rather create synergies that generate wellbeing and overcome pleonexia at the same time.

(Tobias Schäfer)
A Note on Events (Spring 2020)

Just like the University of Duisburg-Essen as a whole and other research institutions in Germany and across the world, the Centre has had to put on hold, postpone, or modify its activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, this has affected our event planning and has unfortunately forced us to cancel all events planned for the summer term, including our pending Käte Hamburger Lectures, InHouse and Authors’ Workshops, and the 2nd Annual Conference on “Communicative Power and Global Cooperation” organized in cooperation with the Main Research Area ‘Transformation of Contemporary Societies’. We are currently busy re-arranging these events for the next 12 months, in close coordination with all the speakers, participants, and panelists involved. Once new dates are confirmed, we will announce them via our on- and offline communication channels. In addition, we will considerably expand our use of digital formats to continue our public discussions on the chances and challenges for global cooperation and have already evaluated suitable video conferencing and communication tools. We are therefore eagerly looking forward to hosting public online events soon and thus keeping up the engaged debates that were already much appreciated in our more traditional event formats. If you are intrigued by what this may look like, please contact us about possibilities to take part in the research colloquium, which is planned to take place as a webinar series in the upcoming semester.

Sincerely
GCR21 Event Management Team

Subject to changes. For newest info, please consult our website. You are invited to follow our livestreams and share your thoughts with our team on Twitter.
From the author’s abstract: In this paper, we ask how exactly right-wing populists make anti-globalization appealing. We follow the growing interest in the ambivalent features of populist language and performances by suggesting a methodological framework around narratives, metaphors, and emotions. We argue that right-wing populists skilfully present abstract phenomena of globalization and translate them to individual experiences of ‘ordinary people’. Metaphors play a crucial role in populist storytelling as they make sense of a complex reality through imagery. They mobilize collective emotions and reach a wider audience through a high degree of linguistic adaptability and normative ambiguity. We demonstrate these narrative operations using two recent cases of ‘successful’ right-wing populist, anti-globalization storytelling, which build on strong metaphors. One is the metaphor of the ‘House’, used by former Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, and the other is U.S. President Donald Trump’s metaphor of ‘The Wall’ (...).
Prof. Dr Wouter G. Werner was appointed as a new member to the Centre’s Scientific Advisory Board from 1 February 2020. Wouter Werner is a professor of international law at the Centre for the Politics of Transnational Law, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He joined the Centre in 2018 as a Senior Research Fellow with his project on ‘Restatements, Narration and Collective Sense Making in International Law’. Werner is the author of ‘Godot was Always There. Repetition and the Formation of Customary International Law’ in the Centre’s Research Paper Series (No. 22). His recent publications deal with topics such as documentary film and international criminal law, social acceleration and international law and the formation of customary law through restatements by expert committees.

Dr Zeynep Sahin Mencutek joined the Centre as a Senior Research Fellow from March 2019 to February 2020. Her research project dealt with The Governance of Refugee Returns. She published extensively in this field and authored a research paper in the Centre’s series already prior to her arrival: ‘From Inaction to Restrictions: Changes in Lebanon’s Policy Responses to Syrian Mass Refugee Movement’ (No. 19). Dr. Sahin got an appointment at The Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration at Ryerson University. In addition, she recently was awarded a Humboldt Research Fellowship for Experienced Researchers. She will be hosted by the Bonn International Center for Conversion. The publication list at the end of this magazine lists her name more than once!

Dr Maria Koinova joined the research group ‘Global Cooperation and Polycentric Governance’ as a Senior Research Fellow from April 2019 to March 2020. Dr Koinova remains associated to the Centre as an Associate Fellow, firstly through the International Studies Review (IRS) Forum on ‘Reimagining Polycentrism in International Relations’, which she co-edits, and secondly through the workshop on ‘Governing Transit Migration: Formal Policies and Informal Practices’ planned with Volker Heins for May 2021.

Joanna Simonow

Dr des. Joanna Simonow joins the research group ‘Pathways and Mechanisms of Global Cooperation’ as a Postdoc Research Fellow from March 2020 to February 2021. Her research project at the Centre is entitled: The Private in the Political. Intimacy as a Pathway of Global Cooperation: Feminism, Anti-Imperialism and Indian Nationalism in Europe, North America and South Africa, c. 1900s-1960s

Umberto Mario Sconfienza

Dr Umberto Mario Sconfienza joins the research group ‘Global Cooperation and Polycentric Governance’ as a Postdoc Research Fellow from January to December 2020. His research project at the Centre is entitled: The Post-Sustainability Trilemma

Maren Hofius

Dr Maren Hofius joins the research group ‘Pathways and Mechanisms of Global Cooperation’ as a Senior Research Fellow from April 2020 to March 2021. Her research project at the Centre is entitled: From Arctic Exceptionalism to Global Arctic: Exploring Pathways of Cooperation in Circumpolar Arctic Governance

Susan Erikson’s piece ‘Pandemics Show us What Governance is for’ is out now in Nature Human Behaviour’s April publications in the light of the COVID-19 global pandemic. It is not just timely and useful for those interested in understanding the implications of the current crisis, but also an insightful article on governance in general. Erikson uses her expertise as a medical anthropologist, to trace in this piece a comparison between government reaction at the time of the Ebola crisis and the current corona crisis. Focusing on the nexus between economic policies and health policies, Erikson indicates what an ideal governance priority in a democracy should be: where the economy is important, but people come first.


In this fascinating article, Volker Heins and Christine Unrau delve into the history of public thought and discourse around foreigners in Germany, in order to understand how the civil sphere in Germany functions on the issue of immigration today. They suggest that while the political systems of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) were very different from each other, they were strikingly similar in the aspect of how each state systematically cultivated a public emotion of suspicion against ‘foreigners’ as a category. Using this, their article contextualizes the systems historically to show how both systems procedurally destroyed the sense of solidarity within the civil sphere. This chapter is part of the book, Breaching the Civil Order : Radicalism and the Civil Sphere by Cambridge University Press, which investigates new interventions social science might have to offer for the problem of radicalism in current times.


Scenario planning has become increasingly important as a research tool, especially in context of the climate change debate. This article Umberto Mario Sconfienza fills up the crucial research gap that still persists within scenario planning literature, by providing an analysis of the possible negative policy consequences that could follow as outcomes from incomplete execution or realization of future scenarios. The article chooses four Global Scenarios Group (GSG) scenarios, namely, Market Forces, Policy Reform, Eco-Communalism, and New Sustainability Paradigm, and pairs them with the associated theory of environmental politics. After a comprehensive literature review for each GSG scenario, Sconfienza then shows the different possibilities that might prevent sustainable futures within the scenarios.


This special issue, edited by Andrea Schapper, Christian Scheper, and Christine Unrau, brings together articles on the different political and ecological facets of dams. A topic rife with debate, as the editors point out in their introduction to the issue, dams make a perfect subject for an intersectional study, as it converges the three pillars of sustainable development which are regularly perceived as mutually in conflict, namely, economic growth, social welfare and ecological sustainability. Andrea Schapper, Christine Unrau and Sarah Kiloh also have an article within this issue, which analyses through a comparative lens three countries, namely, Ethiopia, Brazil and Panama, in order to elucidate the implications of social mobilization against large-scale hydroelectric dams in both authoritarian as well as democratic settings.

Reviews: Mouli Banerjee
What follows is a list of new publications of the Centre’s current and former fellows and staff as well as authors from our wider academic network. We publish an updated list and invite you to inform us about your recent contributions to the field of global cooperation research. The published list represents a selection of titles that we feel are substantive contributions to the field.


Research Agenda
A detailed elaboration of the Centre’s research agenda is available on the Centre’s website:
https://www.gcr21.org/research/research-agenda

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