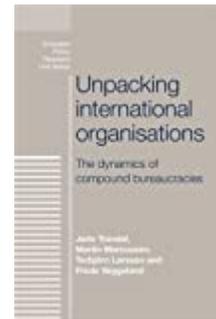




Jarle Trondal, Martin Marcussen, Torbjorn Larsson, Frode Veggeland. *Unpacking International Organisations: The Dynamics of Compound Bureaucracies.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. 228 S. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-8137-8.



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J. Trondal u.a.: Unpacking International Organisations

Although the constructivist notion of international bureaucracies as global rule-makers Michael Barnett/Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World. International Organizations in Global Politics*, Ithaca 2004. has concentrated on the 'actorhood' of international organisations (IOs), research has largely focused on formal structures, the heads of the secretariats or the somewhat simplistic question of whether the international staff tended to stick to national attitudes or became truly global, i.e. being dedicated to the goals of the respective organisation. Likewise, mainstream international relations (IR) theories fall short of adequately grasping the peculiarities within international organisations as most of them still focus too narrowly on the predominant role of state actors. And Public Administration scholars have only recently begun to explore the area of international bureaucracy – too long a traditional concentration on national administrative systems has led to a simple transfer of corresponding findings to the international level, thus disregarding the peculiar features of these sui generis bureaucracies.

The book *Unpacking international organisations* ar-

gues that after the first generation of IO studies – which focused on IOs as intergovernmental agencies – and the second generation – which analysed IOs as bureaucracies with identities, resources, authority and interests – now we should examine the internal dynamics of these bureaucracies as it has already been done by public administration studies on national bureaucracies (p. 10). In accordance, Jarle Trondal, Martin Marcussen, Torbjorn Larsson and Frode Veggeland – all Nordic scholars – demand a 'public administration turn' within the study of IOs. The four authors' central argument is that international bureaucracies function as compound systems of public administration that combine departmental, epistemic and supranational decision-making behavioural dynamics, whereby the Westphalian intergovernmental dynamic is less influential than the very significant departmental dynamic (p. 3). The main questions addressed in the book are what behavioural dynamics prevail in the daily decision-making processes within international bureaucracies, and to what extent supranational, departmental and/or epistemic behavioural dynamics surpass intergovernmental behavioural dynamics. Furthermore, the authors ask under which circumstances do different

behavioural dynamics dominate within international bureaucracies. More concretely, ‘...under what conditions are intergovernmental dynamics bypassed by supranational, departmental and/or epistemic behavioural dynamics within international bureaucracies?’ (p. 5).

The book is structured as follows: the four main parts provide a general framework, namely the introduction that includes a theoretical reflection, a chapter on ‘international bureaucracies’, a section on ‘the dynamics of compound bureaucracies’, and the conclusions. Altogether these four parts are subdivided into ten chapters. The study employs an organisation-theory approach and mostly relies on interviews with civil servants at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Commission, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Including the Commission of the EU is an attempt to normalise this institution’s analysis as being a part of IO studies (p. 23). The EU should certainly be ‘provincialised’ as a certainly peculiar regional organization in order to contest the myth that the European way is the only model applied to regional integration (See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton University Press 2000). Nevertheless, it remains questionable whether we can compare two IOs with the ‘executive body’ of another IO. It is not true, as European ‘exceptionalists’ want to make us believe that comparing the EU with other IOs is comparing apples and oranges. However, to look mostly at the Commission and two other organisations appears to compare two apples with an apple seed. The authors interviewed 121 officials from the high, middle and low hierarchies of the IOs. All had a university degree and worked either for respective trade units (as a purpose sector focusing on a specific topic) or the general secretariats as horizontal department with an encompassing approach (p. 16). Within each organisation, internal dynamics are analysed with regard to the respective organisational components, recruitment procedures, relationships with external institutions and the demographic composition of the personnel (p. 9). The interview guide for officials of the European Commission, the WTO and OECD Secretariats in the appendix is quite interesting, particularly the part on ‘personal perceptions’ as it includes questions on an ‘esprit de corps’, and the identification/personal attachment to the organisation’s goals (p. 209). Nevertheless, the questionnaire could certainly have incorporated more questions.

The book delivers a helpful overview on existing research and explains why the study of international bureaucracies, and in particular the international civil ser-

vice, has largely been neglected by IR scholars. Three types of missing studies are outlined: comparative studies of international bureaucracies; studies with an actor-level focus that explore everyday decision-making dynamics within IOs; and studies with an organisational focus that explore the influence of the bureaucracies’ formal organisation on daily decision-making dynamics (p. 23).

The book concludes that despite the complexity of decision-making in IOs, the respective dynamics in international bureaucracies are mostly influenced by organisational characteristics and not so much by the type of IO for which they formally work (p. 194). Furthermore, international bureaucracies are seen as ‘stabilisers of global governance’ as well as being organisationally contingent, while civil servants in IOs are considered to be rooted in their department but still thinking and acting in a global manner (pp. 197, 200, 202).

Despite the merits of the four-dynamics approach, there are also some shortcomings as well as desiderata that could have been addressed more thoroughly. I would identify three interrelated problems with the selection of the organisations and the focus: the lack of historical depth, no truly global organisations and the neglect of cultural dynamics.

A shortcoming of the book that may well diminish its general results is the fact that (a) no UN institutions but only organisations by and large dominated by the ‘rich’ countries were subjects of analysis, and (b) that these institutions were all created after World War II and thus fail to take into account previous institutional experiences and collective memories; for instance, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), created in 1919, or specialised bodies that evolved from international public unions of the late 19th century. The authors admit to provide no historical focus (p. 9) although they declare ‘longitudinal data sets’ as an important research perspective (p. 207). The OECD (established as the OEEC in 1948), the European Commission (established by the Treaties of Rome in 1957) and the WTO (created in 1995 following the 1947 General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) are all rather new organisations. In the organisations deriving from the 19th century public unions, a quite different understanding of international collaboration may prevail since the very reason for their existence was in fact a certain epistemic-community mentality, which was only supported by intergovernmental arrangement. Did this shape also the behavioural patterns of today’s civil servants in these IOs? Another feature of the chosen

institutions is that all three are based in francophone central or western European cities: Paris, Brussels and Geneva. This must have had an impact on the development of a certain esprit de corps among the respective civil servants. Here it seems once more unfortunate that no single institution from an organisation without European participation – for instance, Mercosur, ASEAN or ECOWAS or from the UN family, with headquarters in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi – had been included.

A view from non-Western bureaucratic concepts, as well as a closer look at the integration of non-Western civil servants in still mostly Western-dominated bureaucratic IO structures, would be helpful in this regard, including a stronger focus on cultural aspects of international administrations. The latter refers to a supposed team spirit, which differs from institution to institution and among respective units: which is the leading culture and what are identity-creating norms? Are there counter-team spirits that challenge the dominant organisational culture or unwritten code of behaviour? If so, does it move along cultural boundaries? Although the authors asked about the importance attributed to an employee's nation and working with people from other nationalities, the intercultural component of international bureaucracies remains implicit at best. Attachments to governments, the organisation, the department or an epistemic community are significant variants in this context. However, class-related connectedness, age hierarchies, cultural, political or gender relations – Western, francophone, Muslim, African, Spanish-speaking, Commonwealth, women/men, upper class, etc. – would fur-

ther decisively enrich this field of study. While the study offers some hints, for instance that the official or dominant language used in a bureaucracy can matter more than nationality in formal contact patterns (p. 188), why not make this and other variants a more prominent area of investigation? It is certainly important to analyse recruitment procedures and previously existing organisational affiliations and pre-socialisations, but how to analyse binationals in international bureaucracies, for example? Is it then nationality that really counts so much and if so, which? In case of German-Turkish or Mexican-US-American officials in international bureaucracies, there would be further a cultural/religious question that, in my view, can easily transcend the question of nationality.

The very fact that WTO, OECD and the European Commission rather represent the rich countries that are somewhat united by certain shared norms can be a limitation. So, I would be careful to conclude 'international bureaucracies' are solely like this and that. Other understandings of loyalty, different notions of bureaucracy and varying meanings of 'international' are only some aspects that should be considered more seriously.

In general, *Unpacking international organisations*, though leaving some historical and cultural boxes wrapped up, does provide very helpful analytical tools to investigate more thoroughly IOs as bureaucracies. The call for a 'public administration turn' should be heeded by IO scholars, who should be inspired to be open to more perspectives on the study of international organisations. In sum, this is an enriching book that proposes new insight.

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