



# TranState Working Papers

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
AND WORLD SOCIETY:  
STUDYING GLOBAL POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY

Anja P. Jakobi

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Universität Bremen • University of Bremen  
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Staatlichkeit im Wandel • Transformations of the State  
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**ABSTRACT**

This article develops a theoretical framework to analyze the rise and spread of global public policy. After an introduction to the background of sociological institutionalism, it first elaborates on the role and functions of international organizations, identifying instruments by which these can disseminate policies and influence domestic policy processes. Second, conditions of global agenda setting and policy diffusion are presented; building up a model of global policy development, a frame in which the worldwide spread of global public policy can be analyzed. Third, I present a case study of global policy development, namely the rise of ‘lifelong learning’ as part of current education policy. In the concluding part I briefly summarize central findings and elaborate on the potential and the shortcoming of the idea. The article mainly has a conceptual aim, but strictly relies on empirical material.

## **CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION .....	2
1. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN WORLD SOCIETY .....	3
1.1 International Organizations and Structuration .....	3
1.2 Instruments of International Organizations.....	4
1.3 The Interplay of Organizations and Instruments.....	6
1.4 Resume: International Organizations and Policy Dissemination .....	7
2. POLICY CHANGE IN WORLD SOCIETY – ESTABLISHING AND DIFFUSING POLICIES.....	8
2.1 Global Agenda Setting .....	8
2.2 Global Policy Diffusion .....	11
2.3 A Model of Global Policy Development .....	12
2.4 Outlook: Global Policy Development and International Policy Goals .....	13
3. THE GLOBAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING – A CASE STUDY .....	14
3.1. The Timing of Lifelong Learning Promotion .....	16
3.2 Actors of Lifelong Learning Diffusion .....	19
3.3 Instruments applied for Disseminating Lifelong Learning .....	22
3.4 Resume: The Rise and Spread of Lifelong Learning .....	24
4. CONCLUSIONS: WORLD SOCIETY AND GLOBAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT .....	25
REFERENCES.....	26
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE .....	31

## ***International Organizations and World Society: Studying Global Policy Development in Public Policy***

In recent years, international relations and comparative politics have both assessed the increased importance of international processes for national policy change. International policy networks exchange views and develop policy solutions, nongovernmental organizations influence national compliance to universal standards. Fields as diverse as education, crime or health have faced growing international regulation, peer-group pressure or policy learning (e.g. Andreas and Nadelmann 2006, Steiner-Khamsi 2004, Deacon 2007, Slaughter 2004). This article conceives such processes as different symptoms of one common trend: as part of the development of a global policy process. This theoretical idea enables viewing processes of global governance and results of policy diffusion within one frame, opening up new lines for future inquiries of global public policy and their conditions. The framework attributes a central role to international organizations and their different activities, and it formulates conditions under which policies are likely to be spread. The article proceeds as follows: After a short introduction to sociological institutionalism, I analyze international organizations and their activities in world society. I present a framework that focuses on the policy outputs that international organizations produce. In a further step, I outline the process by which global public policy is developed and diffused. Finally, I apply this theoretical concept to the case of lifelong learning<sup>1</sup>, one of the most prominent education policy ideas nowadays. This case exemplifies how a global policy can be disseminated by international actors, in this case particularly international organizations. As I show, international organizations have disseminated this idea of expanding education over the life span, turning it to a widely accepted principle in domestic education policies.<sup>2</sup> This paper mainly relies on

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<sup>1</sup> If not otherwise indicated, the term is always related to the political idea of lifelong learning, not to individual learning processes.

<sup>2</sup> The empirical case study presented here – lifelong learning – was mainly concerned with the relation of international organizations and states, as well as it focused on the diffusion of an idea, not necessarily implying that this idea is always widely supported in national politics, not that it is realized on the individual level. research has already shown that countries are reluctant in establishing reform linked to lifelong learning, and even if they do so, these can look very different (Jakobi 2008, 2009). The link to international organizations has also proven to be most important with regard to the diffusion of the idea of lifelong learning, while the establishment of reforms is also strongly linked to national wealth (Jakobi 2006). Since this paper mainly focuses on a conceptual aim linked to international organizations, I will not further present these empirical results that focus on domestic policy-making, but it is necessary to bear in mind the limitations that global policies face concerning domestic realization.

document analysis. It does not intend to clarify why international actors act the way they act, but sheds light on the effects their activities have and the frame in which they take place.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article conceives world politics as being based on a shared world culture, as developed in the frame of sociological institutionalism (e.g. Meyer et al 1997a, b). Originally, sociological institutionalism has been developed within the field of organizational sociology. Researchers found that organizations, for example firms, sometimes are not structured according to a functional logic, but follow those principles that appear to be the most legitimate (Meyer and Rowan 1977). In a so-called organizational field, organizations are thus exposed to ideas of the wider environment that concern their identity, either by explicit or implicit rules. Under such conditions, they show the tendency to become more similar; the so-called ‘isomorphism’ occurs (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Later, sociological institutionalists transferred this approach to the world of states, based on the assumption that questions of legitimacy would also play a crucial role in this particular community of organizations. States, thus, are considered to appear more legitimate if they feature the same characteristics as other states, for example a national constitution, an education system, a democratic order or the entitlement of individual rights (Meyer et al. 1997a). Examples are the world-wide establishment of welfare arrangements, globally spread environmental policies, and science bureaucracies (Finnemore 1996a); (Meyer et al. 1997b). The fight for individual rights and development as well as the quest for progress are nearly universal characteristics across countries (Meyer et al. 1997a:153). Modern societies intend to secure progress and justice (Finnemore 1996b) and the idea and coverage of rights is continuously expanded (Meyer 2000:239). Unlike one could assume such diffusion is not caused by, for example, a common economic development that states would face and that, in turn, would lead to the establishment of certain school curricula or environmental standards (Meyer 2005; Meyer et al. 1992). Instead, these phenomena can better be explained by the idea of a commonly shared world culture – a world society in which states participate while they are embedded in international exchange.

Members of the organizational field of world society are actors as governmental or non-governmental organizations, states or epistemic communities: Non-governmental organizations lobby states and international organizations for policies, implement them at the local level, and campaign for political aims. By doing so, they are concerned with ‘enacting, codifying, modifying, and propagating world-cultural structures and principles’ (Boli and Thomas 1999b:19). Powerful or otherwise successful states can serve as



role models for other states, thereby setting standards of what statehood encompasses in substance and behavior. Epistemic communities, as scientists, influence world politics as a major source for problem definition ((Adler and Haas 1992; Haas, Williams and Babai 1977; Haas 1992). Its authority defines complex and abstract problems that need to be solved in politics, while the layman's perception is disqualified (Hajer 1995:10). International governmental organizations<sup>3</sup> have the capacity to link these different actors, and to provide forums in which world society can meet and discuss global public policy, embed regimes and the like. Moreover, international organizations also have several means at hand to disseminate identified political aims across the countries. In this paper, this function is to be evaluated in more detail:

## **1. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN WORLD SOCIETY**

Based on the sociological idea of a world society, one can expect international organizations to create conditions to the constitution of organizational fields. For example, membership in international organizations creates common cross-organizational structures, such as committees or agencies, one of field's preconditions (DiMaggio and Powell 1982). Further, through agenda-setting capacities, international organizations can urge members to set common goals, as when the UN declares a literacy decade. Moreover, the organizations' publication of policy proposals, statistics, and surveys systematically provides more information to the field, as does for example Interpol for crime-related activities. Finally, international organizations monitor and coordinate member states' activities, and thus increase interaction among them, as in the case of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring of non-proliferation.

### **1.1 International Organizations and Structuration**

In the context of their world conferences, international organizations offer a public opportunity to other actors for spreading their views: Such meetings are important focal points where national delegates can meet other governmental representatives as well as non-governmental activists or where scientists can elaborate on world problems and possible solutions. Despite being a 'hard instrument', a conference can nonetheless influence national policy development, and UN meetings have been a ritual in disseminating world cultural perspectives to countries (Lechner and Boli 2005b:81-109).

As such, international organizations are an important element of constructing what sociological institutionalists call the 'world polity', the increased structuration of politi-

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<sup>3</sup> In this article the term 'international organization' will refer to international governmental organizations only, if not indicated otherwise.

cal activity at the world level (Meyer et al. 1997a, b). International organizations channel and direct political activity; their position is central for addressing an increasing number of political issues with global implications. When addressing new political problems, for example a new environmental harm, the already established international structuration supports the political process: Either new organizations are set up to target such political aims – existent structures are thus copied –, or if an organization with similar aims is already in existence, its mandate can be enlarged. The new governmental activity can also substitute private political activism. For example, setting up governmental environmental organizations has led to decreased inception of non-governmental environmental organizations (Meyer et al 1997b). International organizations are thus critical points for pushing forward items on the agenda and they serve as a platform of world societal concerns. In such sense, international organizations have become crucial players in developing ‘global public policy’ (Reinecke 1998) and they provide an organizational structure in which state representatives can meet and discuss future political lines. International organizations thus structure an international policy field, by bringing actors together, setting global agendas and fostering policy development.

## **1.2 Instruments of International Organizations**

Basically, international organizations generate different kinds of policy outputs and, depending on the specific organization, have different means at hand to influence national policy making (for example Rittberger and Zangl 2006). It is obvious that they can make states move towards a suggested direction in some way, but it is also obvious that the daily work of an international organization differs across policy fields and is influenced by the status and privileges it has. Some general instruments, however, are shared by nearly all international organizations but research so far has come up with different names for them: Some researchers speak of capacities linked to information or monitoring (Karns and Mingst 2004:9), while others refer to outputs as policy programs, operational activities, or information activities (Rittberger and Zangl 2006). On the following pages, I develop a typology of general instruments by which international organizations – irrespectively of a specific policy field or their standing as binding or less binding authority – can influence national policy development. It is inspired by an early analysis of global policy and international activities (Jacobson 1979). However, while this early typology had at least an implicit emphasis on binding instruments, I rearrange the original categories, also including very soft instruments. As I see it, five categories of instruments can be isolated in an inductive way: discursive dissemination, standard setting, financial means, coordinative functions, and technical assistance. They all have an impact on the relationship between the state and an international organization, and in that sense, they represent *governance* instruments.

*Discursive dissemination* means establishing ideas on national political agendas. It resembles the state's instrument to inform and guide the choice of its citizens, but it also includes rather implicit rules or assumptions on how political problems should be tackled. Generally, ideas about cause-and-effect relationships, about the impact of political decisions, and the link to already established policy aims are important pre-conditions for setting agendas (Stone 1989); discursive dissemination is thus a very important instrument of international organizations, in particular because it often precedes the other instruments. Ideas prepare the ground for following policy initiatives and they are also the first element of political change. A currently important international idea is, for example, the internationally acknowledged importance of fighting corruption, redefining local practices as criminal (e.g. Andreas and Nadelmann 2006:55-6). Ideas alone, however, may not be enough. Instead, dissemination of ideas by international organizations seldom stands alone but most often it is part of or is linked to other instruments:

*Standard setting* is a well-known strategy, even if it is often reduced to binding standards only. Standard setting by international organizations in some way equals the nation state's capacity to regulate, even if the former are not able to execute the collective decisions in the same way. Conventions represent a classical standard setting function, but also many other, more informal means such as benchmarking, explicit aims, and rules, with which countries should comply, are formulated. Examples for standard setting range from the General Agreement on Tariffs in Trade to regulations within the IAEA or the benchmarks formulated in EU's Open Method of Coordination. Standards in this sense, however, are not only informal rules or 'soft law', but can also refer to hard law, as in the case of regulations within the EU.

*Financial means* constitute a payment of the organization to a country for establishing programs or institutions related to an international policy aim. Parallel to governmental capacities that we can find in public policy on the national level, incentives are thus set for guidance towards a specific behavior. World Bank financing of projects, the implementation of specific EU projects, as well as many other projects established by international organizations work that way.

*Coordinative functions* are instruments of surveillance, as well as informal and formal monitoring. Parallels to the state level are more difficult to find; legal oversight of political processes or a general focus on whether citizens obey the public regulations would come closest to this idea. International coordinative functions assess the progress of countries towards a common policy aim. They range from monitoring and sanctioning false state behavior, as in the case of IAEA verification measures or the World Trade Organization's dispute settlement body, to softer means like the coordination of country groups, the EU's Open Method of Coordination or the publishing of comparable policy outcomes in international league tables done by the OECD.

The instrument of *technical assistance* is concerned with supporting or enhancing a state's capacities in its aim to move towards an internationally outlined policy aim and it is comparable with social support programs on the national level. International organizations mostly apply this instrument in relation to developing countries that often lack expertise or administrative capability to implement international policies. In such cases, support can range from model legislations to expert advice or just the offer of ready-made public awareness campaigns for countries that could not produce them by themselves (e.g. UNODC 2008). Technical assistance is also an instrument for reconstructing countries after war; current examples are the education of police forces, as has been done in Afghanistan or in Kosovo.

### **1.3 The Interplay of Organizations and Instruments**

Overall, international organizations have thus very different means at hand to disseminate their policy aims and to influence national policy development, ranging from establishing ideas to prescriptions, payment surveillance or support. In table 1, the different instruments, and their dominant function are summarized as well as some examples are given.

In principle, the categories presented are applicable across different policy fields; their de facto existence nonetheless differs depending on the specific issue. When analyzing education only, it is possible to identify the tendency that most often instruments like discursive dissemination, coordination or technical assistance are applied. In the case of security, states more often rely on standards that restrict all in a same way and in coordinative activities that monitor compliance. Emphasis, however, does not mean exclusiveness: For example, the field of education knows standard setting instruments such as UNESCO conventions, and the definition of crime as a threat to security is also a discursive act (UNESCO 2005c; Andreas and Nadelmann 2006:235-7).

*Table 1: Governance Instruments of International Organizations*

<i>Governance Instrument</i>	<i>Dominant Function</i>	<i>Example</i>
Discursive Dissemination	Establishing Ideas	UN Promotion of Sustainable Development OECD Promotion of Lifelong Learning
Standard Setting	Prescribing Behavior	EU Regulations OECD Benchmarks
Financial Means	Transfer Payment	World Bank Financing EU Project Financing
Coordinative Activities	Execute Surveillance	EU Open Method of Coordination OECD Peer Reviewing
Technical Assistance	Support Structures	IAEA Trainings in Radioactive Detection UNODC Model Laws

At the same time, international organizations differ in their authority towards member states, which could be assumed as having an effect on the instruments applied and on their consequences: While the OECD is, formally, a weakly binding program-organization, the EU can generally exercise a more strong binding authority (Rittberger and Zangl 2006: 12; Marcussen 2004), at least implicitly suggesting that the latter is the stronger one, but this is essentially an empirical question. In fact, it is highly likely that most often the interplay of different instruments is crucial for wide-ranging policy change. International organizations start discussions in their forums and may later switch to legal instruments like conventions or recommendations. Further, such activities can be accompanied by financing related projects on the national level, by supporting implementation, and by overseeing collective success.

Nonetheless, it needs to be stressed that the list of instruments presented here does not imply that any promotion of policies necessarily include all instruments. For a long time the EU has financed student mobility programs, but it was not until recently that it has become active in regulating the EU-wide internationalization of higher education. Governance instruments may thus be restricted to specific organizations or to specific policy fields of an organization's overall activities. Moreover, some organizations may have several instruments at hand but they do not apply all of them: This is the case with the OECD, an organization which has no financing capacities and applies binding regulations only sporadically, but successfully disseminates policy ideas. Moreover, international organizations differ in the instruments they apply in relation to the country. While industrialized countries usually do not receive technical assistance, this is more common in developing countries. However, in all these cases, ideas remain central. They deliver the guiding principles towards which an activity is oriented, and they are a precondition for implementing any follow-up.

#### **1.4 Resume: International Organizations and Policy Dissemination**

International organizations are thus not only a forum for exchange in world society, but they are also to develop, support and disseminate policies across countries. The different means they have at hand not only enable a variety of activities linked to a specific policy, but they also enable the organization to intervene in different stages of the domestic policy process: When being an agenda-setter, international organizations mainly stimulate a debate, but by coordinating and monitoring, they also intervene in the implementation process, evaluating better ways to pursue the political goals. The distinction of different instruments thus not only shows how structuring in world society takes place, but also which different ways a policy can take from world society to the nation state. The following section will elaborate on the context and preconditions of such process.

## **2. POLICY CHANGE IN WORLD SOCIETY – ESTABLISHING AND DIFFUSING POLICIES**

Analyzing instruments for the spread of policies does not necessarily clarify why specific policies are spread while others are not; it is thus yet open how such process of policy development and structuring should be conceived. In domestic politics, a very basic instrument to analyze the structure of the policy-making process is the so-called stage heuristic (see DeLeon 1998, critical Sabatier 1998). When applying such stage heuristic, world society and world culture can essentially be conceived as agenda setter of national politics. International debates, thus, at first instance impact on national policy processes by the new ideas and solutions they present.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.1 Global Agenda Setting**

Political ideas do not exist without their proponents, and they are not automatically placed on the political agenda because they are important in an objective sense: Already their importance is politically contested, a fact that has been elaborated by political scientists concerned with agenda setting. Following such an approach, agenda setting consists of the coupling of three independent streams: problems, policies, and politics (Kingdon 2003). To place an issue on the agenda successfully, these streams need to be coupled – such event constitutes the window of opportunity for the respective policy proposal.

The first stream consists of *problems*. These do, however, not exist as primordial entities in a sense that it is always clear what the problem actually is. Instead, ‘difficult conditions become problems only when people come to see them as amenable to human action. Until then, difficulties remain embedded in the realm of nature accident, and fate – a realm where there is no choice about what happens to us’ (Stone 1989:281) also Kingdon, 2003:115). Problem definition is a crucial point in the policy process because it fixes the political problem and the locus of future political activity and intervention (Stone 1989:299). Establishing political problems is thus a social process, not merely a function related to objective necessities, and the forums of world society are in particular eligible for these political interactions. There, participants can broadly discuss and frame issues as environmental pollution, fertility or education, and world society can provide the national political process with new political problems and possible solutions: Scientists, for example, discover new ways for national progress through a specific policy, non-governmental organizations point out the need at the local level, and

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<sup>4</sup> The reference to the stage heuristic has the purpose to show parallels of a world political process to the ones on the domestic level. It does not mean that the process is that simple and that the stages would always be easy to identify or would not be linked by feedback effects.

international organizations provide a forum and elaborate material to diffuse the new needs of intervention.

Such process, however, still requires the coupling with other streams, like the *policy* stream. It represents the specific solution that can be used to solve a problem, and it consists of political proposals which are discussed, drafted, revised and upon which policy-makers finally might agree. A network of policy stakeholders shares and discusses ideas, therewith testing how far they go and whether they are convincing. In the end, only a few proposals are seriously considered and pursued. The process of drafting, circulating, and revising policy proposals is a continuous ‘softening up’ of the policy community (Kingdon 2003:116-131). World society’s forums are in particular suitable for these activities, since they bring together ideas and proposals from very different countries but also enable policy makers to enlarge their horizon of comparison: An idea that is unusual in a specific national context can become more legitimate and could thus be established easier if reference to another, successful country and its experiences can be made. Global meetings, in this sense, ‘soften up’ the international community.

The third stream that needs to be connected for political success is the *politics* stream. In a domestic setting, it consists for example of attitudes that are dominant in the group of policy makers or it reflects election results and public opinion. Also, key personnel of the policy making process and its opinions are decisive and can push or restrict the ongoing process (Kingdon, 2003). In international specialized meetings, knowledge and attitudes of policy makers – as ministers and bureaucrats – are decisive. Besides, international conferences partially strive for more consensus than national bargaining which further fosters a culture of common ideas. Moreover, the international sphere is also accessed by new players. Some decades ago, for example, the EU was not yet such an important entity in world politics. Today, it is, changing the scene of the politics stream.

The three independent streams of problems, policies, and politics are joined together in the so-called *window of opportunity*. Therein, a policy has the chance to become prominent and to pass through the decision bodies. It is a process that is sometimes predictable, for example concerning national formulation of laws that assure compliance with European regulations, but most often the window is unpredictable and may be closed again very quickly. In fact, policy-entrepreneurs very often possess papers with solutions and link them to adequate, currently fashionable problems afterwards; they seek to profit from problems that are high up on the agenda (Kingdon 2003:165).

The outcome of coupling the streams is thus that problems, solutions and players find together and create new policy directions, a new agenda. In the context of global policy development, such ideas on agenda setting outline some conditions for the spread of world cultural models: For successful diffusion, elements of world culture must be

linked to a problem perceived as being important by international and national policy makers. The problem definition thus becomes crucial for policy diffusion. Applying institutional thought, urgent problems for states are likely the ones that touch upon core institutions of states and, for example, question legitimacy and modernity or diminish collective progress. Moreover, the problem and its solution should be widely applicable, which means that not only some states feel attracted, because that would restrict diffusion. As a further precondition, events are needed that bring together problem, policy, and supportive policy-makers to couple the different streams and to establish a broad consensus on the problem and measures to be taken. Such events are usually international meetings that connect adequate problems with policies and supporters at a common place.

Declarations that are often published after major events illustrate the policies upon which the participants could agree. The success of such central ideas remains not only a discursive fact but they settle the ground for new political arrangements and thus have a large impact on the political activities that follow (Blyth 2002:17-39). A main effect is that they reduce uncertainty because they work as a blueprint of analysis concerning the situation policy-makers face. Since a problem may have very different reasons, successful ideas structure the situation and allow putting an emphasis on identified areas of action. Without the conviction that education determines economic growth, much engagement of firms in education policy would not exist. If the idea of sustainable development had not been successful, environmental policies would still be seen as an obstacle to economic growth (Hajer 1995).

With regard to world society, this means that as soon as central ideas are fixed in global forums and its declarations, they are followed by the application of several instruments that support the promotion of these ideas, including policy recommendations, project financing, technical assistance and so on. Depending on the specific ideas established at the international level, the follow-up encompasses different policy changes. Establishing global prohibition regimes on illegal migration, for example, is very different from discussing passport security for preventing false documentation of visas. In theoretical terms, policies discussed can range from slight and medium adjustment of instruments – normal policy making – to fundamental change of goals and means – a paradigm change (Hall 1993). It provides a corridor of options when simply agreeing to reduce CO<sub>2</sub>-Emissions, but it is more fine-tuned to regulate the norms of industry filters. Policy change caused can thus range from establishing new ideas to the introduction of internationally promoted instruments of financing. This depends on the activities of the organization as well as on the situation within the country, as how far it is already in line with international policies.



## 2.2 Global Policy Diffusion

Policy change that takes place within one country due to international activities represents only one aspect of the impact of international organizations. While so far, mainly the vertical dimension of global policy making was emphasized – from world society to the nation state – the consequences of such a global policy process are most visible in a horizontal perspective – because countries all over the world start adopting a specific kind of policies and policy diffusion takes place. Such diffusion pattern does not only represent a sum of individual adoptions, but it is a process of social change among a group that involves communication among its members (Rogers 2003:5,6). In essence, it means that adopters – in this case: countries – subsequently implement a specific idea that, in consequence, spreads within the social system of world society. So even in case of only minor adjustments in the countries, an overall move towards the international goals could become visible. As a consequence, the impact of international organizations should not only be measured by analyzing the depth of policy change within the countries, but also by the breadth of policy change across countries.

Policy diffusion and world society have been brought together primarily by research on norm dynamics (Finnemore and Sikkink 1999). Norms, like the guarantee of human rights, are a special kind of policies and are closely linked to institutions. They have been the most obvious subject of policy diffusion within world society and it could be shown that, instead of a constant diffusion of norms on the world level, norms are first established reluctantly in some countries only, while in a later phase, they are spread quickly and widely across countries. In order to explain such nonlinear developments, the idea of a norm life cycle and its three stages were developed (Finnemore and Sikkink 1999). In the case of a successful diffusion process, the first stage of norm emergence results in a *tipping point*, at which a critical mass of actors adopts the norm and which causes a wide-spread norm cascade. At the second stage, the norm has already spread to a wider audience of policy makers and is widely known. As peer-pressure emerges in the international community, states become familiarized with the changed standard of appropriate statehood.<sup>5</sup>

The same stages, however, do not necessarily apply only to norms, but could be linked to different types of policies, be them human rights, global prohibition regimes or economic policies (e.g. Nadelmann 1990). In its essence, it means that specific policies – not only norms but also other policies – have reached a status of worldwide diffusion,

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<sup>5</sup> Although international organizations provide platforms for norm diffusion (Finnemore and Sikkink 1999), and are at the center of this paper, they are not the only cause of diffusion processes. Other reasons for diffusion can be other actors, e.g. non-governmental organizations, or a (seemingly) diffusion pattern might even result from independent problem solving at different places.

and that this diffusion process shows similar patterns as the diffusion of norms, namely the interaction specific actors, the use of international organizations as platforms and a tipping point before the diffusion accelerates. Against the background of agenda setting theories, however, the tipping point is not only an empirical question, but can be defined as the window of opportunity. Accordingly, to analyze the development of global public policy, the two strands of agenda setting and policy diffusion can be merged and brought together with a concept of global governance, resulting in one common model of global policy development.

### **2.3 A Model of Global Policy Development**

To come to such model of global policy development, a brief resume of the thoughts outlined above should be given: First, international organizations and other actors, world society, can shape the behavior of states when common policies are developed and diffused. The selection of these policies follows principles known from domestic politics, as the coupling of different streams in a window of opportunity, and resulting in the success of specific central ideas. Following on from that, different ways of policy change are possible, either small scale reforms linked to a specific steering instrument but also major reforms that define new policy targets. For causing policy change, international organizations have different instruments at hand, ranging from rather ‘soft means’ as discursive dissemination to binding regulations. Given the fact that these instruments are not only applied bilaterally to one state, but that a large number of countries is affected, international organizations not only prove to be major players in global governance but also effective policy diffusion agents.

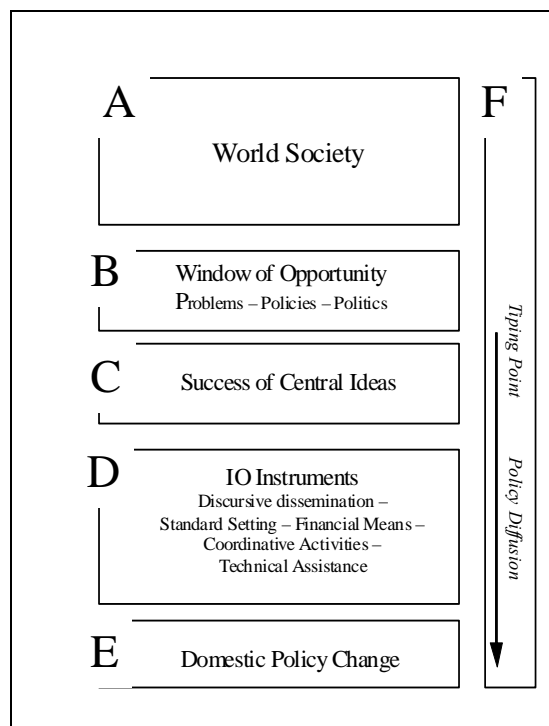
A model of global policy development in that sense thus starts with a background of sociological institutionalism, formulates some conditions that successful policies need for diffusion and unifies ideas on vertical and horizontal policy change. In the frame of international organizations and their platforms, actors push forward policies that are discussed and diffused if the streams of problem, policy, and politics are successfully coupled. The tipping point of a norm life cycle can be interpreted as the window of opportunity that arises in the context of global conferences or meetings. The norm cascade is a policy diffusion process that is linked to the success of central ideas, policy changes, and policy formulation according to the national status quo. Such a model illustrates a policy process that interlinks the global and national sphere: agenda setting and policy proposals are set in the global sphere, while policy change is implemented on the national level. It is possible to bring together these different ideas more schematically in a model of global policy development, as done in figure 1.

In such scheme, international organizations and other members promote specific policies (A). For placement on the international agenda, the streams of problems, policies

and politics need to be coupled (B), resulting in the success of central ideas and their implications for the follow-up (C). International organizations then apply their different instruments (D), to promote policy change on the national level (E). In the same time, the whole process represents a policy diffusion process with the window of opportunity as its tipping point (F).

The added-value of this model is that it subsumes the development of global public under one overarching frame, including actors as well as conditions needed for successful development and spread.

*Figure 1: A Model of Global Policy Development*



## **2.4 Outlook: Global Policy Development and International Policy Goals**

Global policy development is thus bound to the activities of international organizations in a sense that these are the forums that link together non-governmental and governmental activities, creating a global public sphere in which policies are developed and negotiated. Activities by international organizations, thus, are a critical point in the structuring of global public policies. In that understanding, their forums should be identifiable as part of global policy development, in particular related to the tipping point of global diffusion and the window of opportunity in agenda setting. The tipping point was already been linked to world forums in the context of norm life cycles (Finnemore and Sikkink 1999). Moreover, it also known that the more established an issue is in global

public policy becomes, the more likely activities of international organizations are. Since international organizations provide the forums for policy diffusion, such assumption consequently follows from the idea of global policy development (see also Meyer et al 1997b).

A hypothesis derived from this idea of global policy development, the instruments of international organizations and their role in structuration is as follows : *The more established an issue is in global public policy, the more fine tuned policy goals outlined by international organizations are.* This means that over the course of time, international organizations establish more and more detailed ideas, prescriptions and policy recommendations and apply their range of instruments to it. This is in line with assuming an increasing structuring of policy fields, as well as with the fact that international organizations, in this concept of global policy development, become increasingly relevant in the domestic policy process. This relevance, however, does not only relate to the actual number of policy fields in which international organizations are active, but also to the degree by which they are entrenched in domestic policy development: Agenda-setting is only one stage of domestic politics, and by engaging investing in several instruments, international organizations can interact with domestic politics also in other stages, so that, for example, their coordinative function is linked to domestic implementation procedures.

The following pages are dedicated to show whether the model and the assumptions derived from it match reality. The following case study traces such global policy development for the case of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is the political aim to expand learning times across the whole life-span. In its most extended version, it results in an organized process from birth to old age, accompanying the life of people in different settings, and intending to enable them to a constantly changing world. In developing countries, lifelong learning debates have led to a discussion of basic education – as literacy – in adulthood, so that schooling is nowadays not the only possible education these setting. As will be shown, the global development of lifelong learning policies has run through the different international stages, to currently be spread as a popular and widely shared concept for reforming education systems.

### **3. THE GLOBAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING – A CASE STUDY**

Researchers dealing with current education policy can hardly avoid being confronted with the idea of lifelong learning, the political goal of extending education over the life span. In the context of the 1960 International Conference on Adult Education, the idea of ‘éducation permanente’ emerged, a term that was first translated as ‘permanent education’, but later superseded by ‘lifelong education’ or ‘recurrent education’ (Sutton

1996:28). Further work of UNESCO had been the starting point for debates on ‘lifelong integrated education’ in the frame of the 1970 International Year of Education. A large part of these lifelong learning discussions focused on the right to learn and on individual development. Similar issues were also raised within other international organizations: Olof Palme introduced ‘recurrent education’ on a OECD ministers meeting in 1969, based on activities that a Swedish commission on adult education carried out in those years (Papadopoulos 1994:112-113). The International Labor Organization also dealt with lifelong learning, in particular by setting up the paid educational leave standard (ILO 1974a; 1974b; Salt and Bowland 1996). However, besides small steps of success, the debate did not cause major changes in national education systems.

Today, however, consensus on the value of this idea has been ‘one of the most remarkable features of the education policy discourse, nationally and internationally, of the past decade’ (Papadopoulos 2002a:39). Analyzing education policy reports submitted to the International Conference of Education – a major conference hosted by the UNESCO International Bureau of Education in Geneva – confirms such statement in figures: From the mid-1990s until 2004, countries have more and more often referred to lifelong learning in the context of education policy (Table 2).<sup>6</sup> 78 out of 99 countries mention lifelong learning at least once in this period, and their number has grown over the time. Nearly 80 percent represents an impressive number given the fact that these reports come from all over the world and do include many developing countries.

*Table 2: Diffusion of the idea of lifelong learning*

	1996	2001	2004
Percentage of countries referring to lifelong learning			
- in the respective year	62.8	70.6	72.0
- accumulated (from 1996)	62.8	71.8	78.8
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Number of countries referring to lifelong learning			
- in the respective year	27	36	59
- accumulated (from 1996)	27	51	78
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Number of countries analyzed			
- in the respective year	43	51	82
- accumulated (from 1996)	43	71	99

Source: Policy Reports submitted to ICE 1996,2001,2004, own calculations

In principle, the activities of international organizations can focus on different levels of domestic policy making, as agendas, programs or impacts. Even when agendas are changing, reforms do not necessarily follow suit, nor do they necessarily impact on so-

<sup>6</sup> This is a result of a standardized text analysis carried out with all English language reports submitted to the conference. The methodology is described in Jakobi (2007a). See Jakobi (2006) for data on the spread before 1996.

cietal practice. While the above figures might thus only represent important changes in the wording, reforms are principally different. Nonetheless, countries also started reforms for expanding education over the life span: Principally, lifelong learning policies can focus on different educational stages, from very early education in pre-schools to adult and higher education. Common to all kind of lifelong learning is that they intend expanding or interlinking educational phases. States have invested many efforts in restructuring several part of the education system ( Jakobi 2006).

Following the model of global policy development outlined above, it should be possible to identify favorable conditions linked to politics, policy and problems in the context of lifelong learning to explain its timing. Moreover, actors should be identifiable, namely international organizations, which promoted lifelong learning, applying a range of instruments. Finally, the establishment of lifelong learning on the world agenda should also be marked by an increasing fine-tuning of international policies, representing a growth of structuration in the case of lifelong learning.

### **3.1. The Timing of Lifelong Learning Promotion**

A basic condition for the timing of lifelong learning diffusion is a window of opportunity that precedes its current spread. More specific, the 1990s must have given an opportunity for successfully coupling the three streams of agenda setting – an opportunity that the 1970s did not grant.

The first stream to be analyzed in the frame of the agenda setting concept outlined is the one of *politics*: In education, as in many other policy fields, international organizations have developed activities that shape national perception and treatment of political questions. In effect, a growing number of education policy concepts today does not origin from the country, but from international sources like international organizations or other countries (Dale 1999). In this context, the very functions and activities of international organizations in the field of education have changed, leading towards a function as diffusing agents and policy-making bodies. One example of this change is the European Union, that has continuously expanded its influence on educational questions. European activities in education used to be opposed by the member states, and only the treaties of Maastricht 1992 officially established education as a European activity: Articles 126 and 127 contain the aim to develop a European dimension in education, whereby ‘harmonization’ was explicitly excluded (Jakobi and Rusconi 2008:5-6). But with the Lisbon agenda or the Bologna process, the Commission has put education high on its agenda, and the Open Method of Coordination, its guidelines, indicators and monitoring activities (Schäfer 2004) have all been applied to education policy. By such means, the Commission further enhances the European level of education policy making, delivering new proposals, ideas, and agendas to the member states.

The growing influence of international organizations has, as a consequence, particularly fostered the standing of lifelong learning, whose promotion has been strongly linked to international organizations and less to specific nation states. The organizations delivered the major contributions to lifelong learning's prominence and – although it has some linkages to a Scandinavian origin – the concept was generated without having a specific education system in mind but as a truly new idea. Linking this fact to the increasing influence of international organizations on education policy making sheds a light on new politics of lifelong learning: In the 1990s, a policy which was mainly developed in the context of international organizations had more chances to be successfully transferred to the countries than in the 1970s. The changing influence of these organizations thus constitutes a major change in the stream of politics and supported the success of lifelong learning.

A second stream that changed in the course of the years is the *policy stream*, the actual content of this idea. In the debate on lifelong learning, a clear shift of emphasis can be observed: In the 1970s, debates were coined mainly by a discussion about individual development, while today, it is primarily discussed in its economic relevance and individual responsibility (e.g. Kallen 2002, Tuijnman and Boström, 2002)(Tuijnman and Boström 2002). From such economic-oriented perspective, education and long-term economic success are directly linked. Because lifelong learning, in its consequence, offers the possibility of a constantly trained and up-to-date-workforce and should, principally, enable permanent employability, the idea has become more and more attractive to policy makers and the industry: Since 1997, lifelong learning has become a horizontal objective of the European employment strategy, and political statements on lifelong learning underline the importance of the issue for competitiveness (EU Commission 2000; European Council 2002a).

Lifelong learning is thus a rather perfect piece in the puzzle of active social policy: It guarantees education throughout life, and therewith constitutes the base of a competitive workforce as well as it can help to prevent unemployment through deskilling. In the same time, the awareness and the financing of lifelong learning is often seen as individual responsibility, not as something that is financed publicly. This, however, marks an obvious difference to the early policies developed in the 1970s: Such were restricted to adulthood only, and they were mainly discussed as a right for personal development. Consequently, they would have made increased responsibility and expenditure of the state necessary. In contrast to that time, the debate since the 1990s tends to support the decreasing public expenditure by emphasizing individual activity (compare Gilbert and Gilbert 1989). With lifelong learning today, the state can 'activate' instead of redistributing. Nowadays economic importance of lifelong learning thus constitutes an important change in the stream of policies.

A final condition to be fulfilled for successful agenda-setting is to have a prominent and important *problem* to which a policy can be linked. Again, major changes become visible when analyzing the case of lifelong learning from such perspective. During the 1970s, when lifelong learning was mainly discussed in a context of individual development, the discussion was focused on collective progress only to a minor extent. The current link of lifelong learning to the knowledge society, however, is very different from this early approach. The new problem is assumed to have wide-ranging collective consequences, and it delivers a suitable and important rationale for many countries' education policy reforms.

The terms 'knowledge society' or 'knowledge economy' were first made prominent in the late 1960s, by Ferdinand Drucker's book 'The Age of Discontinuity' and a corresponding article 'The Knowledge Society' (Drucker 1969a; 1969b). Some years later, another seminal work on new modes of production was published: Daniel Bell's 'The Coming of Post-Industrial Society' (Bell 1999 [1973]). According to him, knowledge and education have a central role to play in post-industrial societies and human capital would form the new base of societal stratification (Bell 1999 [1973]lxiv-lxx). Consequently, human capital as well as individual or collective education are increasingly important (see e.g. (Bell 1999 [1973])213-42). With his work, Bell sketched a rationale for education policy making: If such a new type of society arises, education has to play a major role in integrating people in the state-of-the-art of their professions. Early policy proposals on lifelong learning, however, mentioned the idea of a knowledge society only sparsely. The 1973 OECD report contained a reference to Drucker's work and outlined that a new type of economy could be expected (OECD 1973). This vision, however, had only been a minor point and the main emphasis was laid on other aspects.

This stands in sharp contrast to the discussion led today: The knowledge society has moved center stage in education policy. When for example the EU decided to strive for becoming 'the most competitive knowledge-based economy of the world' (EU Council 2000) it also identified the need for adequate education policies. While the significance of continuous knowledge development for economic and societal development was thus not yet widely recognized three decades ago, today its implications are summarized under the term 'knowledge society'. As a consequence, nowadays expanding learning and education over the life-course is seen as a critical issue for overall national development, constituting an important change in the in the stream of problems.

Coming back to the assumptions derived from the theoretical framework presented in the first section, major changes in all three streams can be assessed. The fact that international organizations gained more influence has been a favorable condition in politics, the fact that education has increasingly gained economic importance had been a favorable condition in the policy stream; and, lastly, the fact of a rising awareness concerning



the knowledge society was a favorable condition for lifelong learning in the stream of problems. The coupling in the mid-1990s formed the window of opportunity, derived from international collaboration and constituting the tipping point for policy diffusion. The development presented in this section could thus explain the timing of lifelong learning diffusion, linked to the first assumption derived from the theoretical framework. The following section analyses whether the second assumption – that policies are mainly diffused in the context of international organizations – also holds true.

### **3.2 Actors of Lifelong Learning Diffusion**

Several international organizations have started activities linked to lifelong learning, and disseminate this political goal with different means: The *UNESCO* had already been involved in early debates on the issue, for example through the so-called ‘Faure Report’, where lifelong learning was proposed as a master concept along which to develop education systems (UNESCO 1972:182, emphasis in original). This and other activities, however, were not met by increasing national activities and over the course of the 1980s, the organizations turned away from the topic. In the 1990s, however, this situation has changed, starting with the Jomtien summit in 1990, where participants adopted the ‘World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs’. The declaration included an emphasis both on pre-primary education and on the inclusion of adults as potential recipients of basic education (World Conference on Education for All 1990: Art 1(4), 3 (1), 5). In 1991, the UNESCO General Conference decided to establish a commission for reflecting the future of education systems. The ‘International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ published its report in 1996, underlining the importance of lifelong learning for future education systems (UNESCO 1996:Part 1). It was explicitly seen as the foundation of future education policy: ‘The concept of learning throughout life is the key that gives access to the twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education’ (UNESCO 1996:111). Learning over the life span included access to variety of learning opportunities, the expansion of early learning in childhood and preschool (UNESCO 1996:134), (World Education Forum 2000:28-30,64-66). Moreover, being a standard setting activity, the 2001 revised ‘Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education’ conceptualized vocational education and training as being one element of lifelong learning (UNESCO 2001:I). As a consequence, barriers between different levels and kinds of education should widely be abolished, and flexible structures would be needed that guarantee individual entry and re-entry to education as well as continuous learning.

Summarizing these and other activities that UNESCO has carried out over the years, it becomes clear that the organization invested many efforts in promoting lifelong learning. Classic standard setting instruments of the organization, declarations of world con-

ferences or publications all underlined the importance of the issue. The organization emphasizes the importance of the idea for developed and for developing countries: ‘Basic education is still an absolute priority. But adult education, which might seem irrelevant for countries that have still a long way to go to meet basic education needs, has nevertheless acquired decisive importance to be an essential condition for development’ (UNESCO 2005e:24-25). In this respect, it strongly parallels the promotion of science bureaucracies (see Finnemore 1993).

Beside the UNESCO, also the *OECD* began working on lifelong learning at the end of the 1960s (Papadopoulos, 1994:112-3, 119). It published an important conceptual report in 1973, but which did not cause many national changes (OECD, 1973, see (Schuller, Schuetze and Istance 2002). The visible re-emergence of lifelong learning again began in the 1990s. The 1994 ‘OECD Jobs Study’ had already emphasized the need for further qualifying the labor force and the results of the ‘Adult Literacy Survey’ had further illustrated a partly serious lack of competencies of adults, which underlined the importance of further qualification (OECD 1995:15; OECD 1996:237-8). The 1996 OECD’s education ministers’ meeting was concerned with ‘Lifelong Learning for All’. There, countries unanimously agreed on the importance of the issue and declared that ‘Lifelong Learning will be essential for everyone as we move into the 21st century and has to be made accessible to all [...]’ (OECD 1996:21). This conference was an initial event for the success of lifelong learning within the OECD, its members and beyond. Since then, the OECD has published a variety of issues linked to lifelong learning, ranging from questions of financing to the role of school buildings and education policy reviews (Hinton 2005; Istance 2003; OECD 2000; 2002a; 2002c)). Part of one of its projects has been the development of ‘National Qualification Frameworks’, in which 24 countries and other international organizations like the European Commission, World Bank, and ILO participated (OECD 2004d). Lifelong learning will remain a priority of future OECD activity, too, and recent working plans fix that the OECD should help members as well as partner countries realizing lifelong learning for all, the latter also signifying the influence of the organization beyond its members (OECD, 2005b:6,10-1).

Summarizing the overall development within the OECD, it can be stated that the organization has carried out a wide range of initiatives, trying to bring lifelong learning closer to the countries. The organization has become a central player in pushing the idea and it coordinated the different countries’ activities to calibrate their policies (see Jakobi and Martens 2007). Furthermore, the OECD is well connected to other international education policy actors, which secures a wide dissemination of its perspectives and sensitive taking up and framing of emergent issues: OECD representatives promote lifelong learning for example in the context of the European Bologna process or on ASEM

meetings (ASEM 2005b; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2005; Wurzburg 2003).

A further important international actor is the *European Union*, which started activities in the early 1990s. A major public event has been the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, in which more than 500 projects were financed with an overall contribution of around eight million ECUs (EU Commission undated:12-15). At the end of the European Year, the council adopted conclusions on a strategy for lifelong learning. These conclusions were comprehensive and included diverse areas of education, from pre-school to accreditation of teachers (European Council 1996). Since 1997, lifelong learning is part of the European employment strategy and the Lisbon agenda further reinforced the central role of education and qualifications (EU Commission 2000:5; EU Council 2000; European Council 2002a:1) The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, published in 2000, included thoughts on indicators, benchmarks, and best practices for each objective (EU Commission 2000:24-36). It was followed by the Commission's 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality' in 2001. The publication emphasized the role of lifelong learning in empowering citizens and serving the economic goals of the Union, intending to link together different initiatives that had been separated before, as the 'European Employment Strategy' or the 'European Social Agenda'. The follow-up of this agenda was planned to be made by the Commission in cooperation with other European institutions and the member countries as well as with non-governmental organizations and other international organizations (EU Commission 2001:5).

Recent years have continued the emphasis on lifelong learning: In their 2002 work program on education and training, the European Council and the Commission again underlined the importance of lifelong learning and set the target that, by 2010, 'for the benefit of citizens and the Union as a whole [...] Europeans at all ages should have access to lifelong learning (European Council 2002b:3). In the same year, a council resolution on lifelong learning was adopted, emphasizing a 'cradle-to-grave' principle of education and the provision in different settings (European Council 2002a:2). Later, the creation of a common qualification framework was decided, whose implementation began in 2007 (EU Commission 2005b:4). An additional peak was the 2006 decision of the European Parliament and the Council on establishing a lifelong learning action program. The agenda included programs linked to educational phases from pre-primary and secondary to higher education, vocational education and adult education. From 2007 to 2013, more than 6,9 Billion Euro are planned to be invested and the program has enabled the Community to develop wide-ranging education policies at the European level, including financing of programs and technical assistance or the exchange of policies and their evaluation (EU Commission 2006:2-10).

So, although the EU could, in principle, establish supranational legal regulations for lifelong learning implementation. However, the treaties restrict its influence and therefore, mostly project financing or soft law like the Open Method of Coordination is used for assuring progress towards the targets. Only in 2006, the Union has adopted a formal decision of both the council and the parliament on a lifelong learning program. As in the other cases, linkages to other international organizations can be observed: In particular, the case of the European qualification framework illustrates in real-time how similar the policy development within quite different organizations is, since also the OECD are working on exactly the same issue. Moreover, future co-operation with other organizations – as the Council of Europe, OECD or UNESCO – regarding ‘the development of lifelong learning policies and concrete actions’ is explicitly demanded by the member states (European Council 2002a:3). Moreover, by stimulating debates in the ASEM, the Union has also expanded the discussion on lifelong learning far beyond its member states (ASEM 2002a).

*Other international organizations* active in that field are, for example, the World Bank or the ILO: The World Bank has started financing lifelong learning projects or conceptualized how developing countries could implement lifelong learning and benefit from it. The 2004 renewed ILO Recommendation on Human Resource Development puts lifelong learning central and underlined its importance for countries across the world, and the organization has also financed projects linked to lifelong learning targets (Jakobi 2007b).

### **3.3 Instruments applied for Disseminating Lifelong Learning**

Taken together, there has thus been plenty of international activity on lifelong learning, ranging from official standards as recommendations to meetings on special issues as financing. As outlined in the theoretical part, international organizations have principally five instruments at hand to influence national policy development: disseminating ideas, setting standards, providing financial means, coordinating policy efforts and offering technical assistance. Applying this typology to lifelong learning reveals that all of them were used to promote this policy, even if not each of the organization could apply all (see table 3).

Centrally, international organizations have promoted the idea that lifelong learning is an important tool for national and individual progress. They have underlined its role for ensuring economic development at the advent of the knowledge society, for industrialized as well as for developing nations or countries in transition. They have also emphasized the need for lifelong learning in the context of employability. Examples for international organizations that disseminated the idea of lifelong learning has been the UNESCO and its ‘Commission for Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, the OECD meeting

on ‘Lifelong Learning for All’, the European Year of Lifelong Learning, or a World Bank conference on lifelong learning (World Bank 2003a), to name a few. Standard setting activities have been undertaken by UN organizations as UNESCO or ILO and their respective recommendations in the context of adult education, as well as with benchmarks set up in the frame of the OMC education. Financial means, as a third instrument for lifelong learning promotion, has been applied by the World Bank and the EU. The Bank financed projects in borrowing countries, while the EU sponsored projects in the frame of the European year of lifelong learning or, more recently, in the context of the working program on lifelong learning. Coordination of activities, including monitoring, has been in OECD country reviews or in the organization’s project on qualification systems and lifelong learning, but also publications as the UNESCO/EFA monitoring report that assesses countries’ progress towards common aims. Technical assistance, finally, has been offered by the ILO when initializing projects that dealt with establishing learning opportunities in several countries (ILO 2005c, 2005d).

*Table 3: Instruments for the Diffusion of Lifelong Learning*

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Ideas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– OECD Meeting 'Lifelong learning for All'</li> <li>– EU European Year of Lifelong Learning</li> <li>– UNESCO Commission on Education for the 21st Century</li> </ul>
<i>Standard Setting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– UNESCO Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education</li> <li>– ILO Recommendation on Human Resource Development</li> <li>– EU OMC Benchmarks</li> </ul>
<i>Financial Means</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– World Bank Project Financing</li> <li>– EU Lifelong Learning Action Program</li> </ul>
<i>Coordination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– UNESCO/EFA Monitoring Reports</li> <li>– OECD Country Reviews</li> <li>– OECD Project 'Role of Qualification frameworks in Promoting Lifelong Learning'</li> </ul>
<i>Technical Assistance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– ILO Projects Supporting e.g. the Albanian Government</li> </ul>

This list contains only a small number of all lifelong learning activities, but even this small numbers reveals that the amount of international activity makes it extremely difficult for countries to ‘escape’ the lifelong learning agenda. A dense network of activities has been formed, and a consensus has grown not only that lifelong learning is important, but also that it is integral part of education policy. In that sense, lifelong learning has developed into a norm in education policy making; it is nearly universally acknowledged and institutionalized as a common element of nowadays education policy.

As could also be seen, in the course of time, international organizations have additionally more focused on smaller and concrete policy steps deriving from the major

goals of lifelong learning: While in the early and mid-1990s, the organizations established lifelong learning as an important issue in education policy, underlining its necessity and emphasizing opportunities, their following activities could build upon this frame and partly became more focused: The OECD focused on qualification frameworks or on questions of financing, and the EU could establish an action program on lifelong learning in 2006, representing a huge difference compared to the 1996 more public European Year. These more fine-tuned policy goals also enable a closer entrenchment of the international organization in domestic processes, being able to provide service to implementation procedures. Successful placement on international agendas has thus not only a follow-up in the sense that progress should be monitored, but also in a sense that further policy aims are derived from the initial agreement and that the international organizations follows domestic policy stages from agenda setting to implementation or evaluation.<sup>7</sup>

### **3.4 Resume: The Rise and Spread of Lifelong Learning**

The case of lifelong learning has shown that the framework of global policy development can be applied for the analysis of worldwide political change: International organizations, as UNESCO, OECD, EU, World Bank or others have promoted lifelong learning intensively. Common activity in the year 1996 provided a window of opportunity in which policy streams could merge and lifelong learning could successfully be placed on the agenda, also determining lines of action along which policies should be oriented, for example their economic focus . In the following years, international organizations applied a range of instruments to pursue lifelong learning policy development in the countries, and a diffusion pattern of lifelong learning could be observed.

Against the background of the model, the following phase of lifelong learning policy development can be identified: International organizations promoted the policy internationally (Stage A), but only under favorable conditions in the 1990s, a window of opportunity was created to place lifelong learning successfully on the international education agendas (B). The success of this idea meant identification of specific lines of action (C), which were pursued by different instruments of international organizations (D). In sum, these activities led to wide-spread support of lifelong learning on the national level (E).<sup>8</sup> From a perspective of policy diffusion, the international activities in 1996 represented the tipping point for a successful diffusion of lifelong learning (F). The global

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<sup>7</sup> Being a rather programmatic organization, the UNESCO does still invest much in programmatic development rather than in specific policy implementation. Nonetheless this is more the exception than the rule.

<sup>8</sup> The national level could not systematically be presented here, compare Jakobi (2009, in preparation) for such assessment.

policy development of lifelong learning thus proceeded along the assumed theoretical lines, also including increasingly fine-tuned policy goals.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS: WORLD SOCIETY AND GLOBAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

Against a background of sociological institutionalism, this article developed a concept of how to analyze the emergence and spread of global public policy. In such model, world society serves as an agenda-setter for domestic politics, and international organizations influence national policy making and implementation by different instruments. In essence, the concept brought together three different threads of theories, those of agenda setting, of policy diffusion and of global governance: Agenda-setting is important to explain the timing of specific global public policies; policy diffusion is an important outcome of global policy development, and global governance is important part of global policy development, since international actors can therewith influence international problem-solving and activities.

The concept presented here is partial in the sense that it focuses on policy outcomes only, and does not yet incorporate the different actor motivations that are linked to these outcomes. A more complete model would need to incorporate these causes, and, in the long run, could look for whether a specific input determines a specific policy outcome. Nonetheless, the overall value of the above presented concept of global policy development is that it embeds the increasing international exchanges, the growing importance of international actors in national politics, their relevance for global governance, and the phenomenon of policy diffusion in one coherent analytical frame. Although the model itself does not provide a causal mechanism, it enables research to analyze the development of policies in a comparable way, testing conditions for successful global governance across different policy fields. So, it is yet to decide whether the development of lifelong learning is a typical or non-typical global policy development, and in which respect it differs from global public policies linked to corruption, social policy or the environment. New institutionalism considers education to be a strong societal institution, and lifelong learning policies can easily be bound to it. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily tell us much about more contested policies. International organizations have been particularly engaged in supporting lifelong learning, and although their approaches to realize this principle are not identical, they are unified in its promotion. This is not necessarily the case with other policies, so further research is also needed to assess whether this case is an exception, whether large differences exist between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics or whether fields in which international organizations are only weak players face very different global developments. In consequence, this means that global policies are not always that global in the sense that all international organizations support them or countries perceive it nearly universally positively. Lifelong learning is thus a

policy that is, in that sense, atypical in that it does not represent a widely contested area. However, even more contested international policies, for example those of arms control, a part of a policy process, and the concept proposed here could be a first step in examining it.

The model presented here mainly focused on international governmental actors and their role for policy diffusion, and has neglected the role of important states, business or non-governmental organizations for policy development. This, however, is not necessarily a theoretical problem, since they could also be analyzed within the same frame, but a selection in the context of this article: It focused on international governmental organizations and their instruments, because the attribution of international governance instruments can best be linked to their activities, while bi-lateral or non-governmental activities work with different means. The article thus focused on a concept for international organizations, without principally stating that these are the only actors, or always the most important ones.

Further research could link the model of a global policy cycle to other actors, their motivations and their effects, to find out if and where modifications are needed. In the long run, it could also be a valuable task to link more complex models of the domestic policy process (see Sabatier 2007) to world politics, going beyond the concept of the ‘stage heuristic’.

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