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Global dimensions of policy

Mathias Koenig-Archibugi

Abstract

Beyond wide agreement that many areas of contemporary policy making are unintelligible if processes that transcend the boundaries of individual states are not taken into account, analysts often disagree on how various ‘global’ and ‘local’ factors interact to produce policies and policy outcomes. The disagreement stems in part from the use of different analytic lenses, and specifically from the choice between ‘statecentric’ and ‘polycentric’ lenses. This article examines the fundamental assumptions of these general perspectives with regard to the polity, politics and policy dimensions of global policy making, and surveys some of the research questions and findings that resulted from their use. It concludes that scholars and policy makers should treat the two analytical lenses as complementary, as each of them stimulates the analyst to ask questions and look for entities and causal connections that the other lens may miss.

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1. Introduction

There is wide agreement that many areas of contemporary policy making are unintelligible if observers do not take into account processes that transcend the boundaries of individual states: financial regulation, food safety standards, environmental management systems, taxation, intellectual property, telecommunication, infectious disease control, accounting standards, to name but a few policy domains where global factors can be expected to be influential, and sometimes decisive. Beyond that basic insight, though, there is little agreement among analysts on the relative importance of ‘global’ as opposed to more ‘local’ factors (however defined) and on how global and local factors interact to produce policies and policy outcomes. To be sure, disagreements often stem from differing interpretations of specific events or relationships: for instance, whether a particular policy choice was made mainly in order to protect the market share of a national industry vis-à-vis competitors based in jurisdictions where that policy was already implemented; or whether governments that are members of a particular international organization are more likely than others to adopt a certain policy. But sometimes interpretations of global dimensions of policy making vary for a more fundamental reason: analysts use different analytical lenses and hence see different things, even when they are trying to understand the dynamics of the same policy domain.

This article considers two general analytical lenses, or perspectives, that can be used to study global policy, which will be called the ‘statecentric’ and ‘polycentric’ lens. The aim of the article is to highlight the respective assumptions of these perspectives and to review some of the research questions and findings that resulted from them. The terms “analytical lens” and “perspective” (which are employed synonymously) are used to emphasise that statecentrism and polycentrism are not “theories”, if theories are conceived as coherent sets of hypotheses about causal and constitutive relationships between phenomena. An analytical lens is rather a set of general assumptions, which form the basis on which a number of theories can be developed. Theories based on the same statecentric or polycentric assumptions may well be pointing in opposite

directions: for instance, a statecentric theory that expects a ruthless struggle for survival and dominance among self-interested states is clearly different from a statecentric theory that expects states to be deeply socialized in the respect for shared global norms. Similarly, a polycentric theory that assigns to multinational corporations a structurally dominant role in the global system is clearly different from a polycentric theory that expects a pluralistic balance of power between all kinds of nonstate actors.

It should be stated at the outset that the relationship between the two lenses is not conceived here as intrinsically competitive. In some cases it may be fruitful to contrast theories derived from the two perspectives and compare their explanatory power in relation to certain policy cases. But in other circumstances the two analytical lenses are better seen as complementary: each of them stimulates the analyst to ask questions and look for entities and causal connections that the other lens may miss. In analogy to physical lenses, each of them allows the observer to see some objects more sharply while at the same time blurring the context or cutting it out altogether.

The article consists of two main sections. The first section starts by outlining the key assumptions of the *statecentric* perspective with regard to the *polity*, the *politics* and the *policy* dimensions of policy making.¹ It then shows that this perspective has led analysts to focus on three broad areas of research: global policy competition, global policy communication, and global policy cooperation. Some exemplary studies conducted on those research questions are mentioned. The second section outlines the key assumptions of the *polycentric* perspective, again with regard to the *polity*, the *politics* and the *policy* dimensions. It then discusses some emerging research agendas among analysts using this perspective, notably the theme of the inclusiveness and public accountability of private and hybrid governance arrangements. The concluding section offers some thoughts on the relationship between the two lenses.

¹ 'Polity' refers to the boundaries and basic institutional features of the policy-making unit; 'politics' refers to the process of interaction among actors and actor coalitions possessing various material and ideational resources and to the prevalent modes of interaction, such as fighting, arguing, bargaining and voting; 'policy' refers to the particular combination of goals and means 'selected' by the political process.

2. The statecentric perspective

2.1 Assumptions

Authors using a statecentric perspective make a simple assumption with regard to the *polity* that is the object of analysis: it is the state. The policies under consideration are thus instances of ‘public policy’, to the extent that public policy is equated with policy made by states, individually or collectively. (Section 3 considers this equation further). In relation to the dimension of *politics*, the assumption is that it occurs in two separate arenas: domestic and international. Domestic politics consists of the competition for influence on state policy making among groups variously organized as political parties, party factions, pressure groups, judicial bodies, semi-independent public authorities, etc. Depending on the key institutional features of the polity, electoral politics plays a larger or smaller role in shaping policies, but it always interacts with other mechanisms and channels of interest representation, such as corporatist arrangements, factional bargaining within parties, and contentious collective action. International politics, on the other hand, consists of interaction among governments, and it also can take a variety of forms: coercive diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral negotiations, reciprocal or unilateral policy adjustment, inclusion in and exclusion from policy arrangements, to mention just the most common. Domestic and international politics may be interpreted as functioning according to fundamentally different logics. For instance, a very influential approach in International Relations scholarship, structural Realism, is based on the assumption that domestic politics is based on the political ordering principle of hierarchy whereas international politics is based on the political ordering principle of anarchy (Waltz, 1979). But the assumption of a fundamental qualitative difference between the two domains is not a necessary component of the statecentric view. What is necessary is only that the two political domains are separate and that they are connected almost exclusively through governments. In other words, there is an ‘outside’ and an ‘inside’ and governments are the only gatekeepers between them.

One example of a theory based on statecentric assumptions is ‘liberal intergovernmentalism’, which has been developed by Andrew Moravcsik (1998) and other authors, mostly with reference to European rather than global integration. Liberal intergovernmentalism combines a ‘liberal’ approach to the formation of state

preferences (based on the issue-specific economic interests of powerful domestic constituents) with a bargaining theory of international negotiations (based on the relative power of states stemming from asymmetrical interdependence) and a functional theory of institutional choice (based on the role of international institutions in increasing the credibility of interstate commitments).

The statecentric perspective has generated several research programmes that have greatly enriched our understanding of the global dimensions of policy making. These research programmes have clustered around three themes that can be called ‘global policy competition’, ‘global policy communication’, and ‘global policy cooperation’.² The order in which these themes are discussed in the remainder of this section reflects the minimum levels of interaction ‘density’, and hence opportunities for ‘socialization’ among policy makers, which are required for the relevant causal mechanisms to operate. In principle, competition requires very little interaction among decision-makers in different countries to produce an effect on policy, as a ‘natural’ selection mechanism may eliminate ‘unsuccessful’ policies and allow successful policies to survive and be replicated. In practice, however, decisions about which policies to adopt or abandon are often made after ascertaining which policies are implemented in other countries. Similarly, in principle communication may consist of the limited interaction involved in gathering information about foreign policy experiences, but in practice government officials exchange information on a much more regularized and institutionalized basis. Finally, cooperation almost always requires extensive interaction during pre-agreement negotiation and post-agreement verification of compliance. The following subsections present some exemplary findings.

2.2. Global policy competition

In academic and public debates it is often remarked that states design regulative and redistributive policies in such a way as to strengthen the competitiveness of ‘domestic’ companies in global markets and the attractiveness of their own jurisdiction as a location for investments. Once a government changes its policies to protect ‘its’

² Because of space constraints, the article focuses on research on the interaction of policies and ignores the impact of other processes, such as the transnational diffusion of new technologies or policy-independent changes in the international flow of goods, services and capital.

companies or to attract capital, this results in a ‘policy externality’ for other governments, who are under pressure to change their policies as well. According to some authors, global competitive pressures are so strong that contemporary states have become ‘competition states’ (Cerny, 1997). Analysts often also predict the kind of policies that competition promotes: a general convergence towards policies that minimise costs for companies exposed to foreign competition and for transitionally mobile economic actors. In other words, competition is said to produce a ‘race to the bottom’ (RTB). From the point of view of the governments, the equilibrium outcome is suboptimal, since none gain any competitive advantage while their policies are more ‘business-friendly’ than they would otherwise be – a classic instance of a ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’.

The competitive regulation hypothesis has generated much theoretical and empirical controversy. With regard to environmental regulation, for instance, there is considerable disagreement over the extent to which polluting industries relocate or expand in response to differences in regulatory stringency – the ‘pollution heavens’ hypothesis. While earlier research found no such effect, more recent research suggests that investment decisions are sensitive to differences in regulatory stringency, but the question is far from settled (Brunnermeier and Levinson, 2004; Spatareanu, 2007).

More relevant for the purposes of this article is the question of whether governments *perceive* a problem of jurisdictional competition and *change* their policies in the *expectation* that industries will respond accordingly. Some studies have found that exposure to competition affects the likelihood that certain policies are adopted. Simmons and Elkins (2004), for instance, examined 182 states from 1967 to 1996 and found that countries were much more likely to adopt a liberal capital account policy if their direct competitors for capital had done so. In some cases, competition triggers reforms based on efficiency considerations. Thatcher (2007) found that regulatory competition was an important cause of the reform of French, German and Italian sectoral economic institutions in the areas of securities trading, telecommunications and airlines. Some of the extensive literature on the impact of globalization on the welfare state finds that, in some circumstances, increased participation in international trade and finance tends to reduce government spending and social welfare programmes (Brune and Garrett, 2005; Mosley, 2007).

On the whole, however, scholars tend to be more impressed by the relative scarcity of empirical evidence supporting the RTB hypothesis. For instance, Flanagan (2006) analyses data from a large sample of countries at various levels of economic development and finds no evidence that countries that are more open to international competition have weaker statutory labour protection. Holzinger et al. (2008), who examined twenty-four industrialised countries between 1970 and 2000, attempt but fail to find a significant effect of bilateral trade openness on environmental policy convergence.

The logic of the RTB is intuitively compelling, and its empirical weakness calls for an explanation. At least seven possible explanations can be advanced. Some of them are based on the assumption that competitive pressures operate as posited, but that they are overridden by other factors. One explanation is that the global competitiveness of companies is only weakly affected by cross-national differences in environmental, labour, social and fiscal policies, and that the stringency of regulation or the tax burden is not a major determinant of investment decisions. A second explanation is that economic actors are sensitive to costs imposed by public policies, but many governments are held back from competitive regulation by domestic political and institutional constraints. Basinger and Hallerberg (2004) have presented a sustained argument to this effect in relation to tax competition. A third explanation suggests that there is little evidence of regulatory competition because governments anticipate its possibility and prevent it through international regulatory cooperation. A fourth explanation suggests that, in certain economic sectors, one or two countries have such a dominant position that they are unlikely to respond to competitive regulations enacted by lesser jurisdictions. Simmons (2001), for instance, argues that the market size and efficiency of U.S. financial services allowed the U.S. regulators to avoid a downward competitive spiral with foreign jurisdictions in financial market regulation.

Other explanations for the lack of empirical evidence question or modify the internal logic of the RTB hypothesis. A fifth explanation agrees that regulatory competition matters and promotes policy convergence, but argues that it does not necessarily lead towards less stringent standards. On the contrary, it can produce a 'race to the top'. Vogel (1995) famously noted that many U.S. states adopted California's more stringent automobile emissions standards, since the benefits of accessing the Californian market

were large enough to justify a general improvement of standards. Vogel has called this dynamic the ‘California effect’, which forms the conceptual counterpart to the ‘Delaware effect’, named after the most eager participant in the competition among U.S. states to offer business-friendly corporate chartering requirements. A sixth explanation maintains that, if some countries start out better endowed than others with features that make them attractive to investors, then capital mobility will increase rather than decrease policy heterogeneity (Rogowski, 2003). Finally, the absence of clear evidence for regulatory competition may be a result of the inadequate methodologies used to detect it (for a discussion see Franzese and Hays, 2008).

2.3. Global policy communication

Policies implemented abroad can be not only a source of externalities, but also a source of information. Policy makers often use information about experiences in other countries in the process of designing or reviewing policies in their own jurisdiction. Modes of communication and information transmission differ widely in terms of intensity, regularity and formalisation. At one extreme is the case of officials in national administrations who learn about foreign experiences by means of publicly available sources and have no or little interaction with policy makers of the countries where those experiences originated. An intermediate level of intensity, regularity and formalisation is represented by communication flows within transnational epistemic communities, which are usually defined as networks of professionals with recognised expertise in a particular domain and who share normative beliefs, causal beliefs, notions of validity, and a common policy enterprise (Haas, 1992, p.3). Members of such epistemic communities provide information to policy makers or may be directly involved in designing regulatory policies. At the more institutionalised end of the transnational communication spectrum are formalised benchmarking and peer review exercises. Prominent examples of transnational benchmarking exercises are OECD regulatory reviews, which started in 1998 and are based on self-reporting by national administrations, assessments by OECD staff and peer review among members states (Lodge, 2005). The review process is entirely voluntary, since states are neither obliged to undergo a review nor obliged to implement the recommendations they receive.

If it is relatively easy to agree on what channels of communication are available to policy-makers, there is more disagreement among scholars about which causal mechanisms are more likely to operate in cases of policy transfer. As a way of summarising the mechanisms that have been highlighted in the literature it is useful to refer to March and Olsen's (1989) distinction between the logic of consequentialism and the logic of appropriateness and, as suggested by Risse (2000), to add 'arguing' and deliberation as a distinct logic. An explanatory approach based on the logic of consequentialism would assume that policy makers have clearly defined policy goals but imperfect information about cause-effect relationships. Gathering information about foreign experiences is thus a rational way to improve the likelihood that policies are designed in such a way that they attain the intended goals, in a process of Bayesian learning (Simmons et al., 2008. p.26).

By contrast, explanatory approaches based on the logic of appropriateness focus on the social construction of norms of appropriate behaviour. The goals of the policy makers are not considered to be exogenous to the interaction with their foreign 'peers', but are developed with reference to foreign models that are considered as 'legitimate' within the reference group. Simmons et al. (2008) refer to this mechanism as emulation. In principle emulation can occur at a distance, but often it is the result of socialisation processes that take place through interaction within institutional contexts. In international relations, emulation has been examined in depth by the 'world polity' approach developed by John Meyer with numerous colleagues (e.g. Meyer et al., 1997). In this version of sociological institutionalism, state officials orient their behaviour to global norms about what constitutes a legitimate polity and what goals it should legitimately pursue.

Risse (2000) suggests that the logic of arguing is distinct from both the logic of consequentialism and the logic of appropriateness. Decision makers who adopt this logic while interacting with one another do not aim merely at updating their knowledge about cause-effect relationships, nor do they follow predetermined norms of appropriate behaviour for a given situation, but are willing to modify their goals as a result of persuasion. While of course no real-world setting corresponds to the ideal situation identified by discourse ethics theorists such as Jürgen Habermas (1981), a number of scholars maintain that certain transnational forums can and do function according to a

deliberative mode. Participants in these forums are seen as making a genuine effort to find solutions that can be accepted by others on the basis of a process of mutual reasoning and openness to learning about current best practices. Cohen and Sabel (2005) call such settings 'deliberative polyarchy.' Slaughter (2004, pp.204-5) also argues that 'government networks' – among national regulators, judges or legislators – can meet the conditions required for open, genuine and productive discussion.

There is some empirical evidence confirming the impact of transnational communication on regulatory policies. Raustiala (2002), for instance, discusses a number of cases in which US regulators successfully 'exported' their approaches in the areas of securities regulation, competition and antitrust law, and environmental policy. As noted above, transnational communication may trigger both rational learning and normative emulation, but estimating the relative importance of these mechanisms is a difficult task for researchers. In an important study of government downsizing from 1980 to 1997 among twenty-six OECD member countries, Lee and Strang (2006) found that countries learn from each other but that this learning process is heavily influenced by prior 'theoretical' expectations. Reductions in government employment by a trade partner or neighbour lead to reductions in the size of the public sector, whereas increases in government employment by the same partners or neighbours have negligible effects. This suggests that downsizing is contagious but upsizing is not. Countries appear to be sensitive to evidence that downsizing works, since they tend to reduce public employment when recent downsizers experienced rapid growth and improving trade balances and when recent upsizers faced slow growth and worsening trade. But they do not react to information about strong economic performance by upsizers nor weak performance by downsizers. Lee and Strang (2006, p.904) conclude that '[e]mpirical outcomes that confirm expectations reinforce behavior, while outcomes that contradict expectations are discounted. In short, when theories and evidence come into conflict, theories win.'

The assessment of the importance of deliberative modes of communication has proven even more difficult than grasping processes of rational learning and emulation. Cohen and Sabel (2005) see elements of deliberative polyarchy especially in the institutions of the European Union, but they detect embryonic forms of it also in global forums such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC).

2.4. *Global policy cooperation*

A third way in which the global context can affect public policies is through cooperation, i.e. the commitment to implement certain policies in the context of agreements with other governments. International cooperation often consists of reciprocal commitments to harmonise policies across countries, but it can also consist of highly asymmetrical agreements, such as the promise to implement a structural adjustment programme in order to receive loans from the IMF. Studies on international policy cooperation tend to focus either on the causes of international commitments or on their consequences, notably whether and why governments comply with them and actually adjust their policies (of course some approaches – notably rational-choice analyses – treat *expected* consequences as causes). The causes of cooperation can be roughly divided into those related to transnational interdependencies and externalities and those related to domestic politics.

Among those statecentric approaches to international cooperation that stress the role of transnational interdependencies, rationalist institutional theory has been particularly influential since the early 1980s, and the following discussion will focus on it.³ Rationalist institutionalists want to explain when and how states succeed in cooperating for mutual advantage despite international anarchy, i.e. the absence of a supranational government capable to enforce agreements in the international sphere (e.g. Keohane, 1984). The starting point of rationalist institutionalism is the existence of significant physical or policy externalities which create a situation of strategic interdependence among governments. With the help of basic game-theoretical concepts, institutionalists identified several types of strategic situations, among which the Prisoner's Dilemma and a coordination game known as Battle of the Sexes are particularly prominent. The Race-to-the-Bottom hypothesis, for instance, is often modelled as a Prisoner's Dilemma caused by policy externalities. Genschel and Plümper (1997) apply this logic in their argument that the central banks of the world's main financial centres resorted to multilateral action with regard to capital ratio requirements because keeping high

³ For a broader survey including non-rationalist approaches see Koenig-Archibugi (forthcoming).

standards unilaterally might have undermined the international competitiveness of national banks. A crucial tenet of institutionalism is that states can increase the likelihood of successful cooperation by manipulating the informational context in which they act, most notably by creating international institutions. The basic idea on the link between cooperation problems and institutional arrangements is that 'form follows function'. Institutions can contribute to solving 'coordination' problems by providing a favourable context for bargaining and, crucially, by presenting focal points to negotiators. Examples of this function are many of the technical standards developed by the International Organisation for Standardisation. The definition of common standards for, say, the dimensions of freight containers may involve intense distributional conflicts, but the institution does not need an extensive monitoring mechanism since it is generally not in the interest of governments, port authorities and companies to deviate from the standard dimensions once they have been agreed. By contrast, institutions dealing with 'collaboration' problems, such as the Prisoners' Dilemma, must be designed in such a way that the incentive to defect from agreements is minimised: to do so, they must help trust-building among states, define obligations and cheating, improve the monitoring of compliance, and facilitate the decentralised sanctioning of cheaters. An example is the decision to facilitate the monitoring and enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) protection by bringing IPR under the relatively robust dispute resolution mechanism of the GATT/World Trade Organisation.

There is a lively debate among authors working within a statecentric rational-choice approach on various aspects of rational institutionalism. Authors such as Krasner (1991) and Simmons (2001), for instance, stress the importance of power asymmetries in shaping the process and the content of policy cooperation. One aspect of this is the attempt by states to shift the locus of negotiation and implementation to those institutions that are most likely to produce a distribution of gains that is particularly favourable to them. An example is the successful attempt by the U.S. and other states to shift international negotiations on the regulation of intellectual property rights from the World Intellectual Property Organisations to the WTO (Helfer, 2004). A more inclusive institution in terms of membership can be the result of the capacity of a stronger state to remove the status quo from the set of options available to weaker states (Gruber, 2000). With regard to the domain of banking regulation, Genschel and Plümper (1997)

argue that, when in 1987 the British and U.S. regulators reached an agreement on a common capital adequacy standard and Japan joined it, all other member states of the Bank for International Settlements had no choice but to join as well and agreement on a common standard was reached quickly. Simmons (2001) examined several cases of financial market regulation in the 1980s and 1990s and, consistent with her theoretical framework that stresses the autonomous nature of regulatory innovation in the dominant financial centre, she argues that most of the regulatory harmonisation resulted less from mutual adjustment than from unilateral decisions imposed by the United States.

As noted above, the existence of transnational policy or physical externalities is not the only reason why governments may choose to cooperate with one another. International policy cooperation may be a rational response to constraints stemming from the domestic politics of individual countries. If parliaments and executives often delegate regulatory authority to independent agencies to remove it from pressure-group politics and lengthen the time horizon of decisions, they may also be willing to shift regulatory tasks to international arenas in order to increase their policy influence vis-à-vis other domestic actors or to make it more difficult for future governments to reverse policy decisions made by the present government (Moravcsik, 1994). Governments sometimes find that international cooperation is useful to gain influence in the domestic political arena and to overcome internal opposition to their preferred policies, and in some circumstances international governance may be the outcome of 'collusive delegation' (Koenig-Archibugi, 2004a). For instance, after controlling for other variables that may explain the probability of entering into IMF arrangements, countries with a larger number of domestic veto players are more likely to enter an IMF programme (Vreeland, 2007). This suggests that governments may want IMF conditions to be 'imposed' on them in order to help them overcome domestic political constraints on economic reform. To the extent that this mechanism reveals a political cleavage that cuts across state borders, however, it is more compatible with a polycentric than a statecentric perspective, as it is argued below.

Recent rationalist institutional work has emphasised that, while the power of international organisations results from delegation of authority from member states, the effect of those organisations cannot be reduced to the interests of the states, given the significant potential for agency slack (see e.g. Hawkins et al., 2006). In addition to

fruitful specific research questions, this emphasis has wider implications in terms of the general analytical lens to be used to observe and explain global policy. Much more than was the case in the first wave of rationalist institutionalism, international organizations emerge as distinct actors that, while constrained by their role as ‘agents’ of states, possess and pursue autonomous goals and resources in world politics. This signals that an extremely influential IR theory is replacing its statecentric lenses with polycentric lenses.

In sum, statecentric analyses have contributed greatly to our understanding of global policy cooperation, but rationalist scholars are progressively abandoning the notion that such cooperation can be explained exclusively through statecentric lenses. The next section explores the added value of using polycentric lenses.

3. The polycentric perspective

3.1. Assumptions

The statecentric perspective never lacked challengers, but since the end of the Cold War there has been an increasing number of attempts to develop alternative conceptual frameworks.⁴ Jan Aart Scholte (2008, p.18) has recently listed some of the labels used to capture the nature of contemporary governance: ‘plurilateralism,’ ‘polylateralism,’ ‘networked governance,’ ‘complex multilateralism,’ ‘empire,’ ‘new medievalism,’ ‘global issues networks,’ ‘cosmocracy,’ ‘mobius-web governance,’ ‘complex sovereignty,’ and ‘disaggregated world order.’ Scholte himself has provided a particularly clear elaboration of the idea that a fundamental change in the nature of governance is underway, which he conceptualizes in terms of six shifts: (a) from country units to what he calls ‘transscalar spaces’; (b) from state actors to multiple types of actors, such as local governments, regional institutions, global agencies, business consortia and civil society associations; (c) from unitary states to states that are disaggregated into multiple relatively autonomous policy decision points; (d) from centralized decision-making to decision-making that is dispersed across multiple and

⁴ On the broader debate about statism and territorialism in global politics see for instance Agnew and Corbridge (1995), Held et al. (1999), Krasner (1999) and Ferguson and Mansbach (2004).

diverse institutions and networks; (e) from discrete to overlapping jurisdictions; and (f) from sovereignty to a post-sovereign system of divided authority. Scholte summarizes these shifts as an on-going transition from statist to polycentric governance (Scholte, 2008, pp.13-19).

If polycentrism is seen as an analytical lens rather than as a mode of governance, it can be described as resting on the following assumptions with regard to polity, policy and politics. The *polity* to be analysed is not necessarily the state: in principle it can be any entity that is able to produce governance and formulate and implement policy. Rosenau, for instance, argues that the study of global governance should focus on myriad 'spheres of authority' observable in the contemporary world, which may or may not be coterminous with a bounded territory and are 'distinguished by the presence of actors who can evoke compliance when exercising authority as they engage in the activities that delineate the sphere' (Rosenau, 2006, p.117). Ferguson and Mansbach (2004, p.24) focus on a set of somewhat more tightly delimited entities: 'Polities are collectivities with a measure of identity, hierarchy, and capacity to mobilize followers for political purposes (that is, value satisfaction or relief from value deprivation).' Clearly these and other definitions to be found in the literature encompass a wide range of entities. Some authors have attempted to manage conceptual complexity by developing typologies of governance-producing entities or polities. Koenig-Archibugi (2002), for instance, argues that governance arrangements can be seen as varying along three main dimensions – publicness, delegation and inclusiveness – and as conforming to a larger or smaller extent to eight ideal types. However, the key heuristic assumption of the polycentric perspective is that observers should remain open-minded as to where policy making may emerge and develop methodological tools that can identify and assess governance arising from unexpected sites.

The polycentric perspective does not assume a fundamentally different understanding of *politics* than the statecentric perspective: it still can be interpreted as the process by which actors and coalitions of actors use material and ideational power resources to engage in cooperation, competition and conflict with one another, with the aim of bringing about policies that promote their interests and values. What is different is the pattern of conflictual and cooperative interactions that the analyst expects to see, and specifically the kinds of *political cleavages* that are possible and probable in global

politics. As noted above, the statecentric perspective assumes that societal cleavages *within* states determine the policy preferences of governments and then the resulting cleavages *between* governments generate patterns of international interaction, which may be more or less competitive and cooperative. In other words, domestic preferences, bargaining power and institutions combine to generate state preferences over policies; then state preferences, bargaining power and international institutions combine to generate international policy cooperation and competition. The polycentric perspective, by contrast, makes the crucial assumption that *some important political cleavages cut across state borders*. Some issues pit coalitions composed of actors based in different states, i.e. transnational coalitions, against other actors who are primarily based in a particular state or who are themselves part of transnational coalitions. These actors can be governments, other public bodies such as independent regulatory authorities, international bureaucracies, and various types of ‘private’ (i.e., nonstate) actors, such as companies and business associations, civil society organizations and social movements, epistemic communities. The following are some of the political cleavages revealed by polycentric lenses on global politics, which would be obscured by an exclusive reliance on statecentric lenses.

A transnational coalition of private actors versus another private actor. Examples of this cleavage are transnational networks of labour rights activists that span developed and developing countries and that put pressure on large companies, for instance by promoting consumer boycotts, in order to improve labour standards in those companies’ global supply chains (Koenig-Archibugi, 2004a).

A transnational coalition of private actors versus a single government. Examples of this cleavage are campaigns by transnational human rights associations, such as Amnesty International, aimed at stopping the use of torture and other human rights violations by specific governments (Risse et al., 1999). Other examples are transnational coalitions of environmentalists and indigenous peoples aimed at resisting tropical deforestation and other environmentally damaging government policies (Keck and Sikkink ,1998). Yet another example of this type of cleavage are members of ethnic communities residing in various countries who mobilize politically against the governments of their ‘home’ country, as happened with parts of the Kurdish, Kosovar, and Tamil diasporas, who

supported political and armed opposition to the Turkish, Yugoslav and Sri Lankan governments respectively (Adamson, 2006).

A transnational coalition of governments versus a private actor. An example of this cleavage is the alliance between a reform-minded government and foreign governments, often through institutions such as the IMF, against domestic opponents of economic reform, e.g. on the issue of reduction of public spending (Koenig-Archibugi, 2004b). For instance, Vreeland (2003) shows that in 1990 the Uruguayan president signed an agreement with the IMF mainly because he wanted IMF conditionality to be imposed, in order to help him overcome the resistance to economic reforms that was mounted by Uruguayan trade unions, pensioners' organizations and the main opposition party. A rather different example of this cleavage is the collaboration of governments against pirates, which considerably reduced the role of non-state violence in the past two centuries but is still ongoing in some parts of the world (Thomson, 1994; Archibugi and Chiarugi, 2009).

A transnational coalition of sectoral state actors versus other sectoral state actors. As emphasised by Slaughter (2004) and Scholte (2008), different sectors of the state – such as ministries, regulators, judges, and parliamentarians – may not only have their distinct goals, but also pursue these goals by collaborating with their counterparts in other countries. A sectoral state actor may even enlist like-minded foreign counterparts or international agencies as allies in order to gain influence in negotiations with other sectors of its own state. For instance, in Somalia in 1984 the finance minister and other economic ministers tried to use negotiations with the IMF on an extended loan arrangement to promote economic liberalization against the opposition of party and military members of the council of ministers (Kahler, 1993). Similarly, Pakistan's finance minister is said to have 'specifically requested the managing director of the IMF to include in the routine surveillance report on his country a reference to the need to cut military expenditures' (Pauly 1997, cited by Vreeland, 2007, p.65). These and other examples show that state actors may engage in international collusion not only against private actors but also against other sectors of their own state.

A transnational coalition of private actors versus another transnational coalition of private actors. Following the call of the founders of the European labour movements ('workers of all lands, unite!'), transnational union organizations are increasingly

engaged in cross-border campaigns against, and collective bargaining with, transnational companies and their subsidiaries, which often results in ‘international framework agreements’ (Bronfenbrenner, 2007). Capital-labour interaction is formally institutionalized in the International Labour Organization, where labour representatives from 183 countries negotiate with employers’ representatives and government delegates to create and monitor international labour standards (Haas, 1964).

A transnational coalition of private actors against a transnational coalition of governments. An example is the collaboration between like-minded terrorist groups aimed at destabilizing and influencing governments, and the collective action taken by those governments with regard to intelligence sharing, restrictions of financial transactions, political pressure, and military intervention against terrorist networks.

Perhaps most interesting of all is the most complex constellation: *a transnational coalition of private and state actors versus another transnational coalition of private and state actors.* One example of this cleavage is the conflict between actors promoting stricter tobacco control and those opposing it since the 1990s. The broad pro-regulation coalition was institutionalized in bodies such as the Policy Strategy Advisory Committee of the Tobacco Free Initiative, which was set up by the World Health Organization and included representatives from the World Bank, Unicef, World Self Medication Industry, International Nongovernmental Coalition Against Tobacco, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The anti-regulation coalition included the world’s main tobacco companies, and various governments joined the anti-regulation or the pro-regulation coalition during the negotiation process that led to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (Collin et al., 2002; Yach et al., 2006). Another example is the campaign promoted by the Coalition for an International Criminal Court (CICC), to which over 800 organizations adhered. The CICC included most of the 237 NGOs officially accredited at the 1998 Rome conference on the international criminal court and played a major role in spurring and supporting pro-court governments in their difficult negotiations with those governments that preferred a weak court or no court at all (Glasius, 2006).

These examples illustrate patterns of conflict and cooperation that cut across state boundaries and require polycentric analytical lenses to be identified. This does not mean

that cross-cutting political dynamics are more important than situations in which domestic political processes are distinct from international processes and governments act as gatekeepers between the two domains (e.g. governments aggregate domestic preferences on trade policy and negotiate with one another on that basis). The relative plausibility of statecentric and polycentric explanations is an empirical question that needs to be ascertained case by case. But a case can be made that analysts should start by employing the wider perspective, i.e. polycentric lenses, and avoid exclusive reliance on research designs that make it difficult to capture cross-cutting dynamics, such as the common use of a country as unit of quantitative analysis ('methodological statism').

Polycentric assumptions about *policy* stem directly from the preceding argument. To the extent that analysts are interested in the policies that result from important political processes and are likely to be consequential, they should not limit themselves to examining 'public policy', if this expression is taken to be equivalent to 'state policy'. However, this is not the only possible interpretation of 'public policy'. Terry Macdonald, for instance, has suggested that 'power should be designated as 'public' and subject to democratic control whenever it impacts in some problematic way upon the capacity of a group of individuals to lead autonomous lives' (Macdonald, 2008, p.35, emphasis removed). By extension, public policy might be defined as policy that has that kind of effect on individual lives. Examining whether this conceptual shift would bring real analytical advantages is however beyond the scope of this article.

3.2. *Research agendas*

As has been argued above, the statecentric perspective to the global dimensions of policy has generated a set of clearly defined lines of enquiry that allow a fruitful interaction between progressively refined hypotheses and the accumulation of evidence. For instance, the assumption of the state as the basic unit of analysis facilitated the creation of databases that made possible sophisticated statistical analyses of international competition, communication and cooperation. The polycentric perspective has not yet matched those achievements, in part because research programmes in this tradition cannot rely on a predefined unit of analysis, but must devote considerable attention and energy to the definition and empirical identification of their 'objects'.

Researchers have identified a large number of areas where transnational non-state governance arrangements create and implement policies, either of a regulative or an allocative kind: environmental management systems, carbon trading, sustainable forestry, maritime transport, online commerce, financial transactions involving swaps and derivatives, jurisprudence, accounting standards, credit rating, technical product standards, development aid, health services, labour standards, arms control (landmines), 'fair' trade, medical research, commercial arbitration, to name only some of the most prominent areas.⁵ In addition to pursuing the general aim of identifying the variety of governance arrangements that produce policy in particular domains, analysts using polycentric lenses also ask questions on the causes and the consequences of non-state policy making.

Research on the *causes* often proceeds from the question of why policy making in a particular area is dominated by non-state actors rather than state actors, or vice versa. An aspect of this question is whether that predominance is stable or whether (and why) there has been a shift from one policy making mode to the other. Broadly speaking, interpretations tend to be located somewhere between a societal and a statist pole. According to the societal interpretation, public/intergovernmental governance emerges when and where there is demand from powerful private actors, and it is designed to serve their interests. According to the statist interpretation, private/transnational

⁵ A small selection of studies on these governance arrangements is: Cutler et al., 1999; Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000; Ronit and Schneider, 2000; Falkner, 2003; Slaughter, 2004; Koenig-Archibugi and Zürn, 2006; Vogel, 2009.

governance emerges when and where it is stimulated by powerful states, and it is designed to serve their interests. An example of a societal explanation is provided by Mugge (2006). He assumes that the choice is determined mainly by the demands of producers located in key jurisdictions, since usually regulators will be most sensitive to their preferences. He argues that the choice between private and public regulation in a particular economic sector depends on the intensity of the competition among the main companies in that sector. If the competitive struggle is intense, the market incumbents will support public regulation as a means to stave off the challengers. If those struggles have settled and the population of companies is stabilised, the companies in the sector concerned will prefer and achieve transnational private regulation. According to Mugge, the case of derivative listings illustrates the first scenario, while the Eurobond market illustrates the case of a stable population of incumbent companies that banded together to fend off public governance.

To be sure, polycentric analysts stress that the choice is not simply between statist and non-statist governance. They point out that civil society organisations, companies, national public agencies and intergovernmental organisations often form what have been called ‘multistakeholder’ policy networks that seek to agree on consensual policy solutions for specific sectors. For instance, the Kimberley Process on diamonds from conflict zones created a hybrid regulatory framework that combines an intergovernmental regime, which sets standards on the import and export of rough diamonds and the tracking of illicit diamonds, and a self-regulatory system that obliges companies to adopt stringent standards with regard to purchases and sales of diamonds and jewellery containing diamonds, including independent monitoring (Kantz, 2007). The Kimberley Process is a prominent example of a transnational regulatory regime that originated from an NGO campaign and from the response by industry and governments – in this case the market-leading De Beers Corporation and the South African government, which were concerned about possible consumer reactions triggered by the campaign. Polycentric analysts are interested in why the policy response to the problem of conflict diamonds took this hybrid institutional form.

Polycentric research also investigates the *consequences* of non-statist arrangements on policy. One research agenda focuses on the policy process. For instance, Porter and Ronit (2006) examine the different *stages* of the policy process in private self-regulation

and highlight the similarities and differences in relation to the corresponding stage in public policy processes. Another research agenda focuses on the policy output. It is often argued that private 'self-regulation' is mainly a way to prevent public regulation and thus the standards emerging by non-state policy can be expected to be less strict than those that would emerge from a public policy process, all else being equal. For instance, Kolk et al. (1999) compared 132 codes of corporate conduct created by four different types of actors - individual companies, business associations, social interest groups, and international organizations – and find that codes issued by business associations have the weakest scores with regard to focus, measurability and compliance mechanisms.

An important line of research examines the consequences of polycentric policy making for democracy. One common position is that polycentrism is inherently unable to ensure the degree of inclusiveness and participation that genuinely democratic governance requires (e.g. Marchetti, 2008). Other analysts maintain that democratic forms of authorization and accountability can in principle be realized in non-state governance arrangements, even if existing instances still fall short of democratic criteria (e.g. Macdonald and Macdonald, 2006; Macdonald, 2008, Scholte, 2008). One important dimension is the ability of transnational civil society to promote new forms of democratic politics (Della Porta 2009). Several theoretical and empirical contributions make this bundle of issues one of the most interesting areas of investigation within the broader polycentric research programme.⁶

4. Conclusion

A vast amount of research has been conducted on the global dimensions of policy and there are reasons to believe that research in this field will grow at a faster rather than slower rate in the next few years. Scholars, and even more so policy makers, may find it increasingly difficult to absorb all the findings that may be relevant to their areas of interest. As a result, they may be tempted to focus their attention on clusters of research that share similar ontological and methodological assumptions. This article has

⁶ A small selection: Börzel and Risse, 2005; Held and Koenig-Archibugi, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2007; Dingwerth, 2007; Meidinger, 2008; Koenig-Archibugi 2010.

illustrated some reasons why such a temptation should be resisted. Statecentric lenses on global policy have generated a wealth of significant and policy-relevant findings. This is due not only to the undeniable substantive importance of states as authors of policy and as targets for other policy-seeking actors, but also to the methodological advantages of using states as predefined units of analysis. Polycentric lenses on global policy, on the other hand, have revealed policy making entities, political cleavages, and policy outcomes that would have been obscured by an exclusive reliance on statecentric assumptions. Recent progress in devising theoretical and methodological tools for the analysis of non-statist governance suggests that this perspective may one day match the achievements of statecentric analyses.

Is it possible and desirable to aim for some form of theoretical integration of statecentric and polycentric perspectives? As stressed in the introduction, statecentrism and polycentrism are not theories in themselves, but rather clusters of assumptions about polity, politics and policy that may constitute the basis for a range of different theories. It is likely that many analysts adopt certain assumptions not because of a deep-seated belief in their ontological 'truth', but because they capture empirical situations well enough to possess heuristic value and provide certain methodological advantages, such as well-defined 'units' of analysis and availability of corresponding datasets. In other words, in the practice of global policy studies often ontology follows methodology, rather than the other way round. But the fact that commitments to certain assumptions may be more pragmatic than substantial raises the question of whether attempts at theoretical integration may be a particularly promising route to make further progress in global policy analysis.

Jupille, Caporaso and Checkel (2003) identified four "models of theoretical dialogue" in political science: competitive testing; additive theory based on complementary domains of application; sequencing of theories; and subsumption. While competitive testing cannot be considered a form of synthesis, determining domains of application and sequencing are two synthetic strategies based on complementarity, and subsumption is a form of synthesis that interprets one theory as a special case of another. Since statecentrism and polycentrism are not theories, these models cannot be applied directly

to them.⁷ However, it is possible to consider some examples of dialogue in the light of the two analytical lenses. Drezner (2007) performs a ‘competitive test’ of explanations of regulatory outcomes, some of which stress the role of global civil society and others that stress how state power is used to promote domestic interests. He analyses regulation in the field of the internet, financial markets, genetically modified foods and intellectual property and concludes that, if their domestic politics allows great powers to agree among themselves, then global regulatory coordination will occur regardless of the support or opposition of transnational NGOs, IGOs and peripheral states. At most, NGOs can play a marginal role as lobbyists, protestors, monitors of compliance, and delegated standard-setters. What is notable for our purposes is that, while Drezner finds empirical support for a ‘statist’ *theory*, he reaches that conclusion by using analytical lenses that are at least partially polycentric, since otherwise comparing the influence of state and transnational nonstate actors would make little sense.

A related attempt at theoretical dialogue was made in the classic book by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, Jr, *Power and Interdependence* (1977). They presented their analytical constructs ‘realism’ and ‘complex interdependence’ as ideal types to which conditions in the real world may resemble more or less. One of the differences between the two ideal types is that in complex interdependence multiple channels of contact connect societies (i.e. states do not monopolize those contacts), which is compatible with polycentric assumptions. Keohane and Nye’s case studies implement a form of competitive testing and show, for instance, that negotiations over the law of the seas came closer to complex interdependence than negotiations over international finance. These findings can be seen as supporting a synthesis based on the ‘domains of application’ model, which tries to determine under which conditions one or the other theory is more plausible. As with Drezner, the possibility of such a synthesis depends on using polycentric lenses, if only to discover that complex interdependence is empirically weak in many contexts. A final example: Rosenau (1990, pp.97-98) argued that ‘[t]he universe of global politics had come to consist of two interactive worlds with overlapping memberships: a multicentric world of diverse, relatively equal actors, and a

⁷ For an example of how different models of dialogue can be applied to the relationship between two theories see Andreatta and Koenig-Archibugi (2010).

state-centric world in which national actors are still primary.’ Also in this case the possibility of ‘seeing’ *both* worlds depends on the use of polycentric lenses.

In sum: it often makes sense to subject to competitive testing theories that emphasise the influence of transnational nonstate actors on policy and theories that discount it; and it is often fruitful to try to define the respective domains of application of those theories. But both exercises depend on a prior adoption of polycentric lenses. Progress in global policy studies is thus likely to derive from a specific form of synthesis, namely the subsumption of statecentrism under polycentrism. Such a synthesis would be based on the awareness that the preponderance of states in global policy making would be a special case of a situation in which several types of actors are capable to create and implement policy; and that the political cleavages considered by statecentric studies (domestic cleavages on the one hand and international cleavages on the other) can be seen as a subset of the political cleavages that can occur according to the polycentric perspective. But this is a long term project. Until such a synthesis is achieved, the fruits of both perspectives deserve the full attention of scholars and policy makers interested in making global policy more responsive to the needs of the world’s population and more legitimate in its eyes.

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