Role of international organizations

Dr. Gabriele Spilker

Research paper

Comparing socialization- and diffusion-theory in the context of international organizations

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1 Introduction

Modern, globalized life in the 21$^{\text{st}}$ century is influenced by very complex processes, but finding out how ordinary citzens are influenced by international Organizations (IO's) is very difficult. The shaping of new international treaties, policies and practices and the impact they have on us is a research field shared by the big social sciences: sociology, political science and psychology among others. This research paper is focused on discussing the process of transferring ideas, norms and practices both vertically between different levels of society and horizontally between geographical entities.

During the lecture "International Organizations – role of international organizations in world politics" many big themes and questions were brought up. Some of them were: Who and what lies at the core of an organization, unitary actors or combinations of individuals? How much power do they have, what kind of organization is more successful? How can they increase their success rate by using different instruments of soft and hard law? (Re-)answering some of these questions is the second goal of this paper.

Because most of the big IO's have evolved into heavy normative organizations they not only try to reach some practical, but also normative goals, i.e. strengthening Human Rights, liberalizing world trade or promoting general peace or cooperation. Looking into the process of promoting these norms is very interesting. Then more questions arise: Can IO's promote peace? How much influence do they have on the behavior of their members and, in some extent, even their non-members? Discussing these questions is the primary goal of this paper.

Two theories will be examined to analyze this: Socialization- and diffusion theory. First a summary of history and development will be given, followed by a general overview of both theories. Then their place in modern research will be reviewed. The last chapters adopt a more comparative view and look into some of the advantages and disadvantages of both theories.

2 Theory

Socialization-theory applies to different entities in the social sciences. It is foremost used when analyzing individual behavior, but in this research paper the goal is not individual socialization, but rather socialization in its international perspective. What the author would like to find out is how socialization-theory on an aggregate level works and how collectives such as countries can be socialized into different behavior. But before

doing this, we have to return to the individual with a definition about what individual socialization in a sociological context means and then work ourselves up to aggregate level.

> Socialization refers to the process of inducing individuals into the norms and rules of a given community. The mechanisms by which this occurs may range from the self-cautious (for example normative [per-]suasion) to the subconscious (for example social mimicking or role playing), and from the instrumental (for example shaming) to the non- instrumental (for example communication). (Hooghe 2005: 865; square brackets inserted by the author)

The same principle will be used in some extent for section 2.2 when analyzing diffusion processes.

2.1 Socialization theory

In a political science context, socialization research started out as a result of growing interest in political socialization (Wilson 1981). This new research field tried to figure out where political motivations of individuals and politicians were originating from. It also tried to understand the founding of values, attitudes, practices and, crucially, moral judgment and moral behavior. Jack Dennis (1968) summarized the research results of his time, and designed a scheme of factors influencing behavior and political socialization, different from the ones used by sociologist and psychologists. It highlighted factors of the political system and different political stages and processes which could lead to changes in political socialization-outcomes between countries. Integration and identification with the political system in the native country were two especially important factors.

According to Martha Finnemore & Kathryn Sikkink (1998), interest in socialization got lost during the popularity rise of rational choice and economic modeling of behavior in the 1960's and 70's, but became relevant again in the 80's. Scientists from many different research areas found again that it was not enough to consider changes in attitude or identity in individuals or countries only as externalities (*positive* or *negative*) or as "spill-over effects". Also, research in norms changes and normative behavior attracted more attention because of the increase in two things: first systematic empirical results and globalization. The speed of globalization led to the question if norms promoted stability or if they promoted change (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998).

Now, some definitions of norms might be in place. The first is a standard definition and the second is from Martha Finnemore & Kathryn Sikkink (1998: 888). For the

rest of this section only the second and third aspect will be considered, because of the interest in how they influence states and IO's.

> **Norm**: "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity".

> **3 aspects of norms**: their origin, the mechanisms by which they exercise influence, and the conditions under which norms will be influential in world politics

Drawing on other political scientists, theoretical cooperation on the international scene is the result of reciprocity (see Keohane 1986, Axelrod 1981 and others). Also the idea of the "shadow of the future" helps foster non-defecting behavior, even under the state of anarchy. International socialization-theorists argue that on top of utility-maximizing behavior and reciprocity, order and stability on the international scene is created with the use of norms (Dobbin *et. al.* 2007). They limit behavior, because they narrow down the possible ways of acting for players. James Morrow (1994), highlights that this reduces informational problems and that information about different preferences reduces uncertainty in cooperation. Due to norms, countries cannot act as they like, because they may have to fear retaliation and sanctions from other international actors.

How new norms emerge can be seen in table 1. The process includes 3 stages in the "lifecycle of norms", which can be found in the fields of related social sciences too (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998: 895). At stage 1 are norm entrepreneurs trying to persuade states or leaders to implement new ideas because of normative goals or views. The second stage is describing the spreading of the norm through the population, hence the word "cascade" where the norm moves like a "wave". The last stage shows internalization of the norm but also a rise in practitioners and experts dealing with it because of its growing recognition as an existing problem.

Why states change behavior is then either because of domestic or international pressure or both together. Judith Kelly (2004) shows these processes in action in her analysis of Eastern European countries. In her paper, she identifies how IO's can use their power to pressure countries to promote change. She concludes that socialization-based efforts such as persuasion and using social influence *can be* effective on their own, but their efficiency is highly increased when combined with incentives, for example membership-conditionality. She also highlights the complex interplay between IO's, domestic policy-makers, politicians and media. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 893) also supports this, drawing attention to the interplay between national and international norms, calling in a "two-level norm-game" in the words of Robert Putnam (1998).

	Stage 1: *Norm emergence*	**Stage 2:** *Cascade*	**Stage 3:** *Internationalization*
Actors	Norm entrepreneurs with organizational platforms	States, IOs, *networks*	Law, professions, bureaucracy
Motives	Altruism, empathy, ideational, commitment	Legitimacy, reputation, esteem	Conformity
Dominant mecha-nisms	Persuasion	Socialization, institutionalization, demonstration	Habit, institutionalization

Table 1: Stages of norms.

2.2 Diffusion theory

Diffusion in its most general terminology is used in many fields of science to describe the melting together of different substances or behavior. Elihu Katz (1999) traces its origin back to the end of the 19th century, where it was first used in describing phenomenons of mass communication. In political science today it means:

"Policy diffusion research tracks how similar policy innovations are adopted across states [. . .] or across countries in comparative contexts." (Nowlin 2011: 48)

In the current scientific debate not only this term is used, instead there are many different theories about diffusion in the policy process. [For a summary see Zachary Elkins and Beth Simmons (2005) or Matthew Nowlin (2011)]. But all theories of diffusion build on the assumption that the world is *interdependent* and that things happening in one country have an impact on surrounding countries. Theories describing this in similar words generally go under the names of *policy transfer*, or *-convergence* (Gilardi 2011). Many scientists state that this behavior is nothing new. For instance Frank Dobbin *et. al.* (2007) looks all the way back at the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia for signs of policy diffusion. But they also state that now the process of diffusion happens much faster and is spreading geographically wider than ever before.

The main reason why there still exist so many names for almost the same process is that until now, few mechanisms have been clearly identified as the motors of diffusion (see Gilardi 2010, Nowlin 2011, Dobbin *et. al.* 2007) and no theory has clearly shown to be more useful than others. Many diffusion-theorists especially criticize the lack of coordination between the different social sciences (Savage 1985), (Katz 1999), (Dobbin *et.*

al. 2007) and although a large "wave" new of studies with theoretical improvements have appeared only since 2006 (Gilardi 2010) the mechanisms are still somewhat "blurred", to use words of Frank Dobbin and his group (2007).

But concentrating only on the specific string of diffusion research, there are a number of mechanisms recognized, namely *competition*, *coercion*, *social emulation* and *learning* (Covadonga & Gilardi 2009). Problematic is, that they are laid out differently in the works of different researchers and that they can happen simultaneously. To understand how they work and what difficulties may be arising, they will be highlighted below.

We will begin with *learning*, which by some theorists is understood either as *rational* – or *bounded* learning or understood as including parts of both. When *rational*, leaders make informed choices about costs and benefits of policies and their effects. Frank Dobbin *et. al.* 2007, state that policy makers often have to make assumptions about possible outcomes and rarely can base them on hard facts because reliable results might not yet exist. This makes it hard to ever make rational decisions. In the case of *bounded learning*, policy makers use cognitive shortcuts, making learning strongly biased (Covadonga & Gilardi 2009). According to Fabrizio Gilardi (2010) it has to be considered that we all are drawing on old knowledge when processing new information and that we so are biased from the beginning, considering our individual ideological views, values and attitudes towards policies.

The difference between *learning* and *emulation* is that in the second case, policies spread across countries only because they have become socially accepted and not because their performance is well documented (Covadonga & Gilardi 2010). This happens when no real learning process is involved and, instead of acceptance or internationalization, only imitation takes place. According to Frank Dobbin *et. al.* (2007), many constructivist theorists argue that identification with others can initiate emulation processes when countries are considering themselves to be i.e. "liberal" or "progressive" and feeling a psychological or emotional closeness with similar- or neighboring countries. This means that when a few countries in the peer-group introduce a new policy, others shortly follow suit. Some of the most recognized IO's, as the UN, are documented to have this effect on countries considering themselves "moral", which leads them to signing treatises without much consideration.

Competition and *coercion* on the other hand are different. Meseguer Covadonga & Fabrizio Gilardi (2009) state that *competition* occurs over similar and scarce resources. Because of fear of economic disadvantages, they adopt policies to stay competitive. Frank Dobbin *et. al.* (2007) say that in order to attract global investors countries are pushed to adopt many "market-friendly" policies, which may not be the best road to take for

that specific country. Sometimes this can lead to a "race to the bottom- process".

Coercion can be used by IO's, NGO's, or governments over weaker governments through either physical force or manipulation of costs or benefits (Dobbin *et. al.* 2007). Often mentioned to use coercion are the big financial institutions of the IMF, World Bank etc. (Simmons 2000, Dobbin *et. al.* 2007). They are in the position to put extensive demands onto loans as conditions for funding.

3 Comparison and discussion

3.1 Comparing both theories

After laying out the basics of both theories, a discussion of their usefulness is in place. In the view of the author, two main arguments present themselves. Firstly, they are fairly similar. Secondly, diffusion theory is still not much consolidated as a theory.

What are the differences between the two? Diffusion theory has been on the rise in recent years, having scientists presenting large amounts of new articles in an unlimited numbers of research fields. The scope of the research also varies a lot within its research field, even if we limit ourselves to pure policy-making diffusion in political science. Why is this? Diffusion can be very easily measured, using the right amount of statistical data and with help of quantitative (cross-national) analysis (Elkins & Simmons 2005). There is a large amount of research focusing only on the diffusion of policies within the federal structures of countries, especially policy diffusion between states in the U.S. Then there is diffusion between different countries, often about welfare state policies i.e. pension systems, health care and tax systems.

Because what you do is measure empirical change and then try to analyze why it happened and what factors influenced the results. This gives diffusion theory a scientific, mathematical touch, which is strongly appreciated by the scientific community.

On the other hand, socialization theory uses a much more qualitative approach. When analyzing socialization, the attitudes of individuals has to measured. Also, there are difficulties tracing the "life cycle" of norms in Table 1. Who are the actors? What drives them? There is also no real possibility to identify the first appearance of norms or in which stage a norm might find itself in without interviews or media content analysis. In the case of the studies in international socialization in this research paper, methods of identifying socialization have included survey-studies (interviews) and statistical regression-analysis of their data (Hooghe 2005), statistical data on changes in spending, and interviews of UNESCO-officials (Finnemore 1993), interviews of policymakers and politicians and in-depth studies of the policy-processes (Kelly 2004). Compared to

diffusion-studies is socialization research a more personnel- and cost- exhaustive research approach.

Considering the scientific advantages of purely rational models, only accepting preferences based on mathematically measurable choices such as rational choice behavior models, it is understandable that measuring choices and preferences based on norms is considered scientifically not (as) adequate. But some researchers are moving away from overly reduced models of behavior such as the *homo economicus*. Martha Finnemore (1996) has also contributed to this literature with different texts about sociological institutionalism. Or see Rosemary C., R. Hall & Peter. A. Taylor (1996) for a good overview.

Another complicated question is the difference between diffusion/socialization and *development*, because development happens even if we cannot explain it and this has always been the case. This has for example been brought up by a number of researchers like Robert L. Savage (1985), Elihu Katz (1999), Lars Carlsson (2000), Zachary Elkins and Beth Simmons (2005) but according to them the discussion is lacking within the broader research. The reasons for change are as many as they can be, and trying to put them under a common denominator is not an easy task because of the sheer complexity of society.

According to Meseguer Covadonga & Fabrizio Gilardi (2009) is the diffusion literature also marked by a selection bias from seeing diffusion in different fields and then analyzing it, especially in fields where policies have increased explosively. In addition to this, few scientists test for other mechanisms being the reason for diffusion using the falsification approach by Karl Popper. This may lead to a backward analysis of diffusion where only proof for it exists whereas proof against it is neglected.

What do they have in common? Still, they both focus on describing social and cultural change, trying to analyze change in *behavior*, *norms* and *policies*. When thinking deeply about these three words, it gets clear that in modern society none of them really can be said to come first in. All of them can initiate a change in the other, see Table 2.

Both theories recognize personal attitudes to influence our choices. A good example of this is Fabrizio Gilardi (2009: 652), in his paper on policy-learning, where he wanted to show different levels of reception to policy change and used box-plots to depict prior vs. posterior policy-beliefs. At the same time, socialization- theorist Liesbet Hooghe (2005: 877) displays an almost identical graph showing which factors are most important for socialization in personal attitudes toward supranationalism. In his paper, Fabrizio Gilardi also defines learning "as a process whereby policy makers change their beliefs about the effects of policies" (Gilardi 2009 drawing on a definition from Dobbin *et.*

al. 2007). Without any hesitation, this can be said to be almost exact the same as socialization.

Also the other mechanisms of policy diffusion, competition, coercion or emulation, can be used one-to-one in socialization theory. If this is so, why do even two different models exist? Lars Carlsson (2000: 201), quoting Harold Lasswell (1968), states, that a new aim of policy-making studies emerged in the 1950's, where not only a descriptive study was performed, but where the goal was to improve on the policy-making process in itself. Before that it was not really accepted for scientists to make assumptions about where the future should be heading. Instead this belonged to political philosophy or ethics, or it was supposed to be drawing only on the opinion of voters in a more pure bottom-up process (Carlsson 2000). Martha Finnemore (1998) tells a similar story, where the normative and empirical worlds should have been kept apart, meaning that normative claims had no place in policies. This seems like a reason for the division between the two theories, where socialization became unfashionable over almost 30 years and policy-diffusion theory gradually went from neutrally measuring change in policies to identifying mechanisms close to socialization.

Today it is clear that norms have to be researched as an essential part of IO's because conditions for membership (and trade) are not only concerning practical aspects, instead they often include clauses on normative behavior as well. But also when, according to Ian Hurd (2010), formal and informal rules get more important. Or when treatises with both hard and soft law are used (Abbott und Snidal 2000). Countries know, that when gaining membership of highly normative organizations, for example the EU, and/or an organization equipped with great economic power like the World Bank or the IMF, that these organizations *can*, and, in the eyes of many organizations and countries, *even should*, use norms to quicken the pace of *development*. Or, using other words, the pace of socialization or learning-process.

3.2 Can IO's lead to peace?

As a last step in this research paper, the question about socialization- and diffusion theory and their potential role in promoting peace is to be analyzed. First, some underlying mechanics of the international scene will be examinated. This is important for the second goal of the paper, to make sense of some of the international structures on the international scene.

Going back to one of the first question about the dynamics between countries: Why do states cooperate with each other? Ian Hurd (2011) drawing on Jan Klabbers (2002) describes three generally acknowledged features of an IO, IO's as *actors*, *forum* and

resources. A short summary from the works of Ian Hurd (2010), James Fearon (1998) and Kenneth W. Abbot & Duncan Snidal (1998) concerning cooperation is given in the section below:

Countries have problems that they would like to solve, but lack the resources themselves so they pool their resources and create a new actor, a collective unit which can draw on the resources to achieve its goals. When designing the treatises for the new IO, it can be fitted with varying amounts of independence and sanctioning power. They also create a new place, a forum, where members can discuss difficulties arising between them and the world outside. This has the possibility to reduce some of the effects of differences in size and wealth between members and to give smaller countries more leverage in group. It also gives informational advantages inside as well as reduces uncertainties between members because of norms of behavior and written rules and regulations.

Liberalism states that IO's foster peace between countries, which has been confirmed by some scientists (see Abbot and Snidal 1998) and denied by others. The deniers, often realists, are saying that IO's "reflect, rather than effect, world politics" (Boehmer *et. al.* 2004). Whatever the case might be, IO's play an important role designing treaties and fostering new norms on the international scene. Solving the bargaining problem of different preferences over IO treaties and the following monitoring and enforcement problem (Fearon 1998) is important for international relations between states and organizations.

But the question is, are they right to force norms onto countries? Norms more often than not include parts of religious values or values of institutional design and efficiency which non-western countries do not share.

Some of these norms have become internalized and are not even noticed by countries or citizens any more. For example, new legal professionals design treaties in certain ways according to professional norms applying to specific areas of interest. The way they do this is dependent of the education they have received, both inside and outside their native countries and organizations. For instance in the case of the UNESCO (see Martha Finnemore 1994), it gets clear that officials were involved in shaping science institutions in many countries not only as advisers but as driving forces in designing institutions. The same paper also shows the question if the UNESCO officials were right to do as they did and shows the evolution of norms concerning direct involvement over time.

Why do countries sign up for membership in IO's (that they don't need?)? Kenneth Abbot and Duncan Snidal (1998) answer this with that "the role of IO's extends even further to include the development of common norms and practices that help define, or refine states themselves". This statement is drawing on constructivism theory that

supports parts of socialization- as well as diffusion- theory. It shows that identities and reputations get assessed in- and between countries with the help of IO membership (Hurd 2010).

Why do they comply? Classical rational choice theorists would argue that countries comply as long as the trade-off between wins and losses are good enough. A big and powerful country such as the United States has less to lose by defecting (and should therefore do so occasionally according to Brooks and Wohlforth 2005), than a small country with less resources and bargaining power on the international scene. Beth Simmons (2000) answers some of these questions with reputational costs of defecting. By becoming members they show credibility and might gain competitive advantages through information or resources, but they also signal to foreign investors that they are "trustworthy". Simmons further conclude that reputational assessments rather exist on "markets" than measured only within IO's and that more de-centralized forces are pushing for compliance than IO's. Ian Hurd (2010) also supports this, saying that regimes of formal and informal rules spread through regions and lead to clustering of countries.

This supports the claims made by Robert D. Putnam (1998) of the "two-level"-game. In each country the cultural and political contexts make a difference and have to be considered. For example, because of reputational costs, no leaders of today in a western democracy could even propose to leave big Institutions like the UN or NATO. Or even if they did, as when smaller parties in European countries are discussing leaving the EU, they do not have the majority of citizens behind them. Many citizens have been socialized into believing that the structure of existing IO's and their memberships is beneficial for them.

On the opposite side, many times there is no real acceptance of IO norms made by Institutions such as the World Bank within its receiving third world countries, which would be essential for actually promoting changes and learning from ideas. As a result only copying or emulation takes place because of the perceived coercion. Or anti-opinions are formed in people and politicians. This type of learning process is included in the diffusion theory, which also controls for learning the "wrong lessons" (Gildardi 2010), but not in the same extent in socialization-theory.

All of these arguments are important for IO's when designing new treaties. Finding out how they can influence member states, through which methods of hard and soft law does the author believe to be crucial for development in the world. Finding out why international cooperation does not work in some cases and where it does work well could be researched using both socialization-based methods as well as diffusion theory. This

could lead to new priorities and more acceptance in third world countries as well as more efficient funding within institutions.

4 Summary

In this paper two theories have been analyzed and compared, namely international socialization- and diffusion-theory.

International socialization theory is using norm-based theory when analyzing changes in behavior in countries or Organizations. It uses norms about behavior to see where IO's have used positive or negative sanctions on actors and so enforced certain behavior, and trying to see in which cases this has been successful. Researching the change in norms and behavior has to be done mostly through qualitative research, undertaking interviews but also with the help of using statistical models.

Policy diffusion analyzes diffusion of policies between countries or states in a federal system. It recognizes that the world is interdependent and what happens in one country has an effect on the citizens and policy-makers in another country. Four mechanisms have been identified as pushing policy diffusion, namely learning, social emulation competition and coercion. Policy diffusion studies uses statistical data and cross-country analysis to find proof for which mechanisms have been at work in different countries and if general trends can be found.

Both theories are using very similar indicators of measuring social and cultural change and sometimes feel like the same method divided into one qualitative and one quantitative method. This is supported by the historical context in which both theories have been developed in, which happened in parallel. Also, both theories have strong roots in the other social sciences such as sociology and psychology. For an outsider, the sheer amount of diffusion studies can be a misleading indicator to think that diffusion is a technically better and consolidated research theory. This proved not to be the case. Diffusion theory theoretically has still some road ahead of itself before a broad acceptance about which mechanisms of diffusion should be applied and how. But because of its usability in every policy-area and together with its quantitative approach, it gives a clear indicator to why so much of the research took place in the field of diffusion instead of socialization.

In the end they are both theories about preferences, attitudes and beliefs. It is what everyday life is about, as well as politics. Considering normative behavior in countries or policy-makers must not stand against rational behavior-models. Instead they should be combined. But also un-rational behavior has to be considered. This fact is recognized

by diffusion-theorists where mechanisms can show proof of learning from false things or showing emulation of behavior instead of internalizing reasons.

If current research on IO's continues down this road, drawing on conclusions from scientists in the variety of themes in the international relations research such as institutional design, cooperation, legalization, compliance, etc. maybe IO's can promote peace on a larger scale. Both theories are good tools for analyzing trends and clustering of countries or acceptance of behavior. But the importance of norms cannot be ignored, on the international scene as well as domestically.

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