**Boundary organisations in international affairs**

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A workshop co-sponsored by the Research Network on Fragmentation and Complexity in Global Governance (REFRACT), the CIRCULEX ANR (<http://circulex.wix.com/projet>) research network and the WIRE Workshops (<http://www.wire-series.org/>) initiative brought together perspectives on the issue of boundary organisations in international affairs.

Boundary organizations are not recent phenomena in international affairs. Since the end of the 1980s, the need was felt to manage effectively the interface between science and policy for enhanced global collective action. For instance, governments created the International Panel on Climate Change (<http://www.ipcc.ch/>) in 1988 to support and inform decision-making regarding global warming. In 2012, they established the International Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (<http://www.ipbes.net/>) to review and assess knowledge generated by scientists, civil society groups, governments and traditional communities. Progressively, international boundary organisations have expended from the environmental domain and reached other issue areas, including health, energy, food security and finance.

Yet, few studies have been conducted on international boundary organisations outside the environmental realm, and few researches have compared international boundary organisations through time or across issue areas. Against this backdrop, the Research Network on Fragmentation and Complexity in Global Governance (REFRACT), the CIRCULEX ANR research network and the WIRE Workshop initiative convened an interdisciplinary workshop on 26 & 27 August 2015 in Brussels, seeking to increase understanding of international boundary organisations.

More precisely, it gathered original contributions offering a theoretical argument combined with an empirical investigation. The papers, among others, analysed:

1. The institutional design of international boundary organizations;
2. The credibility, saliency and legitimacy of knowledge generated from international boundary organizations;
3. International boundary organizations and boundary work in a context of institutional interactions;

The fields of study covered were, among others, climate change, biodiversity, pandemic control and Arctic governance.

**The institutional design of international boundary organizations**

 Several presentations focused on the issue of the institutional design of international boundary organizations. In particular the issue of representativeness of the different components of knowledge to be included in the debate was found an important one. More often than not, boundary organisations replicate inequalities and power asymmetries.

Moreover, institutional design is often related to the final mission of an international boundary organisation. In that sense, it seems that the more boundary organisations have a sophisticated institutional design to perform boundary work, the less they will have decision-making power.

**The credibility, salience and legitimacy of knowledge generated from international boundary organisations**

The credibility, salience and legitimacy of knowledge are key elements for boundary organisations to perform. Several contributions, in particular on the IPCC, showed how difficult it was to warrantee these elements. For instance, long-term dynamics within the IPCC mean that experts might get used to the boundary process and even adapt their research agenda to be quoted in IPCC reports. Another example is when climate negotiations are blocked because national delegates see IPCC knowledge as highly political when it is wrongly presented as pure truth.

**Boundary organisations and institutional interactions**

Finally, several presentations discussed the impact of institutional interactions on boundary organisations and the role boundary organisations could play in managing institutions interactions. On global health issues, the circulation of experts means that boundary organisations often have overlapping mandates. This creates a reproduction of identical norms that can work in favour but also against the resolution of major health crises. In global biodiversity governance, the IPBES could be seen as a remarkable effort to combine different institutional traditions on biodiversity governance. But it also exercised “epistemic selectivities” whereby some expertise is not present in the adopted organisation.

**Are boundary organisations relevant at all?**

Over the course of the two days, participants also discussed the relevancy of the boundary organisation concept, discussing issues of definition. In that sense most of the workshop was also about boundary objects and boundary work in international affairs. Discussions aroused to compare the boundary organisations to other international actors such as think tanks, international organisations or partnerships.

A list of participants and the agenda of the meeting can be found here. A selection of papers presented at the workshop is in the process of being published as a journal special issue.