

Administrative Culture(s) of International Organizations: Introduction

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The emergence of this historically unprecedented social reality that is modern bureaucracy, i.e., the institution of a relatively autonomous administrative field, independent of politics (denegation) and of the economy (disinterestedness) and obeying the specific logic of the ›public‹. Beyond the intuitive half-understanding that springs from our familiarity with the finished state, one must try to reconstruct the deep sense of the series of infinitesimal and yet all equally decisive inventions – the bureau, signature, stamp, decree of appointment, certificate, register, circular, etc. – that led to the establishment of a properly bureaucratic logic, an impersonal and interchangeable power that, in this sense, has all the appearances of ›rationality‹ even as it is invested with the most mysterious properties of magical efficacy.¹

Anyone who deals with administrative culture² is inevitably confronted with a form of public administration that, at first glance, appears to be closed off from its environment but, on closer inspection, is connected to it in a variety of ways. In the quote mentioned above, Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the autonomy of public administration. Concurrently, he links the transformation in forms of stateness (*Staatlichkeit*) to the evolution and utilization of

cultural techniques and technologies that have become increasingly associated with public administration, even though they have not been primarily developed for administrative purposes: Labor has been organized in spaces dedicated to and equipped as work areas; styles of writing and documenting have been formalized along time- and culture-specific modes of authorization and legitimation; a standardized division of labor has been developed to deal with complex requirements; and the technologies for accessing information in a rapidly expanding data space have improved. These are among the key developments that have contributed to the evolution of public administration.³

The office is often used as a *pars pro toto* for these complex, historically specific processes, thereby concealing the underlying tenets of the ›magical efficiency‹ ironically mentioned by Bourdieu. Public administration has become a black box in the arguments of political scientists and historians, who understand and analyze it as an instrument for providing public goods, developing new political programs, and intervening in crises. To crack this black box, we have to understand the technologies mentioned by Bourdieu as cultural techniques and analyze their use as part of a specific administrative culture. In this context, they can provide links to the practices of work organization, knowledge

production, and information processing in business and science, i.e., the environment of public administration.

The objective of this special issue is to gain insight into how international organizations operate by opening the black box of their administrative culture. We focus on International Organizations (IOs) for two reasons. First, they have proliferated in the 19th and 20th centuries and spread across the globe in various forms, including intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. They have received considerable attention in recent years as conveyors of internationalism, as a specific model of multilateral conflict resolution, as sites of diplomatic, economic, and military cooperation and contestation, and as platforms for the circulation of knowledge, models, and practices of governance between nation-states.⁴

Secondly, IOs have themselves been the object and product of knowledge transfers and cooperation (as well as conflict). They can be understood as organizations staffed by officials trained and experienced in different legal systems, administrative decision-making processes, writing and filing routines, and hierarchical structures. With the founding of the League of Nations, the previously rather small administrations of international organizations took on a new significance: The first internationally recognized international civil service under extraterritorial rule was created. Among the questions that were hotly debated and never answered was whether the administration of the League of Nations should be considered more along the lines of a state administration or whether it belonged to the operational foundations of a future world government, i.e., whether international civil servants should have specific privileges and at least be equated with diplomats.⁵

With their tensions and contradictions, International Organizations enable us to better assess processes of change in administration. Therefore, we do not understand administrations as input-based infrastructures or examine them according to their thematic orientation. Instead, we focus on practices that we address as administrative cultures. The specific character of IOs' administrative culture(s) can only be adequately assessed when we look at it from the vantage point of administrative cultures of state administrations and use the theoretical instruments developed for studying the latter. Our introduction will,

therefore, begin with a look at administrative cultures of public organizations at the state and substate level, focusing on three analytical themes, namely personnel, communication, and knowledge. Second, we will focus on International Organizations and use the reflections in the first part as a backdrop to better profile their administrative culture(s). Our ambition with this introduction is not to present a comprehensive survey of the existing literature. Instead, we want to highlight those perspectives that we consider the most fruitful for studying administrative culture as the rather elusive object of our intellectual curiosity.

Administrative culture(s) ...

Administrative culture as a subject of research has developed considerably since the 1960s and become conceptually and methodologically differentiated, as can be seen in the research overview by Muir MacCarthaigh and Leno Saarniit.⁶ The interdisciplinary approach in the study of administrative culture has thus expanded the field, which comes at the expense of a common understanding of the object of investigation. The two authors, therefore, conclude that a common definition of this field of research is missing and is difficult to accomplish.⁷

Maximilian Wallerath has related this problem of definition to different cultural concepts and pointedly summed them up with the two options »organization is culture« and »organization has culture«.⁸ The first conceptualization takes its cue from a wider understanding of culture, which Wallerath relates to Anglo-American cultural studies. A further clue for organizations being a cultural artifact of their own is their contingent character, which is so obvious with the League of Nations being set up as a new International Public Administration (IPA). However, even long-existing organizations feature a specific structural set-up, chain of command, and formal decision-making processes. Even their positioning towards their political environment is not a given. All these features have to be understood either as continuing a tradition or breaking with it. In any case, both are conscious choices, e.g., to adopt models, to implement abstract principles, or to depart from traditions. The structure of the organization

and its normative set-up can then be understood as the so-called »objective culture« of an organization.⁹ As such, it can be used effectively in a comparative analysis of public administration systems.¹⁰

The second option approaches administrative culture from a narrower understanding of culture. It looks at the *cultural* framing of everyday practices beyond their programming through norms. The organization is considered not as a cultural artifact on its own but rather as a structure from which its culture emerges.¹¹ Such a perspective is also offered in the definition of Franz Thedieck:

*In contrast to the (legal and organizational) structure administrative culture indicates the values, norms, orientations and attitudes of an organization. Administrative culture is composed of patterns, which have developed during a long period and often are discovered only by attentive observers. Administrative culture also characterizes the attitude towards change such as administrative reform.*¹²

This characterization by Thedieck opens an additional perspective on administrative culture that goes far beyond technologies, cultural techniques, and forms of knowledge. It includes people and their actions in organizations, their values, expectations, ways of thinking, and social practices. This brings administrative practices into a different view, as well as the administration's public image in artistic works and their attempts to optimize work processes and improve performance. Moreover, it interrogates how education, social background, and cultural environment shape employees. Looking at administrative culture from this perspective connects the organization and its personnel to its environment on many different levels. It also frames procedures in an informal manner, as we have already briefly discussed when commenting on the introductory quote from Bourdieu. This aspect is even more relevant for International Organizations when we try to understand the complex web of interrelationships they entertained with their environments.

If we consider ethnographic and micro-sociological studies on public administration, we are confronted with an even more radical view of the ways in which organizations are linked to their environment. Jean-

Marc Weller studies bureaucratic work through a detailed look at administrative practices in a street-level organization.¹³ He is interested in the ways in which everyday practices – of communication with the public at the counter, of the production of files – not just constitute public administration but also contribute significantly to the constitution of social and political order, which, in turn, informs these practices. The prominent role of everyday practices is an observation shared between Weller's ethnomethodological study and Niklas Luhmann's system theoretical reflections. Luhmann sees administrative culture as »arising by itself«, for example through everyday communication with a latent function of expressing togetherness and reproducing values that are not formalized.¹⁴ The attitudes and values of employees, which connect to the social and political environment of the organization, are relevant to their actions and even take on a cultural life of their own, somewhat disconnected from the formal programming of the organization. They can form specific hierarchies and develop their own language and logic for making decisions; favor certain orientations, such as the primary focus on the needs of citizens or the pursuit of other goals such as transparency or economic task fulfillment; and lastly, shape the way administrative processes are carried out.¹⁵ These features are currently discussed under the heading of administrative styles with regard to International Organizations.¹⁶

The work of Jean Marc Weller and Fabienne Hanique highlights two key characteristics of administrative cultures, which are not limited to state organizations.¹⁷ First, the approach addresses the materiality of office work¹⁸ and, second, its ambivalent character, both of which are relevant for studying IOs in new ways. Following this line of argumentation, the everyday performance of members of an organization gains epistemological relevance. We can identify the origin of their practices and estimate the consequences of dynamic interferences between individual actors, the political context, and the transformation of the normative and political framework. Weller's and Hanique's arguments take this research program further and reflect on the conditions under which these everyday practices transform under the impact of changes in political culture – the shift towards a new understanding of state agencies as providing

services to the public.¹⁹ The reflection on the role that administrative culture plays in reform processes is certainly not restricted to ethnomethodological research. MacCarthaigh and Saarniit consider »reform and the role it plays in facilitating, inhibiting, and modifying reform efforts« as »the most common context within public administration research«.²⁰ Even within public service reform projects, administrative culture receives increased attention when fundamental changes are planned.²¹ Historical research can cast a wider analytical net and consider the ways in which structural shifts, paradigmatic reorientations, and, more generally, political, economic, and cultural crises impact administrative practices directly and indirectly through their effects on administrative cultures.

The focus on change is particularly intriguing given that research on administrative structures tends to highlight a tendency towards persistence and lack of innovation. Wolfgang Seibel sees administrative culture as an obstacle to change:

For the administrative practitioner, it is an everyday experience that resistance to change is not only based on mere divergences of interest, but also on the proverbial power of habit [...]. As an institution, administration makes the non-self-evident appear self-evident, which not only relieves the members of the administration of the complexity of decision-making, but also lends the actual decisions a spontaneous legitimacy. In this way, what is appropriate and inappropriate, what is right and what is wrong is defined quasi-automatically.²²

The methodological approach to administrative culture unveils the heterogeneous conditions of reform and innovation. The broad range of approaches is obvious when looking at the micro-sociological approach of Weller²³ and at political science studies that operate with strongly reductionist models, such as the »grid-group« cultural theory. Pollitt and Bouckaert can be introduced as representatives of the latter, as they include administrative culture in one of the five factors to describe the nature and success of administrative reform, along with state structure, type of executive government, minister/mandarin relationship, and diversity of policy advice.²⁴

Wallerath has compared administrative culture to »software« that guides the actions of employees in a variety of ways beyond formal control.²⁵ This metaphor is not wrong because the collectively shared values, forms of communication, work processes, and handling of the administrative environment define a practice of communication, filing, and decision-making, complementing and, at times, even competing with formal rules. With its emphasis on practice, the metaphor of software, which implicitly always includes hardware, is based on a specific understanding of cultural studies. It emphasizes the role of organizational-cultural modulations for action, with which the normative structure of a state or international public administration can be made operational in the first place. Stefan Kühl questions this basic assumption from a systems theory perspective and, in continuation of Luhmann's considerations, proposes a departure from the implicit dichotomy between structure and culture, which is so central to many works on administrative culture.²⁶ »Systems theory [...] [understands] culture as a specific form of social structure [...]. In systems theory, a social structure is understood as expectations that guide behavior«.²⁷

This intervention, which this volume uses as a point of orientation, has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of administrative cultures. We suggest a conceptual departure from a dichotomy between structure and culture. Instead, we build our research questions on the coexistence of two complementary »expectation structures« in an organization, which Niklas Luhmann equates with decidable and undecidable decision-making premises. Viewed from this perspective, administrative culture unfolds one of the two »expectation structures«, namely the »informal side of the organization«,²⁸ as Stefan Kühl argues. Formality and informality, as the two »expectation structures« of a modern public administration, are indispensable for its functioning, whereby »only relatively few [expectations] are formalized in the form of decided premises for decision-making«.²⁹

Kühl does not project the contrast between formal and informal onto structure and culture but rather claims the relevance of culture for the formal structure and the structuring impact of informal practices. Therefore, both dimensions – informality and formality – are important for the function of an organization,

without informality having to be made an essential element of formality, as Schuppert argues.³⁰ Informality is not absorbed into formal structure, it can even introduce a disruption to this structure, as in the case of the League of Nations, where Italian fascists started to informally organize Italian members of the Secretariat and thus violated the stipulations of the Covenant.³¹ Kühl generalizes this point from the vantage point of a sociology of organizations: Deviations from normative expectations can be based on organizational cultural expectations.³²

The systems theory perspective has considerable analytical potential for empirically investigating administrative cultures. Both expectation structures have to be conceptually placed next to and related to each other. At the same time, as Kühl points out, an essential subject area of the research on organizational culture – values, thinking styles, symbols, and cognitive schemas – is freed from its exclusive connection to the informal dimension. This avoids a ›naturalization‹ of the formal rules and the structure of an organization. This conceptual shortcoming is less present in the case of International Organizations, as their cultural underpinnings have to be systematically scrutinized.³³

If we look at the analytical strategies used to research administrative culture, we are confronted with a similar heterogeneity to that seen in efforts to define this field. These approaches range from micro-sociological and ethnomethodological investigation of the everyday practices of concrete administrative institutions to historical-discourse-analytical reconstructions of self-image, forms of communication, and decision-making practices³⁴ to political and administrative science studies, in which indicators allow for a comparative analysis of administrative culture as a dependent or independent variable at a higher level of abstraction.³⁵

In political and administrative science studies, the differentiated analysis of organizational culture at a high level of abstraction is made possible through the definition of administrative styles. Howlett understands an administrative style as a ›more or less consistent and long-term set of institutionalized patterns of politico-administrative relationships, norms and procedures‹.³⁶ Basically, to identify administrative styles, we need to examine the connection between the formal and informal programming of administrative action.

Some central topics can be identified in the heterogeneous field of administrative culture research. Personnel is an essential factor for the administration, and ›personnel decisions [are] an important premise for further decisions of the organization,‹ as Stefan Kühl emphasizes.³⁷ Within the organization, formal recruitment criteria are complemented by informal preferences that refer to the position of the organization in a broader political and social environment or relate to the social or cultural self-image of the employees. In order to gain insight into the criteria and conditions of belonging, (international) civil servants are considered part of an epistemic community whose qualification profiles should be part of the investigation. European systems of public administration secured a common epistemic underpinning of their officials through a shared educational background, which became a formal recruitment criterion. In continental Europe, this has long privileged candidates with a law degree, while in the British administrative system, education had a less formally defined role.³⁸

Communication is a second subject area of central importance for research on organizational culture. Organizations can be described by ›formal communication channels‹ because they express the way in which tasks are carried out based on the division of labor, the importance of hierarchies, the use of specialized codes and the communicative design of the environmental relationship.³⁹ Within organizations, the forms of communication required to complete tasks cannot be completely mapped through formal structures alone, since political contexts shape the conditions under which information is exchanged. As Stefan Kühl argues, this is why informal channels develop: ›Informal communication channels are not a one-off deviation from formal communication channels, but rather well-established regular deviations. This is how ›communicative trails‹ are formed.‹⁴⁰

The third subject area concerns the knowledge that is necessary for the completion of administrative tasks.⁴¹ Public administration requires knowledge to generate policy proposals and to perform its tasks. However, it also produces data in the execution of its tasks, which is further processed into knowledge within or outside the respective organizations and is available for the organization and its purposes. The development

of statistics and its relevance for the transformation of ›stateness‹ in the 19th century should be mentioned in this context.⁴² However, state organizations and International Organizations not only use self-generated knowledge: »The state is not only a knowledge-based organization, but above all an organization in need of knowledge, regardless of the aggregate state of ›stateness‹ in which the respective ruling entity finds itself«.⁴³

Knowledge is an indispensable feature of administrative procedures. The expansion of the state during the 19th century and the resulting pluralization of professional competence led to changes in organizations. This is because knowledge is part of the networked character and interdependence of administration, as Seibel argues: »Every administrative landscape is a structure based on the division of labor; interventions at a certain point produce consequences elsewhere that may be undesirable or unpredictable or both«.⁴⁴

... of International Organizations

For a long time, the nation-state has dominated studies on administrative culture. In theoretical debates, the administration has been (albeit implicitly) perceived as that of the nation-state. Also empirically, the nation-state has served as a framework for research on administrative cultures for a long time. Our volume will argue that there is an intellectual surplus when testing the approach with the formation and transformation of international public administration.

The few exceptions in the literature were publications by former employees of the League of Nations. However, these studies were written with the impending end of the League of Nations in mind and aimed at shaping the formal structure of the future United Nations.⁴⁵ They lauded Sir Eric Drummond, the first Secretary-General of the League, for having foiled the plan to establish the secretariat on trans-governmental lines and for having established a truly international secretariat.⁴⁶ Ranshofen-Wertheimer and Walters inquired about the possible models that existed for such an international organization at the time the League of Nations was founded: Interestingly, and very

typical of the political aim of these studies, the Public International Unions founded in the late 19th century were rejected as models. As Ranshofen-Wertheimer explained, they could not serve as a model because they were too small, and their administration was not international enough to serve as best practice. He preferred war-related institutions and propagated the *Inter-Allied War Agencies* as a role model. However, as a temporary infrastructure, these agencies did not create an international administration but brought together representatives of national authorities with their staff in order to jointly solve international (i.e., inter-allied) tasks. According to Ranshofen-Wertheimer, the only possible model for an administrative body that was multinational in composition and yet had entered into a joint commitment was ultimately not used in the planning of the League of Nations Secretariat: the administration of the Habsburg Monarchy. Ranshofen-Wertheimer looks at the Habsburg-model rather selectively and with significant distortion to make it fit the purpose of his argument:

*If the Austrian experience had been studied by the pioneers of the League Secretariat it might have suggested that existent cleavages, even strong disaffection, can be counterbalanced or more than counterbalanced by a common administrative loyalty, by common social and material conditions. This might have conveyed the important lesson that supranational loyalty was possible even if full harmony among the members composing the international organization should not be achieved.*⁴⁷

The growing historical interest in the role of international organizations within the political process,⁴⁸ as well as the experience with the development of new forms of governance and related administrative cultures in the context of the European integration process, has led to a more intensive study of the administrative culture of international organizations. From a political science perspective, the administrations of international organizations have become important because a closer look at their performance can better determine the relevance of these organizations in international politics.⁴⁹ From a historical perspective, Eva Maria Muschik has shown that »the UN should be taken

seriously as more than an intergovernmental forum: namely, as an important actor in global history that was substantially shaped by its employees». ⁵⁰

At the level of International Organizations, studying administrative culture allows for further insights into the institutionalization of international relations and the problems and challenges related to the formation of sustainable international orders. In their introductory reflections on the relevance of international public administrative bodies for policymaking, Bayerlein, Knill, and Steinebach strengthen this perspective:

Zooming in on IOs entails viewing the secretariat as a distinct part of the organization, as a political system that interacts with the IO's other parts and with the broader environment. We refer to these bureaucratic bodies as ›international public administrations‹ (IPAs), which can more specifically be defined as ›hierarchically organized groups of international civil servants with a given mandate, resources, identifiable boundaries, and a set of formal rules of procedures within the context of a policy area‹. ⁵¹

The differences between administrative organizations at the national and international levels are obvious. They lie in the specific setup of international organizations and their administration. Considering the founding of the League of Nations, the Ranshofen-Wertheimer summarized this peculiarity and its impact on the formal structure of the League's Secretariat:

There is nothing comparable to the executive, to a cabinet or to ministers who carry out the policy of an electorate or a congress [...] or of Parliament [...] It was this fundamental constitutional difference in the relationship between administrative and policy-making bodies in national and international affairs that imposed on the League Secretariat the necessity of creating its own technique and procedure, both in its leadership and in its office organization, external relations and personnel management. ⁵²

As Ranshofen-Wertheimer goes on to explain, the aim of developing independent strategies was to strengthen the political role of the League of Nations. In doing so, the Secretariat relied on four strategies, which were

developed within this formal structure: conducting negotiations competently, skillfully using procedures to influence the results of negotiations, ability to manage crises, and, finally, controlling the external image of the League of Nations. ⁵³ Arguing from the perspective of an international civil servant, Ranshofen-Wertheimer thus addresses an idea of policy shaping by the administration, a logic which Seibel captures well in his remark:

In other words, [administration is] not just the implementation machinery of politically pre-decided projects, but an institution with political sensitivity and professional expertise that both advises and independently solves problems. ⁵⁴

Ranshofen-Wertheimer's considerations make it clear that the Secretariat was perceived as an instrument able to influence political decisions primarily, but not solely, by providing capacities for negotiation and by offering expertise for inter-governmental negotiations. Schuppert has highlighted this importance of negotiation capacities even within national politics, because he sees the significance of communication for politics not only in the area of deliberation but also in »negotiation in the most diverse negotiation arenas«. ⁵⁵ For the League of Nations, Ranshofen-Wertheimer's colleague Francis Paul Walters, a senior British official in the Secretariat, emphasized this point in his History of the League of Nations, published in the early 1950s:

Indeed, from the early days of the League, there had been observed an unexpected, yet constantly recurring, phenomenon – the successful issue of conferences, or of sessions of the Council or the Assembly, which had been preceded by many signs of discord and seemed destined to lead to complete deadlock. Delegates who arrived with the expectation of meeting irreconcilable opposition, and with the intention of showing equal obstinacy on their own side, would soon be using all their energy and intelligence in seeking grounds of agreement, and would find their opponents doing the same. ⁵⁶

International organizations also remained an important meeting place during the Cold War, as Sandrine Kott claims:

International organizations were and still are spaces in which diplomats can meet, along with experts, unionists, activists, and economic and cultural actors. They reveal the connections and circulations among individuals, groups, and states that run counter to the traditional Cold War ordering into ›camps‹.⁵⁷

The role of current and historical administrative bodies of International Organizations is, however, not limited to being »mere instruments of their member states« or serving »as forums for intergovernmental bargaining«, as Knill, Steinebach, Bayerlein emphasize.⁵⁸ They reject the conceptual narrowness of studies that, with their orientation towards realism and functionalism in international relations, restrict International Public Administrations only to these functions. They claim a significantly expanded sphere of influence of IPAs on policy development, even though the role of INGOs could be more strongly developed in their argument.

The systematic interweaving of state and non-state actors at the supranational level, which is examined as an essential feature of the European integration process, can, to some extent, already be observed in the working methods of the League of Nations. Madeleine Herren has pursued these considerations for the involvement of women's interest groups:

As a result of the League's activities, semi-official contact gained political importance as part of newly shaped international relations. Semi-official networks, which had reconnected what was left of pre-war liberal internationalism, and international women's organizations had strong claims established since the late nineteenth century.⁵⁹

These networks not only allowed the League of Nations to act externally – they also provided contact points for the recruitment of female employees.⁶⁰

In recent years, the political science debate on international organizations has increasingly focused on »informal factors« in order to determine the practice of IPAs beyond normative guidelines and the overcoming of particular challenges. The aim is to determine the independent influence of IPAs on policy development without ascribing them a formally defined autonomy. As

in the study of national-level administrative cultures, the informal aspects of administrative action are understood as complementary to the »structural and institutional context they operate in« and are considered essential for the achievement of administrative objectives.⁶¹

Based on Knill's earlier work on the Europeanization of national administrations, political scientists try to capture the specific characteristics of informal factors and their influence on the performance of an international organization with the concept of administrative style. These styles are the result of everyday administrative action and, thus, of routines.⁶² With this assessment of the genesis and reproduction of informal practices, the authors rely on a concept similar to the one used by Niklas Luhmann for the study of organizational culture.

However, research on the administrative styles of international organizations does not rely on a system-theoretical approach. Knill and his group use the instruments of political science research. In doing so, they develop an ideal-typical category scheme with which the different forms of practice can be classified. The basic distinction refers to two »orientations, underpinning administrative styles, namely the positional and the functional orientation characterizing informal bureaucratic routines and standard operating procedures.« What does this mean? »If a positional orientation shapes administrative styles, the central objective behind administrative routines is determining how a certain policy will affect the autonomy and legitimacy of the IPA.« This dimension captures the modalities of relations to the political environment. Functional orientation, however, reflects involvement with policy issues.

[It] becomes manifest in the extent to which IPAs' behavior is directed at constantly advancing the policy performance of an IO. The dominant focus is on optimizing internal structures and processes to facilitate the initiation, drafting, and effective implementation of well-designed policies.⁶³

These two vectors (functional and positional orientation) are further differentiated according to the gradation of their occurrence, whereby again, only two ideal-typical manifestations are used – high and low. This results

in four types of administrative styles: Entrepreneur (Positional High, Functional High), Advocate (Positional Low, Functional High), Consolidator (Positional High, Functional Low), and Servant (Positional Low, Functional Low). To explain the emergence of these four styles, the authors refer to the informal logic of action, which they locate in the tension between external and internal challenges.⁶⁴ To empirically determine these four administrative styles, they examine the entire process of policymaking (policy initiation, drafting, implementation) differentiated according to the two basic orientations and define concrete indicators for operationalization. The result is an empirically saturated, conceptually innovative starting point for a comparative analysis of the administrative styles of international organizations. They compare eight current international organizations: the International Labour Organization (ILO) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are identified as Servants, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as Consolidators, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as Advocates, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as Entrepreneurs. This study provides the starting point for a detailed political science analysis of the IPAs' ability to shape international policy.⁶⁵

Looking at international organizations through the lens of administrative styles can not only be appealing for political scientists but also for historians. The specific character of international organizations before the founding of the United Nations will, however, put limitations on its use. As historians, we should keep from this fascinating concept the interest in the active policy-setting role of their administrations. For this, we can follow the guidance of Susan Pedersen,⁶⁶ who has paved the way to a more global and practical understanding of the work of the League of Nations. Following her pioneering work, Gram-Skjoldager and Ikonomou highlight the role of the League as »the first international intergovernmental organization to develop a large-scale bureaucracy«, which influenced international politics by moving »many formerly purely technical or domestic matters into being part and parcel of the international diplomatic realm«.⁶⁷

In more recent scholarship on the League of Nations, the Secretariat became a model for the emergence and transformation of an international civil service, its limits, contradictions, and problems.⁶⁸

Looking back, the former League official celebrated the international nature of the Secretariat.⁶⁹ This was certainly true but requires a historically nuanced view: Unlike older international organizations, the Secretariat was an extraterritorial body, no longer under the control of a particular state. However, the League remained an organization built on Western administrative traditions – albeit with an unprecedented staff, including women and experts from non-Western countries.⁷⁰

In fact, historical scholarship has begun to examine the history of the League from a more global and, unfortunately, very current perspective, discussing the impact of political tensions and financial restrictions on the League during the 1930s. Recently published research shows, on the one hand, a growing interest in the impact of the League on its East Asian members and, on the other, the transnational presence of fascism in international bodies.⁷¹

Exploring administrative cultures unfolds the desperate dynamics of administrative restructuring plans discussed in the League's secretariat during the 1930s when one state after the other left the League or stopped paying the annual fee. In the discussion of the Ramsey Report (1932) and the restructuring and cutbacks in the League of Nations Secretariat proposed therein, Ranshofen-Wertheimer⁷² developed the profile of an international organization and its needs. These related to a kind of »participative bureaucracy« with regard to the member states. Dykmann exemplifies the difficulty in pursuing the recruiting policy by quoting Joseph Avenol, then Deputy Secretary-General, in a comment from 1935. He stressed the need to recruit not only Indian citizens, who might have been suggested by the government, but rather »representative Indians«, meaning candidates who were »in touch with Indian opinion«.⁷³ The ability of an international organization to act depends on its human resources – both in terms of general staffing and with regard to the professional skills and political networks that are made available to the organization in this way. This is shown by a detailed look at the personnel development of the League of Nations, to which Klaas Dykmann⁷⁴ contributed

significantly in order to make the »unknown creature« of the international civil servant better visible.⁷⁵

What do we learn from the decline of the League from the administrative point of view? The »alienation« of the member state caused by the termination of a member state's staff could more than cancel out the savings achieved through it.⁷⁶ In addition, the work of the Secretariat was less predictable than the business activities of a national authority. The Secretariat of the League of Nations had to be able to react quickly to international crises without completely shutting down ongoing business. Without a sufficient staffing buffer in such a situation, the Secretariat was forced »to hire, on the open market and at greater cost, a less experienced and temporary staff«. In the view of Ranshofen-Wertheimer,⁷⁷ even centralizing the typists had considerable negative consequences, which resulted from the specific work situation: The combination of subject-specific communication with a specialized vocabulary and the strong presence of managers whose native language was neither English nor French. The typists assigned directly to these managers or at least to a department were able to proofread the documents, but this required »mutual adaptation and continued association in a common work«.

Administrative Cultures and International Organizations

Our discussion on the administrative cultures of International Organizations has mainly focused on their position within the field of international relations and, thus, the role of international public administrations in policymaking. If we zoom in on the actual working of these organizations, we can identify personnel, communication, and knowledge as the three most important themes in researching their administrative cultures.

Historical research on international organizations has intensively discussed personnel and leadership personalities. More recent studies return to the observations of Ranshofen-Wertheimer,⁷⁸ in which he dealt with the profile of the head of such an organization and distinguished four types: statesman (politician in a democracy), moderator (elder statesman or judge beyond the age of political ambition), top administrator

(civil servant in a leading position), and expert. Gram-Skjoldager and Ikonomou still use the three categories of bureaucrats, diplomats, and technocrats to structure their overview of the recent literature on the secretariat of the League of Nations.⁷⁹ In this volume, the contribution by Dominique Pécaud and Patrice Pipaud on the »Commission Européenne du Danube« (CED) highlights the importance of looking even beyond the League at the early history of International Organizations. They emphasize the CED's role in the emergence of administrative practices of IOs.

In the case of the League, the Secretary-General's ability to act is determined by the formal structure of the organization and the nature of its relationship with the member states, the administrative style of an organization as well as by his strategies. In order to better understand the importance of leadership personalities, the IO BIO project⁸⁰ has documented the biographies of eighty secretaries-general of international organizations. On the basis of this material, which goes back to the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine, Rainalda poses questions that are closely related to the research interests that I outlined in connection with the administrative styles: the independent capacity of an international organization to act.⁸¹ Rainalda relates this to the profiles of the leading functionaries who could be responsible for an »agency slack in the form of »slippage«.⁸²

Since the first debates on the organization of the League of Nations, questions about the loyalty of its members have played a central role. Should they act as delegates of the member states or as members of an international organization? The decision was made in favor of the second option, which Walters emphasized as an innovation. However, this did not mean that employees should or could not be connected to national political networks. Before they entered, they acquired »knowledge and practices [...] in national spaces«, working in universities and research institutions and as civil servants in state organizations, as Véronique Plata-Stenger points out for the ILO.⁸³ This preference for divided loyalties was consciously transferred into the UN system, as Muschik argues:

Citing Eric Drummond's report on the lessons learned from the experience of the League of Nations, Pelt suggested that the ideal civil servants were neither

men without a country nor extreme nationalists, but those who felt their country's interest was best served by international cooperation. Aside from paying attention to national representation, Pelt, by his own account, also favored an inclusive working environment with frequent staff meetings, few secrets, and a free exchange of opinions.⁸⁴

Personnel policy offers international organizations, as well as the authorities at the national level, the opportunity to combine formal and informal aspects. This should increase the organization's ability to act both internally and externally. Véronique Plata-Stenger has studied the ILO,⁸⁵ while Klaas Dykmann has reconstructed this logic for the League of Nations.⁸⁶ For Dykmann, it shows consideration of national origin or affiliation to political networks that were important for the organization as a whole or for individual sections:

Nationality was often the first concern when it came to hiring a new official, regularly combined with political considerations or regional distribution [...]. Age, qualifications, sometimes gender, language skills, special knowledge, or experience with international work further played a role.⁸⁷

Plata-Stenger emphasizes the ways, in which the membership of their staff in »national, professional, or militant groups« had to be transcended in order to integrate them into a »system of international representations and values.«⁸⁸ In his contribution to the volume, Klaas Dykmann delineates how a Eurocentric (or Western-centric) personnel policy shaped the League of Nations' administrative culture. He also looks at how, in turn, administrative culture was deployed to legitimize the hiring of European or Western (educated) staff.

Communication is a key theme in the literature on international organizations, which is more complex than communication from the perspective of individual states. Communication transgresses the boundaries of states and is therefore in part beyond the reach of the regulatory projects of individual states. With transborder communication becoming more important and new technologies for this communication in need of standardization, regulatory initiatives on the international level have emerged. This fascinating

history, which ranges from the Telegraph Union of 1865 to the International Telecommunication Union of today, is discussed in a volume edited by Gabriele Balbi and Andreas Fickers.⁸⁹

International Organizations had all their stakes in mass media and communication strategies targeted at different audiences, as Jonas Brendebach, Martin Herzer, and Heidi Tworek argue in the introduction to their edited volume.⁹⁰ They needed publicity to garner public support and guarantee their legitimacy. The League of Nations is presented as the first International Organization that entertained a »symbiotic relationship« with the media and invested significantly into the projection of its activities and its mission statement to the outside, which was still strongly focused on elites and »Western newspaper readers«. This happened during a time when new media and technologies intensified the challenge for international organizations to keep up with national propaganda. It was a challenge for the League to balance its commitment to political neutrality while serving the radio, film, and press.⁹¹ The contributions by Pelle van Dijk and Michael Burri elucidate IOs' concerns with public opinion in different ways: Van Dijk sheds light on how the League's Information Section sought to mobilize social elites and perceived opinion leaders through diplomatic missions. In contrast, Burri demonstrates that the Interallied Commission for the Delimitation of the Boundary between Austria and Hungary used its engagement with the local populace and expertise in local affairs to legitimize its activity both vis-à-vis the citizenry and its superiors.

The special thing about the League of Nations' communication with the outside world was its creative adaptation of diplomatic communication: »Official correspondence could not follow any nationally accepted pattern or style; the League had to create a style of its own.« This style also had to be easily translatable because documents had to be produced in both working languages.⁹² A common writing style developed slowly and was finally formalized in the *Secretariat Office Rules* (1934). They also regulated the authorization to sign outgoing documents.⁹³

Knowledge is an even more fascinating topic with regard to international organizations than state organizations. International organizations occupy a meta-level in the context of knowledge circulation, the

reduction of uncertainty when facing complex policy choices, and the management of policy processes and regulatory strategies. International organizations act in cooperation and, at times, also in competition with each other and with networks of governance, where state and non-state actors are present.⁹⁴ Two contributions in this volume shed light on these knowledge transfers between IOs, however, in the sense of learning processes.⁹⁵ Anastasiya Schacht demonstrates that, in its founding years, the World Health Organization (WHO) was built to a considerable degree on personnel and administrative practices of the League of Nations' Health Organization (LNHO). Such links were, however, downplayed at the time. Marcus M. Payk's »re-reading« of Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer's seminal publication »The International Secretariat. A Great Experiment in International Administration« investigates the narrative construction of the League of Nations' legacy. Framing the LoN as an »experiment« allowed for the transformation of disappointment about its failure into a learning opportunity for future International Organizations.

International Organizations are clearing houses for knowledge and information – a role for which the League of Nations and the ILO provide excellent examples. Both were heavily invested in the collection of data on social policy, labor relations, health and epidemic disease, and economic indicators. This required a shared understanding and conceptualization of the problems in question and a shared way to translate this conceptualization into policy advice for member states. This common approach had to be built through »networks of knowledge-based experts,« in which members of the organizations actively participated. Haas calls »a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue are« an »epistemic community.«⁹⁶

The League of Nations and the ILO provided an important organizational infrastructure for data collecting epistemic communities. The International Organizations mentioned standardized indicators of data collection and provided a platform for experts and administrators from different backgrounds to further develop solutions to common problems. This point is stressed by Amy Sayward when she emphasizes the role of the League in bringing together the members

of national committees for »exchanging information and organizing international standards for nutritional work.«⁹⁷ Standardization, the collection of data on problems like undernourishment, disease, and economic development, and supplying highly professional meeting spaces for epistemic communities to convene – these were the main instruments of the League in its technical divisions. Sayward points our attention to an additional dimension, which is equally important: »When the representatives of these national committees returned home, they sought to bring their governmental policies into line with emerging global best practices.«⁹⁸ The active participation of International Organizations and their staff in epistemic communities provides a different take on the role of these institutions. They are no longer limited to the role of a clearing house but are actively involved in policy strategies. This can be seen with International Organizations actively involved in the formulation of development and environmental policies.⁹⁹ In her article, Natali Stegmann contributes to the understanding of the political impact of international organizations, clarifying the role of ILO in East Central Europe. Focusing on the Polish case, she demonstrates that for East Central European actors, the ILO remained an important forum for discussing land reform projects. Her findings reflect a shared understanding of (under-) development between ILO and national actors from East Central Europe. However, Stegmann also shows that shared concepts translated into very different policies depending on the political regime over the course of the interwar period. From an African perspective, Ladislav Nze Bekale presents a similar argument when looking at the current conundrum of implementing the African Union's Agenda 2063. He identifies significant hurdles in the evidence-based approach caused by the member states' reluctance to communicate the relevant data. Policy formulation and the design of implementation strategies is only as useful as the willingness of participating states allows. This holds true for the African Union as much as for the rest of the International Organizations with their ambition to impact state policy.

The more international organizations engage in development and other forms of direct support for governments, the more expert knowledge within the organization is relevant.¹⁰⁰ Plata-Stenger looks at the expertise significant for the ILO for carrying out

missions to member states in the interwar period.¹⁰¹ Social insurance and labor legislation were the main policy fields where technical assistance was requested. Expertise in this field was developed by officials at the ILO, mainly through their research and their active participation in communication networks, for which the office in Geneva was a key nodal point. The reliance on training on the job strongly impacted the recruitment process, as different kinds of expertise could be focused on. Plata-Stenger argues that administrative experience in state organizations, membership in reform movements, and professional as well as personal experience with social policy initiatives were of crucial relevance.¹⁰² She illustrates this point with the fact that recruitment for the ILO's Social Insurance Section was run by three disabled war veterans from France, and Austria. The relevance of technical expertise for a career in an International Organization depends, however, on the profile of this organization. The International Telecommunication Union mainly recruited candidates with a technical background – experience in administration was not a priority, as Daniel Gorman argues. The ITU had problems filling its ranks with people who also had sufficient linguistic skills.¹⁰³

The increasing relevance of International Organizations in global networks of governance and their engagement in development activities turned them into attractive partners for aid-seeking governments. Knowledge also played an important role in this regard. Countries that requested assistance from international organizations thus became objects of knowledge production. Their problems linked national expertise with an international epistemic community. In order to access potential technical and financial assistance, aid-seeking countries needed sound knowledge about these international organizations, their programs, and the eligibility criteria. This was, for example, missing in the case of the Bolivian government, when it tried to enlist the support of the UN aid programs, as Eva Muschik argues:

Government officials in La Paz had not been able to follow UN terms of reference, Myrdal wrote, because ›they [had] not seen the needs of their country in the lights of our texts and in the categories we use.‹ Instead of continuously asking them to specify and reformulate their petitions, she thought, the

*Secretariat should have simply framed a request for them.*¹⁰⁴

Within our volume, Manfred Weiss sheds light on the multifaceted nature of ILO missions in an autobiographically inspired contribution. Weiss draws on his own experiences in various missions from the 1980s to the early 2000s but embeds them in the broader context of the ILO's functioning and activities in the second half of the 20th century. He demonstrates that these missions involved gathering information and making policy recommendations but that ILO experts also acted as interlocutors in conflicts and had to build trust.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight three points. First, our volume does not aim to fully represent the rich and thriving research on international organizations and their practices. We rather aim to show how fruitful the transfer of conceptual tools from the study of public administration to the history of international organizations can be. An understanding of organizational culture as expectation structure allows for a differentiated assessment of individual and collective agency and directs our attention to the specific contexts from which these expectations emerge. Second, international organizations are never built from scratch. Like state organizations, they emerge from a more or less systematic engagement with best practices and ultimately contingent political decisions. This predicament of defining the structure of an organization and the challenge of enabling a productive organizational culture to emerge are more difficult for international than state organizations. This can be explained by the lack of national normative traditions and even by the competing organizational traditions of the members of an international organization. With the rapid increase in the number of international organizations, we see, thirdly, that a specific organizational style emerges, which is again informed by best practices – but from other international organizations and not from state organizations. The increasing influence of non-Western actors in these organizations leaves its impact on the organization and its culture. Future research will show if and how these developments will reduce the relevance of European models of organization and will, finally, also have an impact on Western state administrations.

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- 97 Amy L. Sayward: *Food and Nutrition. Expertise across International Epistemic Communities and Organizations, 1919–63*, in: Gram-Skjoldager / Ikonou / Kahlert: *Organizing the 20th-Century World*, p. 116.
- 98 Sayward: *Food and Nutrition*, p. 116.
- 99 Cf. Muschik: *Building States*; Xiaowei Luo: *The Rise of the Social Development Model. Institutional Construction of International Technology Organizations 1856–1993*, in: *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (2020), pp. 147–175; Haas: *Introduction. Epistemic Communities*.
- 100 Cf. Gram-Skjoldager / Ikonou: *Making Sense*, p. 427.
- 101 Plata-Stenger: *Social Reform*, pp. 175–181.
- 102 Plata-Stenger: *Social Reform*, p. 173f.
- 103 Daniel Gorman: *Uniting Nations. Britons and Internationalism 1945–1970*, Cambridge 2022, pp. 65–70.
- 104 Muschik: *Building States*, p. 131.

Abstract

This introduction explores several approaches to the analysis of administrative culture. It argues that we should go beyond an often simplistic equation of culture to the informal dimensions of an administrative organization. Instead, administrative culture emerges from the interrelations between the formal and informal aspects of administration and, in turn, shapes both. This argument builds on Niklas Luhmann's concept of complementary »expectation structures«. It has been developed in the study of the public administration of the nation state, which has been the unquestioned framework for research on administrative cultures. There is an intellectual surplus in testing the approach with the formation and transformation of international public administration. The introduction also proposes an investigation into personnel, communication, and knowledge management in international organizations as avenues for further research on the administrative cultures of International Organizations.

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