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Interfaces: a Concept for the Analysis of Global Health Governance

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From the Westphalian system of nation-states to post-Westphalian global governance

In the introduction we summarized the basic aspects of the relationship between globalization, poverty and health and briefly referred to the developments that led to the emergence of the current structures of global health governance (GHG). In this chapter we will develop an analytical approach towards a better understanding of this GHG architecture, which combines International Relations theory with a concept to analyse the linkages between global governance actors.

We will first take a closer look at the impact of the transformation from a Westphalian\(^1\) system of nation-states to a post-Westphalian system of global governance on global and national politics. Subsequently, we will consider the characteristics of global governance processes in more detail. This entails an introduction of different modes of regulation (state, private, hybrid regulation) and a distinction between different types of power (resource-based, legal, discoursive and decision-making power) and competing interests (market creation vs. welfare), which influence both the interactions of actors and the outcomes of the global governance processes. For a more systematic analysis of the interactions which link the various actors at global, national and local level, we introduce the concept of *interfaces in global governance*. Norman Long’s (2001) concept of social interfaces serves as a starting-point and will be adjusted to the analysis of global governance processes. This will lead us to a *concept of ‘interfaces and change in global governance’* and a number of hypotheses which further specify the propositions made in the introduction.

The architecture of global (health) governance, of course, is not fully developed yet: GHG must be seen as an ongoing process of institutional
change. It is part of the transitional process from a Westphalian structure of international relations between sovereign nation-states to a post-Westphalian global political system. David Fidler (2004, 2005) has thoroughly analysed ‘post-Westphalian Public Health’ with respect to the global reaction to SARS and the revision of the International Health Regulations (IHR); he concludes that the new IHR constitute a shift towards ‘an expanded governance strategy that integrates multiple threats, actors and objectives in a flexible, forward-looking and universal manner’ (2005: 68). The discussion on global governance has contributed many elements towards an understanding of this transformation, but we are still quite far from understanding the newly emerging, incomplete system.

Figure 1.1 illustrates this transformation of international relations into a system of global politics. It is not intended as a model of global governance but rather as a scheme to characterize the dissolution of the ‘old’ structure of international relations in the process of a rapidly increasing density of transborder social, economic and political relations. The traditional system was based on an aggregation of interests at the national level (with A₁, A₂ and A₃ representing the various interest groups – business, unions, CSO – in nation A, and so on). Thus, negotiations at the international level were led by governments on the basis of these nationally aggregated positions, which, in the first instance, reflected power relations within nation-states. The outcome of these negotiations was a result of power relations between nation-states, either mediated by decision-making procedures within international governmental organizations (IGOs) or various characteristics of specific countries (or group of countries) within the international system. In Figure 1.1, the larger circle around country B reflects its central position within the system and points to its hegemony.

The intensification of international economic and social relations has produced a situation in which the Westphalian system was transformed by international negotiations that increasingly limit the power of national societies towards a sovereign formation of their internal political and economic order and of their external relations (in particular the GATT-WTO process). Globalization, the liberalization of markets, and the increasing need to deal with transnational/global problems created the opportunity for the direct interaction of non-state actors, thus establishing new transnational spaces of interests and power that prevent a full aggregation of interests on the national level but produce dynamics and opportunities through a transnational cooperation of non-state actors, which increasingly limit the political options of nation-states.

Figure 1.1 shows that simply by designing the structure of hypothetical relationships for three different non-state actors in three national