Explaining the Causes of Policy Innovation

Abstract: As the theories of IR suggest, the causes and factors of policy change can be multiple. This chapter applies the developed theoretical framework (Chapter 2) to the process of policy transformation (documented in Chapter 3). By revisiting each hypothesis separately, the chapter examines the causes of policy innovation at the UNDP across time and policy stages. The discussion reveals the ability of each theory to explain only certain elements of the policymaking process. Particular attention is paid to specific causal factors highlighted in the discussed theories. It demonstrates that the explanatory power of a constructivist argument dose not simply complement but subsumes and integrates the causal claims of other theories.

Keywords: policy, norms and intersubjectivity, rational choice, UNDP, CSR, partnerships

How do theories of IR explain the transformation in the character of UNDP-business partnerships? The causes and factors behind policy change can be multiple. The main argument in this study has hypothesized that the process of development and diffusion of norms of CSR and sustainability could operate as an intervening mechanism, between the initial conditions and the outcomes of the UNDP’s strategies towards the private sector, and transform policies. In this context, norms could have an impact on the organization’s policies through the process of interaction, dialogue, and reasoning with all relevant partners. Thus, when the agenda and policies of the UNDP are considered as a dependent variable in the process of development and diffusion of CSR-related norms, it is expected that the Programme would adopt new practices and redefine its strategies towards the private sector accordingly.

Alternative interpretations of policy change from other theories of IR are also given due consideration in this study. If the UNDP is considered as an agent operating on behalf of its members, then the collective interest of member states could alternatively influence the process of policy innovation. A third explanation suggests that the UNDP could act as a powerful and independent bureaucratic structure, because the administration and staff members might influence policies by means of their personal leadership, preferences, and professional expertise. Finally, the literature suggests that the organization's need for resource mobilization could also act as a trigger of change, because the financial, technical, and technological capacities of the private sector are the most efficient means to compensate for the decline of such capacities in the public sector. In the preceding chapter, I have relied on these hypothetical causal paths and their respective guiding reference points (GRPs) in the reconstruction of the analytical narrative of policy transformation at the UNDP. The theoretical framework is revisited in this chapter (Table 4.1) in order to explain what happened at the UNDP between 1994 and 2011.

The collective power and interest of member states

As the application of the PA model reveals, the role and influence of member states are indeed important in the process of policy innovation. More specifically, the collective support of member states was essential to the introduction of new initiatives that engage the private sector in IOs’ operations. Two prevailing tendencies have, however, been noticed