

Critical Role of Inter-Governmental Organizations in Global and Regional Environmental Cooperation

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Abstract

Global environmental cooperation does not occur in a vacuum. It is initiated, encouraged, coordinated, strengthened and monitored by a series of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), with exclusive or partial environmental mandates. The environment as an issue for global governance organizations appeared on the international agenda in the late 1960s. Despite its relatively recent entry, the intersection between environment and development has gone on to become a central focus of global governance ever since, and IGOs have played a critical role in this process. This paper reviews the functions and operation of existing global and regional IGOs as they pertain to global environmental governance. It examines some of the more interesting lines of inquiry into their role in the international political system, both individually and as a collective whole, and how they have been applied in research on environmental IGOs to further our understanding of this set of actors. These include the extent to which IGOs are autonomous actors, how to assess their performance and impacts, how to manage links and overlap between them, and the emergence of regional IGOs, adding a new dimension to this field. Finally, this paper outlines possible future trajectories and reforms for this complex institutional terrain.

Keywords: Inter-Governmental Organizations, Global Environmental Cooperation, Environment, Global Environmental Governance

Introduction

Cooperative global environmental action does not happen in a vacuum. A number of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) with full or partial environmental missions originate, encourage, coordinate, enhance, and monitor it. The environment first arose on the world agenda in the late 1960s as a concern for global governance organizations. Despite its relative newness, the relationship between environment and development has subsequently grown to be a major area of concern for global governance, and IGOs have been essential to this process. In relation to global environmental governance, this paper examines the roles and methods of the existing global and regional IGOs. In order to improve our comprehension of this group of players, it looks at



some of the more intriguing lines of study concerning their function in the global political system, both individually and collectively. These issues include how autonomously IGOs are able to operate, how to evaluate their effectiveness and effects, how to handle linkages and overlaps between them, and the advent of regional IGOs, which adds a fresh perspective to the area. This paper concludes by outlining potential future directions and changes for this challenging institutional landscape.

Inter-Governmental Organizations and Global Governance

In organizing and directing interstate cooperation and global governance, intergovernmental institutions have long been essential. They contribute to the development and application of international law and principles. In other words, nation-states give IGOs the responsibility of overseeing and carrying out international political processes. IGOs may be summed up as "organizations that include at least three states among their membership, that have activities in several states, and that are created through a formal intergovernmental agreement such as a treaty, charter, or statute" in the simplest terms.¹ "International institution" and "international organization" are not interchangeable concepts. Broadly speaking, institutions are the "rules of the game that serve to define social practices, assign roles, and guide interactions among the occupants of those roles" on a worldwide scale², and may or may not take on formal shape. This paper focuses on "concrete" environmental IGOs whose role and actions in the international system are shaped, at least in part, by these social institutions, as well as by their member states, including those members' internal cultures and leadership³. These international organizations also have an impact on how social institutions are shaped, as we shall see.

Intergovernmental organizations, like the United Nations (UN) or the World Trade Organization (WTO), may have a worldwide membership in the sense that any nation may join. They could also have a mandate or membership cap. Before entering, a nation must fulfill a number of requirements set forth by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). As is the case with the secretariats of several worldwide environmental regimes, many smaller IGOs are linked to a particular subject. Additionally, the UN Environment Program (UNEP) is the primary "anchor organization" for international environmental governance. Regional intergovernmental organizations, like the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), may encompass a (typically) contiguous set of states. They are involved in many various aspects of international government, including as commerce, world health, finance for development, and environmental protection.⁴ Although intergovernmental organizations have existed in some form since the eighteenth century, the majority of them today were founded during World War

¹Karns, Margaret P., and Karen A. Mingst. *International Organizations: The Politics and Processes of Global Governance*, 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2020, p. 5.

²Young, Oran R. *International Governance: Protecting the Environment in a Stateless Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 15.

³Alade, Adebimpe S. and Ogunsanwo, Richard A. "Environmental Change and Regional Governance." *Global Politics* 16.4 (2022): 122 –128.

⁴Ogunseye, Stephen D. "Sovereignty." *Political Studies* 28.3 (2022): 66 – 94.

II. Karns and Mingst estimated that there were 260 IGOs in existence at the time, citing the 2018-2019 *International Yearbook of International Organizations*.⁵

IGOs with comparable structural elements are common. They are run by (typically small) secretariats, frequently with the aid of permanent or temporary committees. Their original charter or constitution outlines the specific mission or goal they have. They have processes where member state representatives meet and decide on organizational or policy changes, and they have a budget that is provided by states, either directly or through the United Nations (UN). Permanent representation, periodic conferences of the parties that bring together national representatives, or a combination of both may be used to achieve this. The majority of IGOs have a permanent secretariat with full-time staffers who manage day-to-day operations while state representatives (officially) make significant decisions. Voting rules differ across organizations: some are “one member, one vote” (e.g., the UN General Assembly), others, particularly financial institutions, are weighted according to states’ financial contributions (e.g., the World Bank, where donor states collectively hold the bulk of decision-making authority). There are few easily available comparisons of IGO size, in terms of budget and number of employees. In terms of staff and budget, Blackhurst’s data⁶ from 2016 places the World Bank at the top of the list of IGOs, followed by the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), while UNEP and (perhaps surprisingly) the WTO are closer to the bottom of the 17 organizations mentioned.

Theoretical Perspectives on Intergovernmental Organizations

Since the conclusion of the Second World War and the beginning of the 1970s, there have been several theoretical viewpoints and discussions concerning the identity, purposes, and effects of IGOs in general, as well as environmental IGOs specifically.⁷ The bureaucratic politics literature on IGOs has more recently been revived and updated by studies of the links between IGOs’ environmental issues and regimes, as well as the management of such links.⁸

⁵Karns, Margaret P., and Karen A. Mingst. *International Organizations: The Politics and Processes of Global Governance*, 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2020, p. 15.

⁶Blackhurst, Richard A. “The Capacity of the WTO to Fulfill Its Mandate.” *The WTO as an International Organization*. Ed. Krueger, Anne O. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2022, p. 40.

⁷Kratochwil, Friedrich, and John G. Ruggie. “International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State.” *International Organization* 40.4 (1986): 753 – 75; Barnett, Michael N., and Martha Finnemore. “The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations.” *International Studies* 53.4 (2009): 699 – 732; Diehl, Paul, ed. *The Politics of Global Governance: International Organizations in an Interdependent World*, 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 2015; and Hurd, Ian. *International Organizations: Politics, Law, Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

⁸Biermann, Frank and Bernd Siebenhüner, eds. *Managers of Global Change: The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019; and Jinnah, Sikina. “Overlap Management in the World Trade Organization: Secretariat Influence on Trade-Environment Politics.” *Global Environmental Politics* 10.2 (2021): 74 – 79.

In the first post-World War II study, IGOs were viewed under a (neo)-functionalist perspective as being developed by governments as part of an integration process to carry out certain duties that they were unable to complete on their own.⁹This viewpoint was rather readily incorporated into the neoliberal institutionalist view of international relations, which restored the role of states as the primary units of analysis while still recognizing crucial roles for IGOs in facilitating interstate cooperation and controlling dependency.¹⁰According to neoliberal institutionalists, IGOs are created by states in order to reduce the transaction costs of international cooperation, by coordinating meetings, collecting information, running day-to-day operations, and creating mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability.¹¹By preventing governments from cheating or taking advantage of others' efforts, these actions increase the chance of successful and long-lasting cooperation.

Institutionalist theories, unlike their realist counterparts, accord IGOs some "life of their own," in that they outlast the constellation of national interests that created them,¹² but often ascribe that longevity to inertia¹³ or to state actors continuing to value their functions.¹⁴The institutionalist neoliberal approach is extremely applicable to environmental IGOs. At first, it appeared that solving global environmental issues would more likely need national governments to work together and establish laws and norms that would force them to consider environmental deterioration that was occurring both globally and across international borders. In a semi-functionalist view, it is obvious that the level of interconnectedness necessitated some kind of international institution in control.

Recent research has looked at the extent to which IGOs are more than just platforms for nation-states to make decisions collectively, noting that IGOs - or players inside IGOs - may operate as autonomous agents, frequently going

⁹Haas, Ernst B. *Beyond the Nation State: Functionalism and International Organizations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964; Schmitter, Philippe C. "Three Neo-Functional Hypotheses about International Integration." *International Organization* 23 (1969): 161 – 6; and Olowu, Ibironke D. and Nweke H. Afor, "Singing the Unsung: Secretariats in Global Environmental Politics." *The Roads from Rio: Lessons Learned from Twenty Years of Multilateral Environmental Negotiations*. Eds. Chasek, Pamela S. and Lynn M. Wagner. New York: Routledge, 2021.

¹⁰Keohane, Robert O. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984; Baldwin, David A., ed. *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013; and Abbott, Kenneth W., and Duncan Snidal. "Why States Act through Formal International Organizations." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42.1 (2018): 3 – 32.

¹¹Oni, Anne A. and Finnis Daniel C., *Liberal Environmentalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, p. 232.

¹²Keohane, Robert O. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

¹³Krasner, Stephen D. "Sovereignty: An Institutional Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 21.1 (2008): 66 – 94.

¹⁴Okeke, Anthony D., "From Stockholm to Copenhagen: The Evolving Meta-Regime of Global Environmental Governance." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, April 2022.

above and beyond their current purpose.¹⁵As with other bureaucracies, it became crucial to discuss how IGOs come to have their own autonomy, goals, and even take on agency and power in a political environment where nation-states are believed to be dominant. This is true even at the domestic level.¹⁶ To an extent, these approaches are compatible with constructivist approaches within IR theory,¹⁷ in that they examine the co-constitution of organizations, issues and identities in the international system. Research in this line also looks at the role IGOs play in the spread of worldwide standards, such as sustainable development, as well as international regulations.¹⁸ Some have also examined the conditions under which the actions of IGOs become dysfunctional – or pathological, as when, for example, they fail in their mission. Such shortcomings can be explained, for example, by the growth of a bureaucratic culture that is overly insular or possibly even static.¹⁹

The IGO-as-Actor approach is evidently reflected and expanded in the study of environmental IGOs, especially in works that examine overlap, or interplay, management across international regime boundaries, where key personnel within the organizations frequently take on an entrepreneurial or leadership role in directing this process.²⁰In this area, it is obvious that the secretariats and other related regime entities' knowledge is where the IGO draws its power and authority, at least in part. Such knowledge, both scientific and non-scientific, is necessary for efficient management of environmental issues,²¹ but is hard to acquire and build on without an IGO willing to coordinate transnational scientific efforts, for example. Collaboration among units is also useful and likely in a world where several small organizations frequently share space in the same city. Last but not least, we have witnessed both examples of innovative and successful leadership on the part of people that have strengthened global environmental governance as well as instances of ineffective leadership that has resulted in less successful governance.²²Ivanova²³discusses this with respect to UNEP.

¹⁵Barnett, Michael N., and Martha Finnemore. "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations." *International Organization* 53.4 (2009): 699 – 732.

¹⁶Alade, Adebimpe S. and Ogunsanwo, Richard A. "Environmental Change and Regional Governance." *Global Politics* 16.4 (2022): 129-132.

¹⁷Okeke, Baldwin R. and Ineh David A., ed. *Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism: The Contemporary Debate*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

¹⁸Bernstein, Steven C. "Ideas, Social Structure and the Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism." *European Journal of International Relations* 6.4 (2018): 464 – 512; and Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Institution* 52.4 (2019): 887 – 917.

¹⁹Barnett, Michael S. and Martha Finnemore. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in World Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

²⁰Biermann, Frank and Bernd Siebenhüner, eds. *Managers of Global Change: The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019; and Jinnah, Sikina. "Marketing Linkages: Secretariat Governance of the Climate-Biodiversity Interface." *Global Environmental Politics* 11.3 (2021): 23 – 43.

²¹Chaplain, Jennifer, and Falola Dauvergne. *The Political Economy of the Global Environment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022

²²Ekeh, Frank S., eds. *International Environmental Governance*. London: Fashgate Publishing, 2021.

IGO performance and effects, as well as how their performance is judged and how they change over time, have been the subject of recent research.²⁴ Many are particularly curious in whether and under what circumstances IGOs may learn over time, from evaluations, or from one another.²⁵ Again, given the emphasis in the global environmental politics literature on the effectiveness and impacts of environmental regimes,²⁶ work in this field has yielded important insights into issues of environmental IGO performance and learning that have broader applicability to IGOs in general. Finally, researchers are beginning to look at IGOs as a whole, posing what may be a foregone conclusion: are environmental IGOs more or less than the sum of their parts? IGO mandates and activities that overlap or clash with one another create a system that is overly fragmented. Are system players attempting to create connections between IGOs, such as regime complexes as one example?²⁷ Or does the system require some sort of reform, perhaps centralization into a World Environment Organization?²⁸

The rise of regional organizations as nodes of environmental governance, for instance through the EU's environmental governance institutions or through regional organizations and agreements linked to international environmental regimes, complicates these viewpoints.²⁹ Interest in multilevel and/or cross-scale governance is growing,³⁰ especially given the perceived failure of, or deadlock within, global environmental governance processes.³¹ As a result, a new area of focus for IGO academics is the circumstances in which regional governance (or the devolution of governance powers across levels) is suitable and successful for tackling transboundary or global environmental challenges.

²³Ivanova, Maria. "Designing the United Nations Environment Programme: A Story of Compromise and Confrontation." *International Environmental Agreements* 7 (2022): 337 – 61.

²⁴Barnett, Michael S. and Martha Finnemore. *International Organizations and Global Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020; and Ivanova, Maria. "UNEP in Global Environmental Governance: Design, Leadership, Location." *International Politics* 10.1 (2021): 30 – 59.

²⁵Haas, Ernst B. *When Knowledge Is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; and Greene, Owen. "The System for Implementation Review in the Ozone Regime." *The Implementation and Effectiveness of International Environmental Commitments: Theory and Practice*. Eds. Victor, David G., KalRaustiala, and Eugene B. Skolnikoff. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022.

²⁶Nweke, Paul M. *International Environmental Cooperation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

²⁷Keohane, Robert O. and David G. Victor. "The Regime Complex for Climate Change." *Perspectives on Politics* 9.1 (2021): 7 – 23.

²⁸Biermann, Frank. "The Emerging Debate on the Need for a World Environment Organization: A Commentary." *World Politics* 1.1 (2011): 45 – 55; Najam, Adil. "The Case against a New International Environmental Organization." *Global Governance* 9 (2013): 367 – 384; and Biermann, Frank and Steffen Bauer, eds. *A World Environment Organization: Solution or Threat for Effective International Environmental Governance?* London: Ashgate Publishing, 2015.

²⁹Eke, Peter S., *The Global Environment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021.

³⁰Balsiger, Jörg and Stacy VanDeveer. "Navigating Regional Environmental Governance." *Political Studies* 12.3 (2022): 1 – 17.

³¹Conca, Ken. "The Rise of the Region in Global Environmental Governance." *Politics and Development* 12.3 (2022): 127 – 133.

Mapping Environmental Intergovernmental Organizations: Functions, Nesting and Linkages

Global environmental issues are covered in full or in part by a wide range of international organizations and agencies. Despite the fact that most are nested within or intimately associated with the UN system, this offers a complicated landscape and sets of interactions for the researcher to define. From UNEP to individual secretariats and other regime agencies to IGOs with or that have evolved environmental governance functions, this section maps the important international environmental organizations and their functions. Additionally, it lists some of the regional IGOs that have an environmental mission for their member states as a whole. It demonstrates the linkages – horizontal and vertical – and interrelationships across environmental IGOs, as well as some of the insights and perspectives on their work, goals and influence analyzed by the leading researchers in this field.

The United Nations Environment Program

The UN Environment Program is the intended anchor organization for global environmental governance.³² The group was founded in 1972 during the Stockholm, Sweden-based United Nations Conference on Humans and the Environment. This conference was organized by the UN to bring governments together to debate and put into practice a coordinated legal framework to solve transnational and global environmental challenges, the scope of which had only lately become apparent. Despite some calls at the time for a form of “International Environment Organization”³³ that would be more centralized and have more enforcement powers, UNEP was established as a UN program under the auspices of the UN General Assembly and Economic and Social Council,³⁴ reflecting a certain amount of pragmatism on the part of its architects. As a program, UNEP is designed to be nimble and responsive,³⁵ but it lacks the authority and autonomy to make binding decisions on its members,³⁶ as a specialized UN agency such as the World Health Organization can. In contrast to the World Bank, it cannot allocate funds, enforce treaty obligations when they are broken, or resolve disputes in the same way as the UN Security Council and the WTO can.

Although many of its offices are located in Geneva and other cities in Europe, UNEP is the first UN organization to have its headquarters in a developing

³²Ivanova, Maria. “Designing the United Nations Environment Programme: A Story of Compromise and Confrontation.” *International Environmental Agreements* 7 (2019): 337 – 361.

³³ Kennan, George F. “To Prevent a World Wasteland: A Proposal.” *Foreign Affairs* 48 (1970): 401 – 413.

³⁴Biermann, Frank. “The Emerging Debate on the Need for a World Environment Organization: A Commentary.” *World Politics* 1.1 (2011): 46 – 47.

³⁵Nweke, Paul M. *International Environmental Cooperation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

³⁶ Bauer, Steffen. “The Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme: Tangled up in Blue.” *Managers of Global Change: The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*. Eds. Biermann, Frank and Bernd Siebenhüner. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

nation. Its related secretariats and offices are dispersed across the world. Its duties include acting as a focal point and coordinator for global environmental organizations, conducting monitoring, evaluation, and early warning activities, promoting adherence to international treaties, and taking part in long-term capacity-building initiatives. UNEP is also tasked with fostering linkages across the UN system, and is largely funded through voluntary, not assessed, contributions by member states.³⁷ In 2020, its funding requirements across its work programs added up to around \$418 million.³⁸

Given its financial and political limitations, many have questioned UNEP's success, and opinions are sharply divided.³⁹ Ivanova also believes that UNEP's performance is inconsistent throughout the many sectors and objectives of its mission.⁴⁰ Although it has been able to extend its initial mandate in many respects, it has not been able to participate in certain crucial global governance processes and its actions in many ways reflect the pragmatic character of its design. While it has failed to become the main single international environmental organization, it has been more successful in monitoring and assessing the state of the global environment and in establishing and managing many different international environmental regimes and negotiating processes.⁴¹ finds that, despite some deserved criticism, UNEP has functioned well in the light of its budgetary constraints and overwhelming mandate, and by comparison with similar international agencies.

This performance history is explained by a variety of reasons. For UNEP, for instance, leadership has been crucial. Its most significant accomplishments are related to the tenure of office of certain executive directors, such as Maurice Strong or Mostafa Tolba, who were frequently praised (or vilified) for advancing the global environmental agenda.⁴² Not all directors have been deemed to be successful. Others, however, have viewed the reliance on charismatic leadership as a weakness rather than a strength, which is a key learning from more extensive institutional literatures. Ivanova⁴³ builds on the

³⁷Bernauer, Thomas, Anna Kalbhenn, Vally Koubi, and Gabriele Spilker. A Comparison of International and Domestic Sources of Global Governance Dynamics. *British Journal of Political Science* 40. 3 (2020): 509 – 538.

³⁸Brechin, Steven R., Peter R. Wilshusen, Crystal L. Fortwangler, and Patrick C. West, eds. *Contested Nature: Promoting International Biodiversity with Social Justice in the Twenty-First Century*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2022.

³⁹Busch, Per-Olofand, Helge Jörgens. "The International Sources of Policy Convergence: Explaining the Spread of Environmental Policy Innovations". *Journal of European Public Policy* 12. 5 (2021): 860 – 884; and Dalton, Russell Joanne R. *Environmental Groups in Western Europe*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022.

⁴⁰Ivanova, Maria. "Designing the United Nations Environment Programme: A Story of Compromise and Confrontation." *International Environmental Agreements* 7 (2019): 337 – 361.

⁴¹Oni, Anne A. and Finnis Daniel C., *Liberal Environmentalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, p. 237; and Ekeh, Frank S., eds. *International Environmental Governance*. London: Fashgate Publishing, 2021.

⁴²Alade, Adebimpe S. and Ogunsanwo, Richard A. "Environmental Change and Regional Governance." *Global Politics* 16.4 (2022): 122 – 128.

⁴³Ivanova, Maria. *Industrial Transformation: Environmental Policy Innovation in the United States and Europe*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020.

Barnett and Finnemore⁴⁴ framework to identify features that determine UNEP's performance. She examines elements of UNEP's design and operation (as established by member states), its internal leadership and organizational culture – and adds its distant location in order to understand the challenges it faces, and why it has not been able to go above and beyond its mandate. In the next section, however, we move on to examine how some of UNEP's subsidiary bodies have made more progress in pushing global environmental governance beyond its initial bounds.

Treaty Secretariats and Other Regime Bodies

Within international environmental regimes are nestled other significant international environmental organizations. Each treaty-based regime, from ozone depletion to biodiversity to toxins to climate,⁴⁵ is managed by its own secretariat, which in turn reports to the regime's Conference of the Parties (COP), and has its own permanent staff. These are commonly nested inside UNEP. Some are under the control of the UN, such as the UNFCCC secretariat, while others, like the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, are outside of the UN system totally.⁴⁶ In recent years, more focus has been placed on the duties and activities of treaty secretariats.⁴⁷ Long regarded as essentially functional organizations that manage Conferences of the Parties and handle paperwork relating to treaties, it is now evident that they frequently exercise significant power behind the scenes, albeit the exact nature of this power, or more precisely, influence, differs between environmental regimes. For instance, they have frequently been able to use a great deal of discretion to influence their member nations to get specific objectives (for instance, by providing draft text). Both Jinnah⁴⁸ and the authors of the essays in Biermann, Diamond and Siebenhüner⁴⁹ are very curious on how secretariats are actively involved in overlap or interplay management, when one regime's area of influence crosses another. This might occur across distinct environmental regimes (in the same or a separate subject area) or between environmental and other international governance domains, particularly the trade regime. The reason secretariats are especially important here is that international law and politics have little provision for what happens when regime processes overlap – despite the

⁴⁴ Barnett, Michael, and Martha Finnemore. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in World Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018.

⁴⁵ Benedick, Richard E. "Science, Diplomacy and the Montreal Protocol." *Encyclopedia of Earth*. Ed. Cleveland, Cutler J. Washington, DC: Environmental Information Coalition, National Council for Science and the Environment, 2022, pp. 324-325.

⁴⁶ Jinnah, Sikina. "Overlap Management in the World Trade Organization: Secretariat Influence on Trade Environment Politics." *Global Environmental Politics* 31.2 (2021): 54 – 79.

⁴⁷ Sandford, Rosemary. "International Treaty Secretariats: Stage-Hands or Actors?" *Green Globe Yearbook of International Cooperation on Environment and Development 2014*. Eds. Bergesen, Helge Ole and Georg Parmann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; and Muñoz, Miquel, Rachel Thrasher, and AdilNajam. "Measuring the Negotiation Burden of Multilateral Environmental Agreements." *Environmental Ethics* 9.4 (2019): 1 – 13.

⁴⁸ Jinnah, Sikina. "Marketing Linkages: Secretariat Governance of the Climate-Biodiversity Interface." *Environmental Foreign Policy* 11.3 (2021): 23 – 43.

⁴⁹ Biermann, Frank B., Diamond, Larry N. and Bernd Siebenhüner, eds. *The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

potential for conflict – or for mutual advantage in such cases. As a result, even if they frequently do so informally, they have been able to exercise agency in establishing a completely new sector of global governance action. Jinnah⁵⁰ examines, for instance, how the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat collaborated with secretariats of other biodiversity-related regimes to increase coordinated engagement on common objectives. She also emphasizes how the secretariats of the different chemical treaties collaborated to form an ad hoc joint working group to investigate how to strengthen their cooperation.⁵¹

One of the specific issues raised by current research on secretariats again draws on fresh theoretical approaches on IGOs as independent agents. Jinnah⁵² in particular offers a methodology for figuring out secretariat sources of authority, in addition to the power given to them by member states. She emphasizes that individuals may rely on their knowledge and "moral authority" as representatives of the entire world on a particular problem in terms of authority,⁵³ their role as holders of institutional memory, and the ability of individuals within secretariats to build professional networks over time across a number of institutional entities. This latest work highlights the significance of these "unsung" players in global environmental governance but also raises the empirical issue of how much this authority translates into impact (which Jinnah investigates with regard to the environmental overlap management operations of the WTO secretariat). It also points to crucial directions for further research, such as the legitimacy of these actors in global governance.

Subsidiary organizations, frequently providing scientific and technical advice, are a common feature of many treaty-based environmental regimes.⁵⁴ Some of these bodies are temporary, while others are permanent. The administrative framework for the Kyoto Protocol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is exceptionally intricate.⁵⁵ Permanent and ad hoc committees serve each agreement under the overall authority of the UNFCCC secretariat, reporting to the Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC) and the Meeting of the Parties (Kyoto). Along with other committees on compliance, financing mechanisms, and other topics, there are two subsidiary bodies that are permanent: the Implementation and Scientific and Technical Advice groups. Ad

⁵⁰Jinnah, Sikina. "Singing the Unsung: Secretariats in Global Environmental Politics." *The Roads from Rio: Lessons Learned from Twenty Years of Multilateral Environmental Negotiations*. Eds. Chasek, Pamela S. and Lynn M. Wagner. New York: Routledge, 2022.

⁵¹Selin, Henrik. "Global Politics and Policy of Hazardous Chemicals." *The Global Environment: Institutions, Law and Policy*, 3rd ed. Axelrod, Regina, Stacy VanDeveer, and David L. Downie. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2022.

⁵²Jinnah, Sikina. "Marketing Linkages: Secretariat Governance of the Climate-Biodiversity Interface." *Environmental Foreign Policy* 11.3 (2021): 23 – 43.

⁵³Barnett, Michael, and Martha Finnemore. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in World Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018.

⁵⁴Kohler, Pia M., Alexandra Conliffe, Stefan Jungcurt, Maria Gutierrez, and Yulia Yamineva. "Informing Policy: Science and Knowledge in Global Environmental Agreements." *The Politics of Multilateral Environmental Negotiations*. Eds. Chasek, Pamela S. and Lynn M. Wagner. New York: Routledge, 2022.

⁵⁵Stokke, Olav Schram, Ekeh G. Anderson, and Natalia Mirovitskaya. "The Barents Sea Fisheries." *The Effectiveness of International Environmental Regimes: Causal Connections and Behavioral Mechanisms*. Ed. Young, Oran. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021.

hoc working groups, however, have also been crucial in guiding the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol's progress. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the most renowned worldwide scientific organization linked to the climate system, acts independently of the UNFCCC. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP jointly founded it in 1988, and it gathers, compiles, and evaluates international scientific research on climate change.

Similar, albeit maybe not quite as complicated, structures can be found in other regimes. For instance, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and the Article 8j Working Group of the Convention on Biological Diversity have as their duty the incorporation of local expertise and knowledge holders into the framework. More informal international organizations, like the UN Forum on Forests, offer platforms and support for multilateral conversation and guidance even under regimes that are not grounded by a multilateral agreement.

It is crucial to comprehend these auxiliary organizations in order to accurately map the institutional environment. First, they offer crucial knowledge and guidance to Conferences of the Parties, UNEP (and other IGOs), and treaty secretariats that serves as the foundation for new regulations under regimes. Some of these entities have been specifically given evaluation responsibilities. Three evaluation panels and a system of implementation review were established by the 1987 Montreal Protocol, including a wide range of interested parties and creating a productive learning environment.⁵⁶Second, and this relates to the macro view of environmental IGOs, they have caught the attention of academics studying the dispersion of international environmental governance. These analysts want to know how well this system serves everyone's interests and if it would be beneficial to group or combine these many actors into, say, a worldwide scientific panel that could address all environmental challenges, or into clusters depending on particular issues.⁵⁷

Finally, a few environmental IGOs have been established to cooperate with various environmental regimes. The Global Environment Faculty (GEF) organizes financing and capacity building programs across numerous regimes and issue areas, including desertification or land degradation, climate change, ozone depletion, biodiversity, oceans, and persistent organic pollutants. Despite having its own council and decision-making body, the GEF is run by UNEP and UNDP, with financing being handled by the World Bank. Its efficacy as a capacity-building organization has also been evaluated (and found wanting), but it has been praised as a relatively successful experiment in interagency collaboration.⁵⁸On a much smaller scale, the Green Customs Initiative works to

⁵⁶Hulme, Mike, and Martin Mahony. "Climate Change: What Do We Know about the IPCC?" *Progress in Physical Geography* 34.5 (2020): 705 – 718; and Greene, Owen. *International Environmental Commitments: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

⁵⁷Oni, Anne A. and Finnis Daniel C., *Liberal Environmentalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, p. 237; and Ekeh, Frank S., eds. *International Environmental Governance*. London: Fashgate Publishing, 2021.

⁵⁸Cléménçon, Raymond. "What Future for the Global Environment Facility?" *Journal of Environment and Development* 15.1 (2016): 50 – 74; and von Moltke, Konrad. "The Organization of the Impossible." *Politics and Development* 1.1(2021): 23 – 28.

educate customs agents in developing nations on how to recognize and stop the smuggling of a variety of goods and substances that are illegal under various environmental regulations, such as ozone-depleting substances, hazardous wastes, wildlife, and genetically modified organisms. It is a modest but potentially ground-breaking organization in this setting, although one that is under-researched. It is run through collaboration with a range of international institutions, including regime secretariats, Interpol, the World Customs Organization, and others. Last but not least, the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), while not entirely focused on environmental issues, plays a significant role in developing local and national capacity to handle a range of environmental issues, from climate change to chemicals management.

Other Intergovernmental Organizations with Environmental Links and Functions

Numerous additional IGOs now include environmental protection, politics, and sustainable development in their missions and operations. Some have a lengthy history of involvement with international environmental concerns, and some have even played a significant role in advancing the inclusion of environmental issues on the international policy agenda. For instance, the World Meteorological Organization collaborated with UNEP in the early discussions on building a system to counteract ozone layer depletion and with the UN to launch the IPCC. The 1972 World Heritage Convention, a pioneering conservation accord that safeguards places of natural and cultural value around the world, is administered by the UN Economic and Social Council (UNESCO). The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) keeps an eye on the world's forests and is becoming more involved in discussions on global agriculture production's sustainability. Finally, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), among other important functions to do with maritime security and safety, oversees the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution by Ships (MARPOL 1973/78). Despite not being a law-making body, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) publishes recommendations and statistics on environmental performance, largely but not exclusively for and on behalf of its member nations.

Other IGOs have taken on environmental duties far more hesitantly, frequently as a result of harsh criticism of the social and environmental effects of their prior activities. Perhaps most notably, the World Bank was compelled to confront the environmental damage and social unrest that had accompanied many of the large-scale infrastructure projects it had supported, starting in the late 1980s and continuing through the 1990s. Local and international nongovernmental groups (NGOs) were successful in exerting pressure on politicians in donor nations to get the Bank to begin including environmental evaluation into its funding process.⁵⁹ While it has made progress in these tasks, it still faces criticism on a variety of fronts, including its technocratic approach

⁵⁹ Fox, Jonathan A., and L. David Brown, eds. *The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs and Grassroots Movements*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022.

to environmental management⁶⁰ and its continued funding of “brown” development projects.⁶¹

In the 1990s, the WTO and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which it succeeded, came under fire in especially for high-profile decisions opposing US regulatory steps to limit the imports of shrimp (from South East Asia) and tuna (from Mexico) due to environmental concerns. These instances raised concerns that, in the name of promoting global trade liberalization, any trade restrictions relating to the environment, even those under international environmental accords, would be overturned. In reality, these judgments either were never put into effect or were reversed on appeal.⁶² Furthermore, in order to reduce conflicts and manage overlap between their separate domains, the secretariats of the UNEP and the WTO have recently begun cooperating.⁶³ Both the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the 2012 “Rio+20” summit had a sizable participation from the WTO. From an organizational standpoint, these two actions show that regime secretariats are actively working outside their specific tasks in a very independent manner. The results of the cases reflect how the GATT/WTO dispute settlement process can be contingent as well as how it has changed over time, as in the creation of appellate panels under the 1995 WTO agreements.

As a result, in the cases of the World Bank and the GATT/WTO, we see some progress in incorporating sustainable development goals into their initial mandates - economic development for the former, and trade liberalization for the latter - even though these efforts fit with rather than significantly diverge from their overall economic ideologies. For instance, these changes contrast sharply with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the other major international financial institution, which has resisted social pressures to a greater or lesser extent. However, two of the theoretical discussions raised at the beginning of this work are addressed by advancements in this field. They do this in two ways. First, they show how standards have spread throughout international organizations and policy spheres, in this case in relation to sustainable development. Second, they speak to overall debates about fragmentation of global environmental governance, as international economic organizations become new governance sites,⁶⁴ as well as to efforts to overcome such fragmentation and potential conflict.

⁶⁰ Goldman, Michael. *Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022.

⁶¹ Clapp, Jennifer, and Peter Dauvergne. *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of the Global Environment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022.

⁶² O’Neill, Kate. *The Environment and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

⁶³ Jinnah, Sikina. “Marketing Linkages: Secretariat Governance of the Climate–Biodiversity Interface.” *Environmental Foreign Policy* 11.3 (2021): 23 – 43; and Gehring, Thomas. “The Institutional Complex of Trade and Environment: Toward an Interlocking Governance Structure and a Division of Labor.” *Managing Institutional Complexity: Regime Interplay and Global Environmental Change*. Eds. Oberthür, Sebastian and Olav SchramStokke. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021.

⁶⁴ O’Neill, Kate. *The Environment and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

Regional Intergovernmental Organizations and Global Environmental Governance

Analysts and decision-makers have recently paid more attention to regional environmental governance, which refers to governance arrangements across several (typically contiguous) states, terrestrial ecosystems, or shared bodies of water. They have also paid more attention to the role of regional governmental organizations in environmental governance.⁶⁵ Given how global governance processes have stagnated recently and the belief that tackling global and transboundary environmental issues more successfully by smaller groups of actors who share common traits could alleviate issues with collective action, this development may not come as a surprise.⁶⁶ The function of regional governing organizations in bridging scales is of importance to proponents of multilevel governance and of integrating the activity of local, regional, and global organizations and players. A wealth of research papers are being produced and brought together by this rekindled interest, which can only be briefly explored here.

Regional organizations have lately begun to take on larger and more diversified environmental governance duties, despite the fact that regional environmental governance arrangements have a long history (such as Rhine River management arrangements in the eighteenth century). The definition of regional agreements according to the most often accepted definition is "those bilateral or multilateral agreements which are signed by at least two countries that share territorial or maritime borders, or which govern a contiguous, transnational region."⁶⁷ Their organizational elements range significantly in size and capability, from extremely large institutions with plenty of staff and resources (such as the EU) to very small ones with few personnel and assets. Some regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), for instance, are fortunate to have even three permanent personnel, according to a search the author conducted on the Internet.

As Balsiger and VanDeveer⁶⁸ point out, some of these initiatives are part of autonomous organizations, such as environmental policies within the EU, the Arctic Council, ASEAN, or environmental bodies within free trade associations such as NAFTA. Others are part of multilevel governance arrangements, such as regional centers established under chemicals treaties⁶⁹ or regional treaties formed under the umbrella of a broader global regime. Various sub-regimes related to the 1975 Convention on Migratory Species, such as Eurobats (which monitors the European bat population and engages in educational activities and entered into force in 1994) or ACCOBAMS (the Agreements for the

⁶⁵Balsiger, Jörg, Miriam Prys, and Niko Steinhoff. "The Nature and Role of Regional Agreements in International Environmental Politics." *GIGA Working Paper*, no. 208, Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2022.

⁶⁶Conca, Ken. *The Rise of the Region in Global Environmental Governance*. Cambridge: Routledge Publishing Company, 2022, p. 423.

⁶⁷Balsiger, Jörg, Miriam Prys, and Niko Steinhoff. *Regional Agreements and International Environmental Politics*. Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2022.

⁶⁸Balsiger, Jörg and Stacy VanDeveer. "Navigating Regional Environmental Governance." *Political Studies* 12.3 (2022): 1 – 17.

⁶⁹Chayes, Abramand C. *The New Sovereignty: Compliance with International Regulatory Agreements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021, p. 311.

Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and Contiguous Atlantic Areas), are examples of the latter. Others are independent regional governance structures, while they might be connected to other organizations of a same kind, such RFMOs. The 1979 Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution, whose operations are mostly headquartered in Europe but with another North American sub-regional body, is another example of regional governance systems around specific environmental concern areas.⁷⁰

Issue-area based regional organizations frequently cover (or are expanded to encompass) a cluster of problems, including environmental, but also those linked to sustainable development, border control, regional security, and others. This is true in many examples of regional environmental governance. Examples include transboundary mountain regions, such as the Himalayas or the Swiss Alps⁷¹ and regional seas, such as the Barents Sea and the Mediterranean.⁷²

Many of the same patterns found in the larger literature apply to them when evaluating regional environmental IGOs, but they could manifest in various ways. Some studies look at how regional organizations reflect and/or form identities inside or beyond borders.⁷³ Others look at how well already operating firms are able to incorporate environmental considerations into their operations.⁷⁴ Others examine the results and efficiency of regional organizations and agreements. There is a ton of material specifically on RFMOs in this scenario.⁷⁵ A 2022 study by Sarah Pralle⁷⁶ and published by Georgetown University that focuses in particular on the creation of some coordinated management of RFMOs, at least in terms of monitoring and compliance or providing scientific input, suggests doing so. The study also notes high-level discussions about the establishment of a global fisheries agency. Despite the fact that this hasn't happened and doesn't seem likely, the regional level of this case's regional administration makes its efficacy look low, at least in part.

⁷⁰ Brown, Weiss E. and Jacobson, Harold K. *Engaging Countries: Strengthening Compliance with International Environmental Accords*. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 2022.

⁷¹ Davidson, Debra, J. and Frickel, Scott. "Understanding Environmental Governance: A Critical Review," *Organization & Environment* 17. 4, 2020: 471 – 492.

⁷² Drezner, Daniel W. "The Power and Peril of International Regime Complexity," *Perspectives on Politics* 7.1, 2020: 65 – 70.

⁷³ Harris, Paul G. "Bringing the In-Between Back In: Foreign Policy in Global Environmental Politics," *Politics & Policy* 36.6, 2022: 914 – 943.

⁷⁴ Jordan, Andrew. "The Politics of Multilevel Environmental Governance: Subsidiarity and Environmental Policy in the European Union," *Environment and Planning*. 32. 7, 2021: 1307 – 24; and Kahler, Miles (ed.). *Networked Politics: Agency, Power, and Governance*, Ithaca, NY : Cornell University Press, 2021, pp. 201-202.

⁷⁵ Marks, Gary N. and Ray, Salk J. "Competencies, Cracks and Conflicts: Regional Mobilization in the European Union," in Gary Marks , Fritz W. Scharpf , Philippe H. Schmitter and Wolfgang Streck (eds) *Governance in the European Union*, London: Sage Publications, 2021, pp. 40 – 63; and Palmer, Glennand M. *A Theory of Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022.

⁷⁶ Pralle, Sarah B. *Branching Out, Digging In: Environmental Advocacy and Agenda Setting*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022.

More concerns specifically related to this topic are raised by the potential addition of a regional component to the environmental IGO landscape. First, in what instances and under what circumstances is regional government more suitable or successful than global governance? What kinds of connections do international and regional organizations have? across regional organizations? Are they more horizontally (networked) or vertically (hierarchical) oriented? Can regional groups in related fields share knowledge and adapt more readily than international non-governmental organizations? Zürn et al.,⁷⁷ in their study of the bilateral regime managing the Barents Sea, suggest that while learning is possible, careful attention needs to be paid to the contextual characteristics of specific regional arrangements, which may make policy or institutional diffusion much harder. Either way, these questions about regional IGOs deserve further exploration.

Conclusion

Environmental IGOs have lately seen some success, both practically and theoretically, even though that success has occasionally exposed some of its shortcomings. This paper has explored the complicated landscape of IGOs with environmental governance obligations at the global and regional levels. Additionally, it has identified some of the official and informal connections between them, such as the nesting of the main UN-affiliated organizations, from UNEP to the secretariats and other regime bodies, or their expanding cross-regime connections with the WTO. The advent of multilayer governance as a very noticeable phenomenon has also prompted inquiries about connections between the global and regional stages of global governance.

Individual IGOs' performance, effects, and role in lowering the transaction costs of interstate cooperation are all factors and themes that have been crucial to understanding them. The data is conflicting when it comes to performance, as was described above, but some studies show that considering the different restrictions IGOs encounter, performance is better than predicted. They have also made progress in figuring out what aspects are crucial in deciding performance. Recent studies have also looked at the (often expanding) degree to which IGOs can exercise agency beyond the duties that member states have assigned to them. While research indicates that UNEP is more confined in the environmental sector, more recent studies demonstrate how bureaucracies at a lower level, such as treaty secretariats, are able to influence environmental governance agendas in unique ways. Quite frequently, this is done informally, for example, by creating consensus on agreed standards and understandings for handling regime overlap.

Environmental IGOs as a whole deal with a variety of issues. The first one is, quite simply, the complexity of this landscape, which can lead to unneeded fragmentation of governance operations as well as possible overlaps and conflicts across organizations and between jurisdictions. Conflicts between scales are also more likely when regional IGOs are included in the mix. Discussions now center on the potential future course of this institutional

⁷⁷Zürn, Michael M., Wälti, Sonja and Enderlein, Henrik A. *Handbook on Multi-Level Governance*, Cheltenham: Elgar Publishers, 2022, pp. 1 – 17.

structure or complex. This indicates the depth to which environmental IGOs have now permeated the fabric of world politics. One of the possible trajectories for this system is towards deliberate centralization, building, for example, an overarching authority to coordinate global environmental governance such as a World Environment Organization.⁷⁸ Others point out problems with this model⁷⁹, and there is some doubt that such deliberate reform, even if the political will existed, would lead to the desired results. Conversely, some scholars⁸⁰ have identified forces for decentralization given the perceived failings of traditional state-led global environmental governance, in this case, pursuing governance solutions at a regional level. The direct inclusion of NGOs and other non-state players into IGO decision-making processes has, up to now, been under-represented.⁸¹ While some studies – with respect to partnerships,⁸² multi-stakeholder commissions such as the World Commission on Dams,⁸³ and specific global institutions, such as the World Bank⁸⁴ – address the possibilities of a more hybrid form of international organization (international “governance” organizations, perhaps), this possibility needs more exploration.

In conclusion, it has been established that IGOs play a substantial and mainly beneficial role in international and regional environmental cooperation. Realist or neoliberal institutionalist interpretations of their role and activities fall well short of capturing their influence and actions. There are many objections to and criticisms of their actions. Of course, practical considerations are crucial, and ultimately, they cannot accomplish their goal without the support of member states. Finally, if we presume that they will gradually gain greater autonomy, we will eventually need to examine their legitimacy—or lack thereof—in this position as global policy-makers and whose interests they will be advancing.⁸⁵

⁷⁸Edokwe, Fred D. and Woolcock, Stephen. “Multi-Level Economic Diplomacy: The Case of Investment,” in Nicholas Bayne and Stephen Woolcock (eds) *The New Economic Diplomacy. Decision-Making and Negotiation in International Economic Relations*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publications, 2022, pp. 131 – 151.

⁷⁹Najam, Adil D., Papa, Mihaelaand and Taiyab, Nadaa S. *Global Environmental Governance: A Reform Agenda*. Winnipeg, CA: International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2022.

⁸⁰Oberthür, Sebastian and Gehring, Thomas. *Institutional Interaction in Global Environmental Governance: Synergy and Conflict among International and EU Policies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021; Ostrom, Vincent S., Tiebout, Charles M. and Warren, Robert H. “The Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas: A Theoretical Inquiry,” *American Political Science Review* 55.3, 2021: 831 – 842.

⁸¹Oni, Moss T. and Newig, Jens. “Multi-Level Water Governance and Problems of Scale: Setting the Stage for a Broader Debate,” *Environmental Management* 46.2, 2023: 1 – 6.

⁸²Bache, Ianand F., and Matthew, Francis W. “Themes and Issues in Multi-Level Governance,” in Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders (eds). *Multi-Level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, pp. 1 – 11.

⁸³Adebisi, Lanre F., and Edmund, Alfred F. “Multi-Level Governance and Global Politics,” in Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders (eds). *Multi-Level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, pp. 65 – 88.

⁸⁴Chayes, Abramand C. and Antonia, Handler M. *The New Sovereignty: Compliance with International Regulatory Agreements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021.

⁸⁵Barrett, Scott G. *Environment and Statecraft: The Strategy of Environmental Treaty-Making*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, p.232.