

The influence of bureaucracies on international environmental governance: the Division on Sustainable Development

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1. Introduction

Political scientists have long understood that bureaucrats are not only the mere implementers of policy designed and formulated by others: They have an agenda and interests of their own, and they create and respond to incentives. Hence, in the study of *national* governance processes a focus on bureaucracies as actors with steering capacity is considered to be perfectly legitimate and highly relevant (Meier 2000; Niskanen 1971; Ripley and Franklin 1984; Hecló 1978). In the study of *international* governance however, an interest in the fourth branch of government has made a late appearance. This is likely to be due to fact that the development of international relations (IR) as an independent field of study is shaped by the demanding debate between (neo)realists and (neo)liberals on the *role of sovereign states* in international affairs. Whereas realists hold that states are the primary actors in international affairs (Waltz 1979), liberals have in response opened up their analytical frameworks to non-state actors (Keohane 1984; Arts 2002). Whereas realists view the global polity as basically anarchical (i.e. cooperation is impossible), liberals have in response begun to study partnerships and cooperative governance regimes in the international sphere (Glasbergen 1998; Glasbergen, Biermann, and Mol 2007). As a result of this debate, international bureaucracies are now either seen as the extended arm of powerful states – i.e. the realist view (e.g. Mearsheimer 1994) – or as platforms or institutional arrangements that facilitate the cooperation between state and non-state actors – the liberal view (e.g. Nielson and Tierney 2003).

In this paper, we set out to challenge this narrow view: First, contrary to the realist view, we suspect that viewing international bureaucracies as merely carrying out the orders of sovereign states does not do them full justice. Second, contrary to the liberal view, we suspect that it makes analytical sense to view international bureaucracies as sets of people rather than as sets of rules.

Especially, the branch of IR that looks at *international environmental governance* (IEG) has lately begun to transpose the conventional view in political science that bureaucracies matter, to the international arena. This is not surprising, since recent years have witnessed a large proliferation of international environmental agreements. Ron Mitchell's International Environmental Agreements Database project³ contains well over 900 multilateral and 1,500 bilateral international

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³ <http://ica.uoregon.edu/page.php?file=home.htm&query=static>

environmental agreements. At least 310 secretariats coordinate and oversee the implementation of these agreements. Can we continue to hold that these secretariats play no significant role in determining direction and outcomes of IEG?

IR scholarship is slowly but surely beginning to systematically study the autonomous influence that secretariats that carry out international environmental agreements have on IEG (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009).⁴ As a result, empirical studies are now beginning to reveal that such secretariats do possess *various degrees* of influence beyond the intention and reach of their creators. Can we explain this variation? Under what circumstances is it more likely that a secretariat sticks to its formal purely executive role, and what conditions contribute to secretariats taking a more autonomous course in international environmental governance processes?

We hope to contribute to finding the answer to this question through the development of single-case study – namely of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) which is the Secretariat to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), mandated to review the commitments made during the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. The CSD consists of 53 Member States and representatives from civil society organized in 9, so called Major Groups.⁵ The formal involvement of civil society in the CSD is unique for the UN system. Because we acknowledge the problems related with the establishment of causal inferences based on a single case, we will complement our own findings with a comparison of the DSD with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the Secretariat to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (Climate Secretariat).

2. Literature review

It seems that no article touching upon the topic of IR can escape referring to the realist-liberal controversy. However, for studying the autonomous influence of bureaucracies in IEG, the postulates regarding actor behavior of both approaches seem mostly irrelevant. They treat organizations as “empty shells or impersonal machinery to be manipulated by other actors” (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 704). What alternative theoretical angles might be useful then, for the study of the topic of our choice? In this section, we identify four such theoretical perspectives: Principal-agent theory, social constructivism, regime theory, and a theoretical framework that is a synthesis of the three others.

Principal-agent theory

Principal-agent theory analyzes relationships in which one actor (the *principal*) delegates work to another actor (the *agent*). In our study *states* would be the principals, *secretariats* the agents. Principal-agent relations become problematic if due to information asymmetry agents possess more information than the principal does regarding the satisfactory fulfillment of tasks. Problems become especially pressing if there is a conflict between the desired goals of the principal and the agent, respectively and, if the monitoring of actions of the agent is either difficult or costly for the principal (Eisenhardt 1989). The challenge is to neutralize information asymmetries and thus align preferences and interest of all parties involved.

⁴ Other earlier work on the influence of international environmental bureaucracies on IEG includes Sandford (1996, 1994, 1992), Andresen and Skjaereth (1999), and Bauer (2006).

⁵ These are: Business and Industry; Children and Youth; Farmers; Indigenous People; Local Authorities; NGOs; Scientific and Technological Community; Women; and Workers and Trade Unions

Hawkins et al. (2006) distinguish between *slack*, *autonomy* and *discretion* of the agent. Agency *slack* refers to the fact that agents can minimize effort (*shirking*) or shift the outcomes of the action away from the principal's preference towards its own (*slippage*). An agent has *autonomy* if it can maneuver independently from its principal once the rules for delegation have been established. *Discretion* refers to contracts in which the principal's goals are stipulated but not the actions required to achieve these goals. Vaubel (2006) (2006) uses the European Union (EU) to exemplify discrepancies between principal - (i.e. voter) and agent- (i.e. the EU bureaucrats') preferences. Voters are "rationally ignorant" regarding what they want from EU bureaucrats. They also lack the power to impose their will in this respect. EU international civil servants on the other hand, are interested in the survival of their organization. These bureaucrats manage to gain power through lobbying for more staff, more resources, increased competencies and the expansion or protection of turfs (see also Niskanen 1971).

Principal-agent theory does help us examining the autonomous influence of international bureaucracies on IEG. It teaches us that there is a potential risk when the interests of bureaucracies and states collide. It also makes us aware of the fact that bureaucracy behavior is partly driven by its interest in self-preservation. However, it falls short for the purpose of this study on a number of accounts. First, because of the premise that civil servants are primarily self-interested – a feature that mixes badly with autonomy – a principal-agent theory approach results in a lot of effort being invested in “solutions” that bring power back into the hands of the principals. Furthermore, its two-dimensional perspective – with a universe consisting of only principals and agents – leads to realist, state-centric analyses that neglect other important aspects of IEG. Also, if states and the international bureaucracy share goals the explanatory power of principal-agent theory vanishes completely (Barnett and Finnemore 1999). Finally, principal-agent theory would explain autonomy and slack of international bureaucracies by factors such as common agency, the existence of multiple principals and the length of the chains of delegation. However, for many bureaucracies and secretariats these factors apply to more or less the same degree. The fact that the level of secretariats' level of autonomous influence on IEG seems to vary, implies that the explanatory power of principal-agent theory is limited (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2007).

Social constructivism

Social constructivism leaves room for the consideration of norms, the creation of new knowledge, the dynamic shaping of utility and the interaction between multiple players with multiple roles, interests, preferences and capacities. A central claim of this theoretical perspective is that knowledge and interests are “constructed” through the interaction between actors. In doing so, it steps away from rational-choice – the fundamental postulate for actor behavior in principal-agent theory – according to which interests are predefined and actors are preoccupied with the maximization of utility. The implication of this view for the study of international relations is the notion that we should view state interests as dynamically shaped by constantly changing norms and perceptions (Checkel 1998). Finnemore (1996) for example, shows how UNESCO was able to influence state interests by proactively (and to a certain extent, intentionally) constructing norms and knowledge that provide states with new understanding of their interests.

Based on Weber, Barnett and Finnemore (1999) claim that international bureaucracies derive power from the authority that sovereign states have vested in

them. However, their ability to produce and control social knowledge is also an important source of power. They *classify* persons and objects, which gives them control over the reconfiguration of definitions and identities. They *fix meanings* by “naming or labeling the social context [which] establishes the parameters, the very boundaries, of acceptable action” (p.711). Finally, they *disseminate norms*: “Armed with the notion of progress, many IO elites have their stated purpose as advisers to shape state practices by establishing, articulating, and transmitting norms that define what constitutes acceptable and legitimate behavior” (p.713).

The social constructivist view is similar to principal-agent theory in the sense that it sees international bureaucracies as “real” actors and not as “empty vessels” that are created to reduce transaction costs. The two perspectives differ in the sense that constructivism takes social structures as causal variables with an impact on actors’ views, interests, preferences, and consequentially, agendas, behavior and choices (Finnemore 1996). Social constructivism teaches us that if an international bureaucracy proves able to create generally accepted knowledge then it potentially possesses autonomous influence.

Regime theory

Regime theory has a tradition to look at international organizations (IOs). How can this perspective help us to understand the question we pose ourselves? Firstly, regime theory views IOs as institutions that through the generation of knowledge and the linking of issue can shape national governments’ agendas. They are also seen as instances suited for joining up issues and interests (Haas, Keohane, and Levy 1993). Basically, IOs provide platforms for solving collective action dilemmas in IEG and grant instrumental leadership during the implementation of agreed-upon courses of action (Miles et al. 2001).

Regime theorists have attempted to identify variables that could explain *variation* in the influence that IOs have on IEG. “Problem-structure” is routinely used as an explanatory variable in the study of regime effectiveness. It is common to distinguish between the malignancy and benignancy regarding both the intellectual and the political dimension of a problem (Miles et al. 2001; Mitchell 2006; Wettestad and Andresen 1991). As a second place to look for explanations for variation in the level of autonomous influence, regime theorists propose the overarching institutional setting. Any organization operating in an international environment is embedded in a larger organizational framework. The level of “fit” – i.e. the congruence and compatibility between ecosystems and institutional arrangements (Young 2002) – is claimed to bear on the IO’s impact.

Regime theorists are primarily concerned with regime *effectiveness*. They are particularly interested in structural and system-wide explanations. They seem to lack a more micro-level analytical capacity – e.g. it offers little room for explanations based on for example the organizational characteristics of the IO. In regime theory, bureaucracies are not seen as actors in and by themselves.

A synthesis approach

Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) introduce an alternative way of approaching international bureaucracies’ autonomous influence on IEG processes. In essence, theirs is a synthesis of principal-agent theory, social constructivism, and regime theory. It is also strongly empirically driven. They owe credit to *principal-agent theory* when it comes establishing whether international bureaucracies (can) have the capacity to autonomously influence IEG processes. This perspective is much less

helpful when it comes to explaining variation in the amount of autonomous influence that such agencies have. After all, all international bureaucracies engage in similar exchange relations with national government as agents with their principals. Is it then not suspicious that we observe nonetheless big differences between agencies in terms of the amount of autonomous influence they exercise on IEG? Second, the synthesis approach leans on some of the assumptions made by *social constructivism* – especially, the assertions regarding the relevance of cognitive elements in measuring agency influence is taken at heart. Social constructivism is also recognized as a source for the formulation of working hypotheses regarding variation in agencies’ level of influence on IEG. *Regime theory* is acknowledged for its contribution to insights regarding both the dependent variables and the explanatory variables. Finally, the synthesis approach complements its perspective through the inclusion of elements from organizational and management studies when arguing that organizational culture and structure can help to explain variation in agency influence.

Biermann and Siebenhüner list three ways in which a bureaucracy can exert influence on IEG. First, international agencies have influence on IEG if they act as *knowledge-brokers*. By framing issues, they can change the way in which actors perceive a problem and its solutions. This is called *cognitive influence*. Second, a bureaucracy can act as a *negotiation-facilitator*, thus creating, supporting and shaping international norm-building processes. This is called *normative influence*. Finally, agencies can act as a *capacity-builder* by supporting countries in the implementation of international agreements or the ability to participate in international conferences. This is called *executive influence*. Variation in influence among different international bureaucracies is determined by three independent variables: *Polity* refers to the formal structures, i.e. the legal and institutional setting in which a bureaucracy maneuvers. *Problem-structure* refers to the cost of regulating a problem and the perceived urgency and saliency of a problem. *People and procedures* refer to the internal organization of the bureaucracy. In order to place our research endeavor in larger comparative context – thus contributing to our common desire to establish causal claims through the accumulation of a large number of observations – we decided to stick as closely as possible to the set of variables that is proposed and used by Biermann and colleagues.

3. Conceptual model, operationalization, and data collection methods

Firstly, in this paper, we want to establish the level of autonomous influence that DSD exercises in IEG processes. This means that we need to establish how autonomous influence manifests itself most significantly, and what indicators can be used to meaningfully measure it. Secondly, we want to test some of the generic causal propositions that link international agencies’ level of autonomous influence with a number of explanatory variables. This means that we need to establish what these explanatory variables are, and – again – how we can meaningfully measure these.

According to Eckstein (1975) “a single measure on any pertinent variable” can be used for explanatory purposes. We think that the DSD can serve as a “crucial case” (Eckstein 1975; Gerring 2007). However, we agree with King et al. (1994) that due to the existence of potentially many explanatory variables; the difficulty of reliably measuring social science indicators and; the likely occurrence of random error due to the non-deterministic nature of social processes, strong causal inferences based on a single-case observation are inherently suspicious. Therefore, we opt for

complementing the DSD case that we develop in-depth, with a brief comparison of the DSD with the United Nations Environment Program and the Climate Secretariat (secretariat to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol).

Establishing autonomous influence

Based on Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009), we have set out to establish and measure the amount of influence that DSD can be argued to have on IEG processes by focusing in on its cognitive, normative, and capacity building influence, respectively.

Cognitive influence

According to Haas (1991, p.9) “*the knowledge available about ‘the problem’ at issue influences the way decision makers define the interest at stake in the solution of the problem; political objectives and technical knowledge are combined to arrive at the conception of what constitutes one’s interest.*” Knowledge is power and power is influence. International agencies have the potential to generate, and disseminate seemingly credible, policy-relevant, expert advice to states and non-state actors in the IEG arena, thus influencing interests and behavior regarding the problem and its possible solutions. To measure the level of *cognitive influence* of the DSD, we first researched what sort of information it collects, creates and disseminates – e.g. databases, information briefs, press releases, reports, articles in peer-reviewed journals. Second, we attempt to establish if and to what extent this information is used and perceived as being useful by relevant actors in IEG.

Normative influence

Young (1994) holds that bureaucrats *can* influence international negotiations, even if they are not directly mandated or involved in the negotiations. They are able to do so – so the argument goes – for example through influencing the composition of participant-lists, the selection of available background materials, helping participants to understand procedures and legalistic language, the definition of agendas, and through their involvement in putting negotiation outcomes in writing (see also Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Miles et al. 2001). To measure the level of *normative influence* of the DSD, we particularly zoom in on DSD’s interaction with the CSD chair and its bureau; on the role of DSD in the writing of the Secretary General’s report; on their provision of support to national delegations in the CSD process, and; on its role in selecting expert panelists for the CSD thematic sessions.

Executive influence

Empirical research indicates that national administrative capacity plays an important part in the successful implementation of environmental agreements (Biermann & Siebenhüner 2009). Often, international bureaucracies are actively involved in “leveling the playing field” in this respect, for example through the provision of training and funding to national agencies and NGOs, particularly those from the South (e.g. Finnemore 1993; Victor, Raustiala, and Skolnikoff 1998). To measure the level of influence that DSD can be argued to exercise through *capacity building* activities we will particularly explore whether DSD has contributed to the meaningful participation of non-state actors (e.g. NGOs) in IEG. In addition, we will assess whether non-western public service representatives indicate that they feel better equipped to get the most out of negotiations, thanks to the support they have received from DSD.

Table 1: Dependent variables: Description and indicators

Dependent variable	Description	Indicators
Cognitive influence	Influence of an international bureaucracy on the generation, categorization and dissemination of the knowledge that (other) actors in the international environmental governance arena consider seriously.	The extent to which the bureaucracy plays a significant role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge considered crucial for governance for sustainable development (for example, through the compilation of (1) databases, the issuing of (2) information briefs, press releases, and reports, and via (3) the production and publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals.)
Normative influence	Influence of an international bureaucracy on the outcomes of negotiations between (other) actors involved in international environmental governance processes.	The extent to which the bureaucracy puts its mark on the outcomes of multilateral negotiations (for example, (1) via its interaction with the CSD chair and its bureau, (2) the role in the writing of the Secretary General's report, (3) the provision of support to CSD diplomats, and (4) the role in selecting expert panellists for the CSD thematic sessions).
Executive influence	Influence of an international bureaucracy on the inclusiveness of international environmental governance processes.	The extent to which the bureaucracy has significantly contributed to (1) the meaningful participation of non-state actors (e.g. NGOs) and (2) non-western administrations in the CSD process (for example, via training and funding activities).

Explaining variation in levels of autonomous influence

Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) identify three main areas where to look for variables that may account for variation in the international agencies' levels of autonomous influence in IEG processes: *Problem structure*, *polity*, and *people and procedures*. We adopt this perspective for our own research, in order to increase the external validity of the outcomes.

Problem structure

Environmental problems vary in *malignancy*, both from a political and an intellectual perspective (Miles et al. 2002). Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) expect that if national governments face problems that are intellectually as well as politically malignant then they will retain control, which in turn restricts a bureaucracy's possibility to exercise influence on IEG processes (Biermann & Siebenhüner 2009).

Polity

Many people will point to *mandate* and *budget* as the *only* factors determining an organization's impact. Although we set out to add significant nuance to this limited viewpoint, we acknowledge that both variables are important to the study of variation in autonomous influence of international agencies in IEG. Biermann and Siebenhüner expect that both mandatory discretion and budgetary leeway (as perceived by the bureaucracy's staff) are positively related with an organization's level of autonomous influence. Besides that, we also expect the *position* of the bureaucracy in the broader IEG setting to affect its potential to influence governance processes and outcomes. First, more principals will render bureaucracies (i.e. agents) more influential. Furthermore, turf-wars between bureaucracies regarding the primacy of solving certain global environmental problems undermine an agency's capacity to exercise autonomous influence in IEG.

People and procedures

A bureaucracy consists of individuals. The combined outcome of individual choices and behavior determines a bureaucracy's level of autonomous influence on IEG processes. Commitment to the bureaucracy's mission (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Sandford 1994), a fit between *staff* composition and the nature of the problems the bureaucracy is expected to tackle (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009), and the effective storage of knowledge regarding "lessons-learned" (i.e. institutional memory) (Meijer 2000), are found to correlate positively with an agency's independent steering capacity. Furthermore, good *leadership* is deemed important. Unfortunately, this variable is notoriously hard to operationalize. Meier (2000) distinguishes internal and external expressions of power. Internally, a leader must facilitate the development of expertise and foster cohesion. Externally, a leader must maintain "good relations" with those who matter and foster "personal credibility" and legitimacy. This resonates well with Biermann and Siebenhüner (2007) who argue that leaders are able to shape the use of expertise, cohesion and bureaucratic culture.

As stated before, we acknowledge the limitations associated with causal inference based on a single-case study. Nevertheless – especially when put in a broader context of empirical work – we feel that this study of the DSD can contribute to either corroborating or refuting some of the working hypotheses that are currently on the table. We will do so by testing whether correlations run in the predicted directions. In

addition, we will compare our primary data to existing cases (based on similar theory and methods) of UNEP and the Climate Secretariat.

Data Collection

We gathered data primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews with key respondents. Firstly, interviews were held with DSD staff members – representing all DSD branches (n=6). Secondly, a number of respondents external to DSD were interviewed. First, interviews were held with country representatives to the CSD from the permanent mission in New York and with delegates participating in the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting (IPM) held in New York between 23-27 February, 2009. This part of the sample includes representatives from developing (n=5) and developed countries (n=9). Representatives from civil society organizations (i.e. Major Group representatives) were also interviewed during the IPM meeting (n=2). Second, we conducted a complementary large-N survey with NGOs involved with the CSD process. We used the integrated Civil Society Organizations System (iCSO)⁶ to determine the sample. We contacted all 463 organizations with special CSD status via email, with the request to fill out a 22-question survey, set up in SurveyMonkey. We ended up with a response rate of 14.5% (n=66). The sample is evenly distributed in terms of geographical area (developed and developing countries) and experience with the CSD process (novices and seasoned participants). Additional data was collected through on-site observations, the analysis of web-statistics and the use of previous case studies of the CSD, particularly those from Kaasa (2007, 2005) and Dodds (2002).

⁶ <http://esango.un.org/civilsociety/login.do> (Accessed: 04-02-2009)

Table 2: Independent variables: Description and indicators

Explanatory variable	Description	Indicators
Problem-structure	The extent to which consensus about causes and effects of the problem exists (intellectual malignancy). The extent to which consensus among actors regarding the solution (and the related allocation of costs and benefits) exists.	What is the level of malignancy of sustainable development as a problem? (1) Is there consensus about causes and effects involved (intellectual dimension of the problem structure)? (2) Is it likely that actors will agree on solutions and courses of action (political dimension of the problem structure)?
Polity		
<i>Mandate</i>	The set of instructions given to the bureaucracy by the governments.	(1) The extent to which staff and direction feel that their mandate leaves them sufficient possibilities to implement their activities as they see fit. (2) The extent to which this view is shared and confirmed by external parties – such as CSD Member State delegations and Major Group NGOs.
<i>Budget</i>	Financial and other resources that the bureaucracy has at its disposal	(1) The extent to which DSD staff and direction have the impression that operational resources suffice to fulfil its tasks. (2) The extent to which this view is shared and confirmed by external parties – such as CSD Member State delegations and Major Group NGOs.
<i>Position</i>	The position of the bureaucracy in the IEG policy arena, <i>vis-à-vis</i> the other actors.	(1) The extent to which principals (governments) present themselves as a heterogeneous, diffuse set (a diffusion of multiple principals will render bureaucracies (i.e. agents) more influential). (2) The extent to which <i>turf-wars</i> between DSD, Member States and other agencies undermine DSD's functioning.
People and procedures		
<i>Staff</i>	The people on the bureaucracy's payroll	(1) The extent to which DSD staff is committed to the agency's mission. (2) The match between the staff members' capacity and the requirements for the kind of problem solving they are supposed to engage in. (3) The amount of institutional memory within the bureaucracy, i.e. knowledge acquired in previous experiences is readily available.
<i>Leadership</i>	The Director and the Office of the Director	(1) The extent to which leadership is able to develop expertise, and foster cohesion within the agency. (2) The extent to which it maintains "good" relations with external partners. (3) The extent to which it is considered by DSD staff, and other actors in IEG as credible and legitimate.

4. Results

In accordance with our conceptual framework, we first set out to measure and establish the extent to which DSD can be argued to have a cognitive, normative and capacity-building impact on IEG processes and outcomes. Subsequently, we propose to explain the particular level of influence we find by correlating the observed level of autonomous influence with the identified explanatory variables, i.e. the specifics of the structure of the problems DSD has been requested to tackle, its mandate, budget, position in the overall IEG arena, its staff and its leadership.

Establishing the Influence on IEG by the DSD

Cognitive influence - A source of knowledge for sustainable development?

To what extent does DSD play a role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge that key actors consider crucial for the achievement of sustainable development? In its mission statement, the DSD proclaims an ambition to be an authoritative source of expertise on sustainable development.⁷ The DSD has several opportunities to exert this cognitive influence. It releases policy briefs, so-called sustainability trend reports, it maintains and publishes several on-line databases, it issues proceedings from workshops, and publishes a peer-reviewed academic journal (Natural Resources Forum), and various other types of written and electronic information. Yet, one experienced senior staff member told us in an interview: “We do not publish a lot”.

Among the on-line databases that DSD compiles and publishes, the *Partnerships for Sustainable Development* database has enjoyed some success. The database on *sustainable consumption and production* has considerably less users, however. Interest in the “matrix” - a web-based compilation of best practices and information on implementation for sustainable development – is increasing rapidly (see table 3). Still, overall absolute numbers of visitors are very low.⁸

Table 3: Annual number of visitors of DSD online products

	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>Partnerships for Sustainable Development Database</i> ⁹	41,966	83,749	112,877	144,023
<i>Sustainable Consumption and Production Database</i> ¹⁰	3,082	4,791	9,280	9,779
<i>“CSD Matrix”</i> ¹¹	3,747	4,162	No data	25,919

Source: Data collected on site.

In our survey with (mainly) NGO respondents, 59 percent of the respondents indicated that they consider the databases to be useful for their work. However, only 12.1 percent claims to actually use them “frequently” or “very frequently.” One large developed country diplomat interviewed for this study considered the Matrix the single most important output of the CSD whereas another deemed it to be an idealistic

⁷ http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd/dsd_index.shtml

⁸ For comparison, in 2008, the number of visits to the homepages of the UNFCCC reached 7 million users viewing over 86 million pages. In the same year the DSD recorded 1.7 million visitors viewing 5 million pages. (See Section 5 of this paper, “Comparison”).

⁹ <http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/browse.do>

¹⁰ <http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/scp/public/Welcome.do>

¹¹ http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_matrix.shtml

construction with no impact on “real” implementation. Beyond web-based databases, the DSD produces other publications and a peer-reviewed scientific publication¹². However, again, interviews and web-statistics portray a low level of utilization of these products by target groups. Diplomats interviewed for our study indicated that they retrieved information from other source or relied on experts in their respective countries. A developed country diplomat called DSD reports difficult to penetrate and often imprecise due to self-censorship and the apparent wish to please everyone. One environmental economist admitted that she never heard of the DSD before working directly with the CSD. She also mentioned a 2008 conference in Gothenburg, gathering 150 of the world’s most prominent environmental economists where not one participant had ever attended a CSD. This example corresponds with many statements of respondents who seemed unaware of DSD publications and often expressed surprise when being asked about the usage of DSD publications. A limited number of publications, low utilization among target publics and low visibility of the DSD, lead us to conclude that the DSD plays a minor role in shaping the belief systems of stakeholders regarding sustainable development. Cognitive influence of DSD on IEG processes seems very low.

Normative influence - Influencing negotiations and outcomes

Does DSD put its mark on the outcomes of multilateral negotiations? Although stakeholders do not indicate they collect *substantive* information to a large extent from the DSD, they do indicate to download *procedural* information from the secretariat. The DSD homepage is essential for delegations and *Major Groups* for the retrieval of information regarding formal procedures and to download forms and other procedure-related documents. By producing, publishing and managing procedural information in a timely and efficient manner, DSD does indeed lubricate the negotiation process.

However, DSD influence on negotiations processes and outcome is a sensitive issue. Especially staff members are extremely reluctant to claim substantive influence on negotiations (obviously, since they are not supposed to actually meddle). All interviewees – except NGOs - stressed DSD’s role as a service provider. Nevertheless, from our talks with the people involved emerge at least four areas where autonomous influence on negotiations and outcomes could be argued to take place.

First, the Secretariat advises the CSD Chair on procedure, language, and dissemination of texts. In CSD sessions, the Chair has a relatively strong role in directing processes and shaping the outcome. Thus, if the DSD is in theory able to influence the Chair, then its indirect influence on process and outcome could be strong, too. A vice-chair to the CSD and a close aide to the current chair confirmed the correctness of this argument but didn’t give any concrete examples. Second, the DSD prepares the Secretary General’s reports that the different stakeholders use in preparation for the negotiations. Two interviewed diplomats regarded DSD’s involvement in the preparation of these reports as an opportunity to influence the negotiations. One large developing country diplomat even claimed that the reports indicate what the secretariat (and not the Secretary General) *thinks*, suggesting biased reports. A staff member stated, “You have to make them [negotiators] believe that it’s their idea”, indicating that international civil servants may have their own agenda. Yet, due to the extensive molding of the negotiated text during CSD sessions, it is doubtful that the reports actually influence outcomes. In fact, 65 percent of our survey

¹² Impact factor = 0.79 (November 2009)

respondents deemed the report's influence on their policy debates and interests ambiguous.

Third, in the negotiations, the DSD provides support to the participating diplomats. Interviewees recounted occasions when secretariat staff, by keeping their fingers on the pulse, tipped off delegations where deals could be struck and demarches could be useful. Also, individual staff member's diplomatic sensitivity could be important identifying challenges and opportunities to negotiations, helping the Chair in finding compromises between delegations.

Fourth, the DSD chooses the panelists that provide views on issues to the delegates at the start of plenary sessions. Some interviewees attributed importance to this role as they could frame debates and high-light specific challenges. In the end, the influence of the DSD on the normative level is difficult to measure. The possible influence on negotiations is often informal, diplomatically sensitive and hard to unveil. Considering the absence of clear evidence, we judge the level of influence on the normative level as low.

Executive influence - Leveling the playing fields

Does DSD significantly contribute to the meaningful participation of delegations from developing countries in the CSD process and of non-state actors (in particular Major Groups)? Two developing country diplomats representatives expressed great satisfaction regarding DSD activities such as sponsoring delegations and informing national policy debates. Major Groups representatives expressed even greater appreciation of the work of the DSD. In times when Chairs, national delegates or DSD executives have restricted Major Groups input in CSD session, the capacity of individual staff within the DSD has proven invaluable. Two staff members work exclusively with Major Groups, and one interviewee argued that without their existence, there would not be any civil society in the CSD. During plenary sessions, the involvement of staff is clear as they can be seen running between the Bureau and the Major Groups. For Major Groups these are welcome interventions, as Chairs seem sometimes reluctant to grant them good speaking slots or a possibility to intervene. Similarly, during Regional Implementations Meetings (RIMs), when regional commissions do not share the view of civil society as important in the CSD process, the DSD has been proactive in promoting the interest of Major Group. In conclusion, assisting, informing and promoting Major Groups and developing country in the CSD process might be the area in which the DSD exerts most influence. (For an overview of our findings, so far, see table 4).

Table 4: Does the DSD influence IEG processes: A summary of the findings

Dependent variable	Result	Influence
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Successful in compiling information, but less so in creating knowledge. ▲ Significant problems with visibility which hinders real cognitive influence. 	Low
Normative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Successful in providing procedural and organizational service to the process. ▲ No real impact beyond procedural and service matters; such as outcome of negotiations 	Low
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Considerable success in involving Major Groups. ▲ Some success involving developing countries in negotiations. 	Medium

Explaining the Influence on IEG by the DSD

To explain the low level of influence of the DSD on IEG processes, we list six explanatory variables in our conceptual framework: Problem-structure, mandate, resources, position, staff, and leadership. All these variables are derived from the empirical and theoretical literature (plus we added a little bit of commons sense, ourselves). Methodologically – as many scholars of IEG before us – we see ourselves obligated to use one of the weakest approaches in the business for the establishment of a causal claim: A single case observation with hardly any longitudinality involved in it. One thing we *can* do using this approach is check whether the direction of the correlations runs as predicted by our model.

A malign problem-structure

Sustainable development is a malign problem, no doubt. *Intellectually*, the problem is malign because of the sheer endless list of related topics, and uncertainty about causes and effects. *Politically*, the malignancy may be even more evident, for example when we take into account the difference in perception of goals and priorities between developed and developing countries. In our interviews, a developed country representative lamented that poor countries only focuses on economic development, omitting the sustainability aspect. This view was countered by a representative from a developing country: “What is sustainable development for the North might not be sustainable development for the South. Sustainable development is about opening the way for poverty eradications. It’s not about making profits out of green technology or green industry or whatever. And it’s not about giving more focus to the private sector.” The sign of the correlation between problem-structure and autonomous influence is as expected. Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) expect malign problems to be claimed by national governments, thus leaving international bureaucracies less room to exercise autonomous influence. Our research confirms this expectation.

A Weak Mandate

The CSD was never given the mandate to make binding policy-decisions. Instead, the CSD’s mandate is focusing on reviewing, monitoring and engagement in dialogue. The national reporting to review the progress of the Rio conventions is voluntary. Depending on the circumstances, either a weak and ambiguous mandate can allow a bureaucracy to test and expand the limits, or it could stifle and hamper the functioning of an organization. The impact of the kind of mandate that CSD has been given depends for example on the level of *de facto* discretion that is granted by the principals – i.e. the amount of monitoring and correction by the CSD Member States in New York. Some interviews indicate that the DSD is kept on a tight leash, especially by developing countries who fear the hidden agendas of the developed countries, and therefore cautiously scrutinize all DSD initiatives and actions. The physical location of both the CSD and the DSD at the UNHQ was also brought up by several respondents as a possible explanation for the thorough overview and unconstructive politicization of issues. Overall, we find that for DSD, the weak mandate seems to be more of a hindrance, and not an opportunity, for developing influence in IEG.

A tight budget

As many UN bodies and programs, the DSD has only limited funds available (Kaasa, 2005). A developed country diplomat gave an example: The respondent asked the DSD to develop a system to facilitate reporting with quantifiable targets. The DSD answered that it would not have any problems with such a task provided that the

respondent's country would fund the enterprise. Lack of finances has also created difficulties in organizing inter-sessional meetings and expert groups. It furthermore limits the number of developing-country delegates which the DSD can support to attend CSD meetings. The financial situation also hampers the development of in-house expertise considering that the annual budget for training its staff of 60 is only about \$7,000 a year (Kaasa, 2005). The sign of the correlation between budget and autonomous influence is as expected.

Positioned among diffused principals and organizational turf-wars

First, from our interviews emerges a picture of mild distrust between the developed and the developing member states. The North-South divide is projected onto the DSD resulting in a suspicious working environment. (We have already mentioned that this hinders the establishment of a widely agreed upon political understanding of the problem structure and the expansion of the mandate.) Principals do not present themselves as a uniform bloc. Second, the problem-structure of sustainable development is extremely complex and touches upon perceived dichotomies such as environment versus trade and environment versus development. Hence, it penetrates the agendas of most international bodies working with environment, trade or development. The DSD finds UN agencies, programs and MEA Secretariats on its route to sustainable development. This has resulted in *turf-wars*. The establishment of indicators for sustainable development, climate change, and energy for sustainable development, are but a few issues where there has been battle or institutional confusion over where the issues belong. For example, the only result of CSD-15 (when climate change was discussed) was a referral to the UNFCCC as the proper forum for climate discussions (ENB, 2007). The DSD and UNEP have also been in caught in struggles stemming from competing mandates, goals, and practice (Kaasa, 2005). Other powerful actors in this corner of IEG – such as UNDP and the World Bank - have gradually incorporated sustainable development into their work. One developed country diplomat argued that the CSD is the last body that comes to mind when discussing IEG organizations. The absence of a clear and strong mandate intensifies the *turf-wars*. Contrary to the expectations posited in principal-agent theory, the diffusion of principals does not seem to have contributed to an increase in autonomous influence of the agent (DSD), in this case. On the other hand, the direction of the sign of the correlation between DSD's low level of influence in IEG and the relatively high occurrence of turf wars in the sector is as expected.

Capable and committed staff?

The cohesion, composition and proactive learning among staff members were difficult to establish in our research. Interviews and observations indicate a commitment towards the goal of the CSD, however, the accuracy of these claims (that are based on self-reporting) is hard to determine. Staff seems to engage in rather informal internal knowledge exchanges, sharing experiences in the corridors of the office rather than in open meetings or workshops. Similarly, the institutional memory is safe-guarded by staff members with often more than ten years of experience, sharing their knowledge with new employees. One staff member noted that they could run on "auto-pilot" if needed. It is acknowledged that staff composition reflects DSD's diverse problem-areas and is highly professional.

Strong leadership?

In the case of the DSD, different styles of leadership have heavily influenced the degree of proactivity in the Secretariat. Between 1994 and 1998, the DSD was lead by

Joke Waller-Hunter. She was replaced by JoAnne DiSano who stayed in the position until 2007. Kaasa (2007) argues that Waller-Hunter has been given more credit for her proactive leadership than DiSano. Waller-Hunter appears to have been more efficient in establishing working relationships with countries and Major Groups, pushing the DSD mandate to its limits. DiSano conformed more literally to the mandate and is credited with performing her tasks well according to rules and procedures (ibid.). Member State opinions on DiSano diverge. One developed country diplomat argued simply that: “developed countries liked DiSano and developing countries disliked her”. She serviced the systems well but beyond that her input was less outspoken. She knew her political position and place in the system, argued one respondent, which also confirmed her rather procedural role. The external credibility of DiSano among Member States appears to vary across the field.

Major Groups representatives portray a more unified picture regarding DiSano. During her leadership there were apparent tension between Major Group representatives and the DSD leadership. According to one source, the Major Groups were “cold shouldered” out of the process and given far less place in the system than under Waller-Hunter. However, staff members provide a more nuanced story. The Major Groups hold a much politicized position and which they have learned to utilize in the CSD process. DiSano was reluctant to allow the Major Groups a larger place than mandated and were hence perceived by some Major Groups as hostile to their involvement. It seems valid to argue that DiSano represented a leadership style very much in line with the service role attributed to secretariats. She also kept a rather hierarchical internal management culture, and must thus be perceived to not influence the influence of the DSD on IEG positively.

Finally, it is worth noting the importance several respondents attributed to leadership. “It is about leadership” and “leadership is everything” are but two of many examples of the stress many respondents put on leadership. For example, one respondent pointed out that the director is the link between the SG and the CSD and even though they certainly are constrained by structure and context, they can determine the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful Secretariat (See table 5 for a summary of the overall findings).

Table 5: What explains the lack of DSD influence IEG processes: A summary of the findings

Independent variable	Result	Impact on influence
Problem-structure	Malign problem-structure: Complex inter-linkages between issues; Diverging interests and preferences among North and South.	Negative
Polity		
<i>Mandate</i>	Weak and ambiguous mandate focusing on “soft” measures.	Negative
<i>Budget</i>	Funding perceived as insufficient to adequately fulfil all tasks;	Negative
<i>Position</i>	Diffused principals; Polity suffers from turf-wars;	Negative
People and Procedures		
<i>Staff</i>	Good mix between technical and political staff members; Institutional memory depends on informal exchanges.	Positive
<i>Leadership</i>	Focus on the procedure and strict adherence to the mandate; Not considered charismatic or proactive.	Negative

5. Comparison

In order to get a comparative perspective on the case study results a comparison between the DSD, UNEP and the Climate Secretariat has been conducted. This section is not based on our own data but relies instead on case studies done by others, notably Busch (2006), Bauer (2007) and Bauer, Busch and Siebenhüner (2007). Since both authors used a conceptual framework similar to ours, a comparison does not pose too many methodological issues.

Cognitive influence

Whereas the DSD has failed to become an authoritative source of information, the Climate Secretariat and UNEP seem to have performed better. Bauer (2006) finds that UNEP has become an agenda-setter in the policy debate about global environmental issues through its knowledge production and dissemination. The agency’s environmental assessments – which are widely recognized and highly acclaimed – often form the main knowledge input to intergovernmental processes. Bauer (2006) also find that output and support from the Climate Secretariat is widely used in policy making on climate change. However, the Climate Secretariat does not create new knowledge. It merely collects and disseminates data. In terms of usage of the information the three agencies offer, DSD seems to compare poorly to UNEP and the Climate Secretariat. For example, in 2008, the number of visits to the homepages of the UNFCCC reached 7 million users viewing over 86 million pages. In the same year the DSD recorded 1.7 million visitors viewing 5 million pages. The Climate Secretariat’s website has become more popular since 2005, whereas visits to DSD’s homepage have stabilized during that time period.¹³

Normative influence

According to Bauer (2006) UNEP seems to have significant autonomous influence in IEG processes during negotiations. As an example he mentions the role UNEP played

¹³ Sources: http://unfccc.int/essential_background/about_the_website/items/3358.php and data gathered on-site (Accessed: 05-06-2009)

in the IEG reform debate.¹⁴ In comparison to UNEP, the Climate Secretariat and the DSD play a more modest role. Bauer et al (2007) high-light two instances where the Climate Secretariat could have potentially influenced negotiation processes: Trough its informal support to the COP president, the Chairs in the subsidiary bodies, and the officers in the Bureau to the COP, and via its role in cleaning up the draft negotiation texts for the Kyoto protocol. This finding is strikingly similar to what respondents in our own study revealed.

Executive influence

UNEP seems to be, again, the bureaucracy with the most influence. UNEP has acquired *de facto* implementing capacities through its engagement in so-called partnerships for sustainable development, in the implementation of environmental assessments and via the training of national stakeholders in the crafting of environmental law (Bauer 2006). The Climate Secretariat in turn, does not distribute financial resources, doesn't implement environmental projects, and has not autonomously triggered any adoption of policy. It does however coordinate implementation reviews, and has developed several tools, such as gas emission databases, to facilitate the implementation of the FCCC (Busch 2006a) .

Table 6: Summary of Dependent Variables

	DSD	UNEP	Climate Secretariat
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Not successful in creating knowledge. ▲ Significant problems with visibility which hinders real cognitive influence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Source of credible and authoritative knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Source of knowledge and output is used in policy making. ▲ No independent knowledge creation.
Normative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ No real impact beyond procedural and service matters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Taken on an autonomous stakeholder role. ▲ Impacted several negotiation processes ▲ created or participates in partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ No real impact beyond procedural and service matters.
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Some success in prepping Major Groups and developing country delegates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Builds “on-the-ground” capacity regarding implementing MEAs. ▲ Builds national and international capacities in crafting environmental law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Not active in capacity building activities.

Orange = little influence in IEG; yellow = medium level of influence; green = much influence

Problem-structure

All three bureaucracies address problems with an intellectual and political highly malign problem-structure. The fact that a similar problem structure is linked with

¹⁴ Since 2005, there has been a protracted IEG reform debate within the UN which has yielded limited results. It is facilitated by Claude Heller of Mexico and Peter Maurer of Switzerland. Major obstacles have been the debate of sustainable development vs. environmental protection and the role and scope of UNEP's work (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/un-reform/un-reform-topics/general-analysis-on-un-reform/47789.html>).

varying levels of autonomous influence suggests that the explanatory power of this particular explanatory variable is limited.

Polity

The three organizations have mandates that equally are weak and ambiguous. Furthermore, UNEP, DSD and the Climate Secretariat all suffer from lack of resources¹⁵. Given the observed variation in IEG influence, this finding adds nuance to the general claim that *mandate* and *budget* are all that matters for a bureaucracy. The latter finding in particular contrast with Sandford's claim that the lack of funding for international bureaucracies dealing with environmental issues is "perhaps the most significant constraint faced by Secretariats" (1994, page 22). The polity that DSD, UNEP and the Climate Secretariat operate in is the same, i.e. principals present themselves in a diffused way, and *turf wars* and concurrence are an issue. So, *position* is also not a sufficient explanation for the observed variation in influence between the three organizations.

People and procedures

Staff in all three bureaucracies investigated here, are perceived as highly skilled, engaged and professional. UNEP staff has been called "the strongest source of the UNEP Secretariat's political influence." Bauer (2007) holds that UNEP has become "a hub of global environmental information" thanks to the competence and commitment of its staff. Staff of the Climate Secretariat is appreciated for its ability to translate scientific knowledge into policy options (Busch 2006). One of our interviewees complained that where the Climate Secretariat has proven consistency in delivering high quality proposals, the DSD has a more uneven track record in this department. Here, we finally arrive at an explanatory variable that seems to consistently correlate with the observed variation in our dependent variable. The more capable the staff, the higher the likelihood of observing autonomous influence of the organization, so it seems.

The leadership of UNEP has, to a large extent, been effective in dealing with the North-South divide and in attracting attention through personal charisma (Bauer 2006). They used their personal backgrounds, UNEP's clout and negotiation skills to gain influence in IEG processes (Bauer 2007) On the UNEP leadership, Bauer (2007) holds that "strong organizational leadership enables maximization of the influence that can be generated from even modest resources endowed to an international bureaucracy" (p.20). The Executives of the DSD and the Climate Secretariat have a less active role than UNEP's ED. "Not weaker, but different", one of our interviewees stated. From this comparison, leadership emerges as another variable that could explain if and to what extent an international bureaucracy acts as a player with autonomous influence in IEG processes and outcomes: The more leadership develops expertise, and foster cohesion within the agency, the more it maintains "good" relations with external partners, and the more is considered as credible and legitimate, the higher the likelihood to observe a bureaucracy that has autonomous influence (for a summary, see table 7)

Table 7: Summary of the independent variables

¹⁵ UNEP appears to enjoy a larger amount of extra-budgetary contributions, especially from nations that wants to strengthen the independence of UNEP (Bauer 2006)

	DSD	UNEP	Climate Secretariat
Problem-structure	Malign problem- structure due to complex inter-linkages between issues and diverging interests and preferences among North and South	Same	Same
Polity			
<i>Mandate</i>	Weak and ambiguous mandate focusing on “soft” measures.	Stronger mandate than both the DSD and the Climate Secretariat. Yet, still weak.	A weak, service-oriented mandate
<i>Budget</i>	Funding is not sufficient to fulfil all tasks adequately	same	Funds limited to bare basics of service provision
<i>Position</i>	Diffuse principals; Polity suffers from turf-wars	Same	Same
People and Procedures			
<i>Staff</i>	Good mix between technical and political staff members; institutional memory depends on informal exchanges	Committed and capable staff is claimed to be instrumental to the success of UNEP	Able to translate scientific knowledge into policy options
<i>Leadership</i>	Focus on the procedure and strict adherence to the mandate; Not considered charismatic or proactive.	Strong and effective leadership	Service-oriented leadership; Few attempts to take substantive initiatives.

6. Conclusion

International environmental governance has experienced a rapid increase in the number of secretariats that are to implement multi- and bilateral environmental agreements. The agreements themselves are routinely picked as the units of analysis of scholarly investigation. The *UN framework Convention on Climate Change*, the *Montreal Protocol on Ozone Protection*, the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, the *Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution*, the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species*, the *Basel Convention on Control of Hazardous Wastes*, the *Convention to Combat Desertification* and the *International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling* are just a few examples of well-studied agreements (see for example Miles et al. 2002). However, the implementers of these agreements have not yet been the subject of thorough scrutiny. This is strange. Our colleagues from governance studies focusing on national policy arenas have widely adopted the idea that secretariats, agencies, and bureaucracies may play an active role in the shaping of policy processes and outcomes. Their list of publications on the autonomous influence of these actors in national policy arenas is long and goes back quite a few decades (it can be argued to go back to Weber 1947; and includes people like Moe 1984; and Niskanen 1971).

Whereas these scholars before us have started to ask the sorts of questions about bureaucracies that are relevant to us analysts of global polities, too, their findings and theories regarding national policy spheres cannot automatically be supplanted to the international governance arena. For example, compared to their national and sub-national counterparts the IEG bureaucracies’ principals are many and

highly diffused. Personnel consist of professionals that are international civil servants and national citizens at the same time. Overall, the scenario seems to allow for the emergence of agencies that play an increasingly autonomous role in the IEG arena. Therefore, the question as to whether it makes analytical sense to consider secretariats as independent players in IEG, is relevant, important and timely. So is the question regarding the explanation of variation in the autonomous influence that secretariats, and other international bureaucracies can be argued to have.

We show that bureaucracies *do* play an autonomous role in certain IEG processes. We also provide evidence that there is quite a bit of variation in the extent to which these bureaucracies autonomously influence content, form, and outcome of policy processes in the international arena. In broad strokes, the target of our primary data collection effort – the DSD – turns out to be not very influential. The commission it is supposed to aide – the CSD – has been called nothing more than a “talking shop” (Brenton 1994; Imber 1999). CSD’s bureaucracy has not established itself as an authoritative source of knowledge, it has not forcefully acted to change processes and outcomes, and it has had limited success in training and otherwise facilitating CSD participants. When put in a comparative context, we find the Climate Secretariat and especially UNEP score better on the yard stick we used to establish autonomous influence of international bureaucracies.

The observed variation allows us in turn to take a shot at *explaining* this variation. The gut-level response that it’s all about mandate and money can be immediately dismissed: These variables simply do not co-vary across the cases we explored. The same goes for a couple of other candidate independent variables that are alluded to in the literature such as problem structure and embeddedness in the wider governance structure. Staff and especially leadership seems to emerge as factors that do make a difference with regard to a bureaucracy’s capacity to exercise autonomous influence. Also, rather than “just” being a secretariat to an agreement, UNEP is also a “program” which may account for the significant difference influence it has in comparison with the DSD and the Climate Secretariat.

Understandably, the IEG literature has methodologically leaned on single case observations, mostly. The complexness of processes urges scholars to focus more on internal than on external validity. Also, many cases are unique in the sense that a comparative context cannot easily be constructed. With regard to our question however, it is possible to start establishing a rather large-n (recall the number of secretariats inserted in Mitchell’s database (310)).

Our study has explicitly *not* embarked upon the question whether or not it is desirable that international bureaucracies can autonomously influence IEG processes and outcomes. With an overall univocal principal absent, it may as well be that agents in IEG are inherently required to be more discrete. However, future research could focus on incentives and institutions that push this discretion into the right direction, i.e. exercise cognitive, normative and executive influence that can be expected to optimize efforts to solve collective action dilemmas in international policy arenas.

7. Literature

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