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Governance through Global Goals

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In recent years, a relatively new mechanism of global governance has gained prominence: the use of broad global policy goals to orchestrate the activities of governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and eventually all citizens of the world. Global governance through goal-setting works through the joint commitment of all governments to collective policy ambitions. These ambitions are then enshrined in the form of multilaterally agreed goals that are not legally binding but come with more specific targets, indicators and time frames, all of which are expected to steer public and private actors collectively into desired trajectories (Kanie and Biermann 2017). While governance through global goal-setting has featured in global governance since the second half of the twentieth century, its role has become much stronger in the last two decades (Fukuda-Parr 2014). The Millennium Development Goals, agreed by the United Nations in 2000, were a first attempt at comprehensive global steering through goals. But global goal-setting has gained much more importance when the United Nations General Assembly agreed, in 2015, on 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be implemented by 2030.

Like other attempts at global governance through goal-setting, the Sustainable Development Goals share four key characteristics (Biermann, Kanie and Kim 2017). First, they are not legally binding and cannot be enforced as law within national or international adjudication. Second, they are marked by weak institutional arrangements that are not supported by international treaty organizations, formal monitoring agencies, strong dispute settlement bodies and the like. Third, they are meant to be highly inclusive, covering all countries and sectors of society. Fourth, they are broadly framed and hence leave much leeway to national implementation and interpretation. While none of these characteristics is specific to this type of governance, the combination of these four characteristics amounts to a unique approach to global governance.

In this chapter, we review recent literature on these four key characteristics of governance through global goals. We first conceptualize governance through goals as a mechanism of global governance. We then delve into key literature around the four main characteristics of governance through goals, with a view to understanding how they affect the performance of governance architectures. We then distil how these characteristics, taken together, can affect governance architectures, for instance by leading to new actor constellations, by galvanizing efforts and by transforming or creating new institutions. Thereafter, we identify future research directions that might help increase understanding of whether and how global goals could effectively deal with the challenges that result from the institutional complexity of global governance architectures.

Conceptualization

We define global goals as internationally agreed non-legally binding policy objectives that are time-bound, measurable and aspirational in nature. Notably, in this definition, we exclude legally binding international legal rules and norms such as those often established through multilateral agreements. We also leave out widely proclaimed aspirations of global civil society and other non-state actors, such as those reflected in transnational private regulations. These goals from non-governmental bodies do not enjoy the formal support of governments and inter-governmental organizations; they are rather part of the realm of non-state, transnational governance (Chapter 4). Furthermore, while we acknowledge that goals have been a feature of global governance since the first United Nations Development Decade in the 1960s, we focus on the more recent, and much more ambitious, global goals, and especially the Sustainable Development Goals from 2015.

The concrete mechanisms through which global goals function are yet to be examined in detail. There is consensus, however, that a key defining feature of governance through goals is that it does not seek to directly change existing institutional architectures, and that it does not seek to regulate existing institutions or actors by demanding or enforcing behavioural change (see contributions in Kanie and Biermann 2017). Rather, governance through goals relies on non-legally binding global public policy goals, generally negotiated under the purview of intergovernmental institutions and organizations, most notably the United Nations. Such goals are hence largely aspirational, but they are typically endorsed by governments and non-state actors around the world, which could enable them to guide actions and policies at global, national and subnational levels.

Although it is unknown to what extent governance through global goals can really lead to immediate and radical governance transformations, many commentators and supporters expect them to have some impacts, for example by triggering

incremental but widespread changes when goals are taken up in national and international policies and programmes. Governance through goals can thus have some influence by setting priorities that shape the international and national allocation of scarce resources, as well as by galvanizing action through specific and time-bound targets with which actors track their progress towards goal achievement (Young 2017; see also Chapter 13). As such, governance through goals can trigger and orchestrate, rather than enforce, some of the policy responses to governance fragmentation and institutional complexity that have been analyzed in this volume, such as policy integration (Chapter 9), interplay management (Chapter 10), orchestration (Chapter 11) and hierarchization (Chapter 13).

The effects and effectiveness of governance through goals remain contested, however (see discussion in Kanie et al. 2017). While some observers argue that global goals can have significant impacts (Hajer et al. 2015; Stevens and Kanie 2016), others criticize this governance mechanism for its lack of enforcement and compliance mechanisms. Will the goals be effective in the end? In this chapter, we review the body of social science literature that deals with this question. We are less interested in whether goals are actually implemented but rather in the prior, first step: whether goals have any effects on governance systems and processes, and here in particular on whether goals have the potential to affect entire governance architectures, for example by advancing institutional integration between decision-making systems or reducing norm conflicts. While some observers are optimistic that the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 will help foster institutional integration at the international level (Le Blanc 2015), others doubt such claims, arguing that the goals themselves simply reflect the fragmented structure of global governance (Kim 2016). So far, however, there has been little, if any, empirically grounded research on the effects of governance through goals on governance architectures. Therefore, our review attempts here to lay the foundation for new inquiries into this research domain.

Research Findings

We now review recent research findings and conceptual contestations on the four key characteristics of governance through goals mentioned above, namely their non-legally binding nature; the underlying weak institutional arrangements; the inclusiveness of the goal-setting process; and the national leeway in the implementation of the goals.

Non-legally Binding Nature

A first key characteristic of governance through goals is that they are not legally binding (Biermann, Kanie and Kim 2017). Both the Millennium Development

Goals of 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 were formally established by a non-binding United Nations General Assembly Resolution as part of a broader development agenda. Although some scholars claim that the United Nations General Assembly has quasi-legal competences (Falk 1966), the United Nations Charter clearly deems its resolutions as being only recommendations, as they are not formally signed and ratified by states. These sets of global goals are hence not part of international law but are essentially political agreements (Kim 2016).

Some scholars have argued, therefore, that goal-setting through non-binding agreements is merely a suboptimal, ineffective or even counterproductive strategy. Some even see it as contributing to increasing institutional complexity and fragmentation, with the potential to complicate international cooperation (Elliot 2017). For those global goals that are grounded in international agreements – as is the case with some targets under the Sustainable Development Goals – legal scholars have emphasized the need to create additional mechanisms to ensure that these goals are not just a reflection of, but reach further than the existing fragmented and compartmentalized system of international law (Kim 2016: 17; see also Kim and Bosselmann 2015; Underdal and Kim 2017).

Others have questioned the ability of non-binding goal-setting to influence a wider political arena and to mobilize societal forces in modern systems of multilevel governance (Bodansky 2016; Young 2017). A non-binding status could potentially limit the compliance-pull and legitimacy of globally agreed goals at the national level, because acceptance can be limited to mere executive approval, without the need for governments to seek domestic legislative approval and formal adoption (Bodansky 2016). For example, domestic courts are not obliged to use the Sustainable Development Goals as a judicial source when resolving disputes.

Furthermore, the non-binding status of global goals might limit the sense of urgency, commitment and acceptance, especially among government officials who are expected to assume key roles in realizing the goals (Young 2017: 43; see also Franck 1990; Raustiala 2005; Bodansky 2016). That governments generally attribute some value to the legal status of agreements is emphasized by the strong disappointment expressed by many governments when the outcome of the 2009 Copenhagen conference of the parties under the climate convention proved to be ‘only’ a political agreement. Another example are the continued discussions over the legal status of the subsequent 2015 Paris Agreement (Bodansky 2010, 2016).

In addition, given the lack of legal standing, internationally it could be unclear how new global goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, relate to all the earlier agendas, agreements and plans. In the case of the Millennium Development Goals, for example, it has been argued that they disrupted ongoing processes for the

implementation of the 1990s conference agendas through cherry-picking of issues, the modification of previously agreed targets and the disruption of nascent initiatives (Fukuda-Parr, Yamin and Greenstein 2014; Langford and Winkler 2014; van der Hoeven 2014).

Yet, while it does seem that lack of legal force limits the effectiveness of global goals, the opposite argument is also found in the literature. Serious questions have been raised, for instance, about the effectiveness of international environmental law (Kim and Bosselmann 2013) and the extent to which it affects state behaviour (Goldsmith and Posner 2005). Bodansky (2016) even argued that some merely political agreements – including the 2009 Copenhagen Accord – have had a greater influence on state behaviour than legal agreements. Proponents of goal-setting add here that its underlying premises differ substantially from those of rule-making (Young 2017: 34). Whereas rule-making creates indefinite behavioural prescriptions formulated as requirements and prohibitions for specified actors, goal-setting articulates time-bound aspirations, procedures and targets that need to rely on enthusiastic support among a wide range of actors to induce self-governance (Young 2017). The expectation of behavioural constraints that legally binding documents potentially create can even lead to pick-and-choose strategies among countries, resulting in many narrow agreements with only few parties that leave out important countries. The more flexible instrument of goal-setting, however – especially when it provides possibilities for the adaptation to national and local realities – might motivate all governments to make at least some contributions on sensitive topics (Zelli et al. 2010). For example, although the reduction of inequality between and within states was a bone of contention during the negotiations of the Sustainable Development Goals, all countries have in the end agreed to Goal 10 on inequality, including many highly hesitant parties such as the United States (Kamau, Chasek and O'Connor 2018: 184). This would not have been possible if that goal had been legally binding.

Another dimension of 'bindingness' is the precision with which goals are formulated. Although the Paris Agreement included non-legally binding Nationally Determined Contributions, its provisions are formulated in terms that do not create clear individual obligations (Bodansky 2016: 146). Also its provisions on adaptation and means of implementation lack the precision to create enforceable legal obligations (Bodansky 2016). An increasing number of legal norms and provisions can result in the progressive proliferation of normative ambiguity with little effect, whereas non-legally binding commitments might in some cases be more precise and effective (Victor, Raustalia and Skolnikoff 1998). This is what some argue could be the case with the non-binding but sometimes very precise indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Whether global goals as legally non-binding political agreements can have some effect will, hence, depend more on the detail and on additional elements that add alternative dimensions to bindingness that could enhance compliance (Bodansky 2016: 149). An important example is the extent to which accountability mechanisms are in place to support global goals, for instance through systems of transparency and review. In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Voluntary National Reviews provide such a system. Although it will still take more time for all governments to bring forward their Voluntary National Reviews, in the end these reports may have the potential to serve as a detection mechanism for poor performance. This again could raise the reputational cost of non-compliance. In addition, Voluntary National Reviews could help mobilize and empower domestic supporters and increase a sense of urgency among participants. In sum, with these mechanisms in place, the Sustainable Development Goals could have important effects despite their lack of legal standing.

Weak Institutional Arrangements

A second characteristic of governance through global goal-setting is that it needs to rely on weak institutional arrangements at the international level. By ‘weak’ arrangements, we mean that global goals do not rely on legal authority or on a formal status within the United Nations hierarchy. This also implies that they lack significant resources to execute their mandate and the capacity to create norms, resolve disputes and enforce compliance with further rules and regulations.

Generally, weak institutional arrangements are often associated with claims about the ineffectiveness of global governance that comes from inefficiency, the lack of an overall vision, duplication and conflicts between the mandates and activities of organizations, lack of implementation and enforcement and lack of adequate and predictable funding (Lodefalk and Whalley 2002; Elliott 2005; Biermann 2014). Such criticisms often coincide with negative views on governance fragmentation (Chapter 8). Many of the discussions regarding the institutional reform of the global architecture for earth system governance, for instance, revolve around an upgrade in authority of existing organizations or the establishment of an authoritative international organization dealing with the environment (Chapter 13).

Several authors, however, have framed weak institutional arrangements also as a possible way to deal with governance fragmentation. One such way is known as orchestration, a strategy closely linked to governance through goals. Orchestration relies not on legal authority and enforcement but rather on ‘soft modes of influence’ (Abbott et al. 2015: 223). Orchestrators gain influence through intermediary organizations and can steer actors in desired directions, typically through ‘bottom-up, non-confrontational, country-driven and stakeholder-oriented’ strategies

(Biermann, Kanie and Kim 2017: 27). Despite a lack of formal authority, orchestrators are believed to be able to exercise leadership, provided that they are considered as legitimate by intermediary and target organizations and that they are the key focal point and expert within their areas, which grants them political weight (Chapter 11).

A prime example of orchestration is the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which is responsible for the institutional oversight in formulating and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (Persson, Weitz and Nilsson 2016). The High-level Political Forum was established during the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, replacing the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development that was often seen as a mere ‘talk shop’ with no authority to make or facilitate formal decisions (Ivanova 2013: 219; see also Bernstein 2017). The High-level Political Forum did not gain much formal authority or resources compared to its predecessor (Abbott and Bernstein 2015).

Yet, despite these shortcomings, some scholars perceive the High-level Political Forum as rather influential. The Forum has been granted legitimacy through a formal resolution on its establishment; it has universal membership, high-level representation and participation of not only United Nations member states but also international organizations and non-state actors. The High-level Political Forum is hence regarded by some as a focal point for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level. It is a forum within the United Nations General Assembly, which may provide it with some political weight (Abbott and Bernstein 2015; Bernstein 2017). Though this points to a potential for success, the High-level Political Forum is bound to face challenges in exercising leadership within an architecture that is still characterized by fragmentation and partial competition among a plethora of international organizations that all work in the field of sustainable development.

In short, the jury is still out on whether weak institutional arrangements harm or help with the effectiveness of governance. While some see little promise in organizations with weak arrangements, others are more optimistic, provided that the right policy measures – such as purposeful orchestration strategies – are in place.

Inclusiveness

A third characteristic of governance though goals is the inclusion of a plurality of state and non-state actors in both goal formation and goal implementation. We distinguish here between procedural inclusiveness – that is, the openness of the process to a wide range of state and non-state actors – and substantial inclusiveness,

which relates to the broad range of targets of a given policy. Both dimensions of inclusiveness are related: procedural inclusiveness can shape substantial inclusiveness, because including a wider range of actors in the setting of goals can favour the establishment of goals with broader objectives.

In global goal-setting, the attention to inclusiveness is linked to the search for greater (input) legitimacy in global governance. This, again, relates to the concern of addressing democratic deficits in global governance that result from insufficient participation and accountability (Bäckstrand 2006a; Biermann and Gupta 2011; Keohane 2011; Gellers 2016). Some even see goal-based governance as a way to pursue what they call stakeholder democracy – a type of hybrid governance that responds to the argument that more deliberative input legitimacy results in greater output legitimacy and hence better governance results (Bäckstrand 2006b). Inclusiveness is generally viewed by proponents as a crucial step to more ‘reflexive’ forms of governance. Reflexivity is seen as a form of resilience and deliberation that embodies the institutional ability to be something else (as opposed to do something else) to effectively deal with changing circumstances (Voß and Kemp 2006; Dryzek 2014; Feindt and Weiland 2018). Also empirically, we observe since the 1990s a participatory turn in global governance that started with the Agenda 21 of 1992 and later evolved into the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, which led to a shift from ‘mere’ participation to multi-stakeholdership. New forms of hybrid governance emerged, including dialogues and public–private partnerships. These play important roles in the governance of sustainability issues (e.g., Glasbergen, Biermann and Mol 2007; Bitzer, Francken and Glasbergen 2008), regimes (Gupta and Vegelin 2016) and interactions between regimes (Visseren-Hamakers, Arts and Glasbergen 2011; Visseren-Hamakers and Verkooijen 2013), even though concerns about their actual effectiveness and equity effects remain.

These mechanisms have been criticized, for example, for lack of participation from marginalized groups, insufficient monitoring and reporting and the biased funding that is generated through strong private sector involvement (Bäckstrand 2006a; Biermann et al. 2012; Bäckstrand and Kylsäter 2014). Studies on the failure of some partnerships suggest, for example, the importance of clear links with intergovernmental organizations, as well as the existence of measurable targets, effective leadership and systematic reviews for the reporting and monitoring of targets (Bäckstrand 2006a; Bäckstrand and Kylsäter 2014; Pattberg and Widerberg 2016).

This importance of effectiveness and measurability has informed the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000: a very concise set of development goals, praised for their clarity and simplicity and hailed as a historic example of global mobilization to achieve important priorities (Sachs 2012; Solberg 2015).

And yet, the Millennium Development Goals have also faced sharp criticism with regard to their inclusiveness.

First, the Millennium Development Goals were aimed only at developing countries, with industrialized countries envisaged almost as tutors, reflecting a unidirectional and not very inclusive understanding of development (Deacon 2016). Procedurally, the earlier stages did reflect some inclusiveness, with the United Nations inviting input from non-state actors and eventually publishing ‘We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century’, which included a list of global values and priorities. However, the actual Millennium Declaration, and the extraction of the Millennium Development Goals from it, were largely based on input from the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, thereby attesting to the scarce inclusiveness of a supposedly global goal-setting process (Honniball and Spijkers 2014; Chasek et al. 2016). In addition, there has also been criticism about the strong emphasis of the Millennium Development Goals on measurability, which has caused a certain reductionism and may have led to the exclusion or marginalization of crucial qualitative elements of comprehensive development (Fukuda-Parr, Yamin and Greenstein 2014: 115). At the same time, the partnerships that were established around the Millennium Development Goals were criticized for their weak review mechanisms and performance measurements (Bäckstrand et al. 2012; Bernstein 2017).

Considering these deficits of the Millennium Development Goals, some have described the strong focus of the Sustainable Development Goals on inclusiveness as a transformative moment in development policy (Stevens and Kanie 2016). Unlike other UN goals, the Sustainable Development Goals emerged from a ‘mould-breaking’ negotiation process that involved the establishment of an Open Working Group, which, in line with the official aim to conduct an ‘inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders’ (United Nations General Assembly 2012: 63), strived to be as open and inclusive as possible. Unlike most United Nations General Assembly working groups, whose meetings are generally closed to observers and lack official and publicly available records, the Open Working Group pursued the full involvement of stakeholders and the gathering of expertise from civil society, the scientific community and the United Nations system. It actively reduced delegation rigidity and set up a stocktaking process – including meetings with civil society – aimed at providing all negotiators with the same terms of reference and at fostering a high level of cohesion and a common sense of purpose (Chasek and Wagner 2016). In this light, also noting the role played by UN agencies in the UN task force and by the wide consultations with civil society, some scholars have referred to this goal-setting as ‘global social governance’ (Deacon 2016: 118). Instrumental in the procedural success of the ‘largest development dialogue ever

held' (Solberg 2015: 61) has also been the experimental use of new technologies – such as the creation of a global questionnaire – in the consultation phase (Sachs 2012; Gellers 2016), with some scholars arguing that the very future of global participation lies in the application of information technologies (Honniball and Spijkers 2014).

Against this rather optimistic backdrop, however, more critical voices have pointed at some weaknesses in the inclusiveness in global goal-setting, even with the Sustainable Development Goals. First, there is a difference between inclusive invitation and inclusive participation (that is, actual influence on the final outcomes), with the process leading to the Sustainable Development Goals faring better in the former than in the latter (Deacon 2016; Gellers 2016). Second, the combined emphasis on growth (Gupta and Vegelin 2016) and on nationally determined commitments presents the risk of stifling inclusiveness at the later stages of goal implementation, in that it might incentivize a 'sovereignist' policymaking reversal away from the concern to improve global governance along 'social' lines (Deacon 2016: 129). Third, from a discursive standpoint, it has been pointed out that the Sustainable Development Goals do not constitute a major revolution vis-à-vis the overwhelmingly neoliberal narrative of the Millennium Development Goals. While the Sustainable Development Goals do include more references to Keynesian, feminist and 'world society' sustainability elements, they still retain an emphasis on neoliberal tenets such as economic growth. And they do not, as pointed out by critics, include any strong criticism of the existing global trade and financial architecture (Briant Carant 2017).

National Leeway

A fourth characteristic of governance through goal-setting is that it grants much leeway for national choices and preferences. While global goals provide a roadmap of what ought to be done, they remain subject to contestation, negotiation and translation at the national level (Fukuda-Parr 2014).

To start with, this again brings in concerns about the legitimacy, fairness and accountability of national goal implementation. For example, the inclusiveness with which the Sustainable Development Goals have been crafted at the global level would imply that such inclusiveness is also important for the implementation of the goals at national and subnational levels, but this is not always the case. So, the national leeway left in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals might result in less inclusiveness in some countries than was originally envisaged.

Second, should global goals be nationally implemented without adaptation to national circumstances, the results could be unfair outcomes (Easterly 2009; Fukuda-Parr 2014) and the omission of important priorities for inclusive and

equitable development (Kabeer 2010). If countries with different levels of development are held up to the same measures of performance – as was implicitly the case with the Millennium Development Goals – then the special conditions in the least developed countries would make it very difficult for them to meet the goals (Easterly 2009; Hailu and Tsukada 2011). African countries, for instance, have performed poorly in implementing the Millennium Development Goals despite having made significant progress in that period (Easterly 2009). Furthermore, the translation of the Millennium Declaration into an agenda for action has created a dissonance between the Goals' original intent and their implementation (Fukuda-Parr 2010). The Millennium Development Goals distilled complex development challenges into merely 21 quantitative targets, which affected how development was understood and how decisions were made (Fukuda-Parr 2014). Poverty, for example, was narrowly framed as material deprivation with little attention paid to inequality, and it therefore overlooked the multidimensional, intersectional causes of poverty such as race, gender and ethnicity (Kabeer 2010). Even though the Millennium Development Goals had established a clear and communicable focus, the subsequent measures of progress did not account for whether such progress was equitable or sustainable (Hill, Ghulam and Claudio 2010; Hulme 2010; Kabeer 2010).

Third, however, nationally owned strategies for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals might also foster greater accountability at national and other levels, through the development of appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Such mechanisms, including the national Sustainable Development Goals reports and the Voluntary National Reviews, provide important means through which states could reflect, confront and fill institutional gaps towards goal attainment. As a key feature of governance through global goal-setting, national leeway encourages self-regulation or self-steering (Fukuda-Parr 2014), the translation and adoption of goals into national policies and institutions (Galli et al. 2018) and more integrated institutional arrangements fit to address cross-sectoral issues and challenges. All of this can affect governance architectures discursively and materially.

However, while the Sustainable Development Goals somewhat remedy the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals, potential pitfalls remain. As Oran Young aptly states, '[i]t is relatively easy to establish a causal connection between the articulation of goals and the establishment of organizational arrangements to promote their attainment. It is another matter to demonstrate such a connection between goal-setting and actual progress toward fulfilling the relevant goals' (Young 2017: 37). Given the politics that animate development policy and practices across scales, there are risks of simplification and selectivity of goals through national implementation (Fukuda-Parr 2016). A recent analysis of Voluntary National Reviews indicates that various efforts are underway to

incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals across all levels of governance, from setting up new institutions and engaging with local governments to realigning national plans with the Sustainable Development Goals (Sarwar and Nicolai 2018). Yet very few governments clearly articulate how to execute their respective agendas or how to monitor and evaluate their progress (Sarwar and Nicolai 2018). This may result in ‘slippage in ambition and vision’ in the processes of moving from goals to targets to indicators, all of which guide the orientation of policies and institutions (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019: 12; see also Merry 2019). A study on Sustainable Development Goal 12 discusses the divergent framings of what sustainable production and consumption means and how to get there, arguing that quantitative indicators are vital to ensure accountability and avoid the continuation of ‘green growth’ trajectories that overlook planetary boundaries (Gasper, Shah and Tankha 2019). At the same time, quantification may lead to misleading or distorted information with significant policy implications (Merry 2019), leaving the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to adopt a pragmatic approach of ‘measuring what we know how to measure’, while addressing remaining challenges (Elder and Olsen 2019: 80).

Fourth, the national leeway might foster important learning processes within countries. Institutional integration requires much re-learning and must transpire through a multi-actor, multi-sector and multilevel process, providing new possibilities to engage with different types of knowledge (Meuleman and Niestroy 2015). For instance, the tendency to simplify global goals may be because of genuine operational challenges in formulating and implementing policies, which can reflect the multiplicity of linkages and foster integration among goals (Elder and Olsen 2019). Some indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals are still not based on established methodologies and standards, and some lack the required data for measurement (MacFeely 2019). Additionally, moving from sectoral to integrated approaches to goal implementation and measurement at the national level is challenging, given that many institutional structures are still arranged in silos (Elder and Olsen 2019). In sum, all these processes at the national level can facilitate social learning both within and across institutions, all in order to create policies that respond to local, national and global aspirations (Patel et al. 2017).

Governance through Goals and the Performance of Architectures

We now turn to the final question of whether global goals can affect global governance architectures, and under what circumstances. Drawing on the typology of fragmentation offered by Biermann and colleagues (2009; see also Chapter 8), we assess whether global goals can strengthen institutional integration and reduce overlaps between decision-making systems, limit norm conflicts and influence the

type of actor constellations, all possibly leading to less conflictive and more cooperative or synergistic fragmentation.

With regard to institutional integration, since goals are not legally binding and operate through weak institutional arrangements, their contribution to normative and institutional integration in global governance might seem limited. In the same vein, global goals do not offer much detail on how to reach the goals through specific policies or procedures. In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is left to states to develop their own strategy to achieve the goals. Self-steering is encouraged, which results in the development or adaptation of institutional arrangements at the national level by each state's own preference. Though there are clear benefits to this approach, it also implies – at the global level – that a variety of institutions emerges that are not necessarily integrated.

Yet global goals may still contribute to institutional integration despite their lack of formal authority. As goals can play an important role in creating overarching and crosscutting norms (Biermann, Kanie and Kim 2017), they may serve as a key soft law instrument to orchestrate international agreements and institutions (Kim and Bosselmann 2013; Bridgewater, Kim and Bosselmann 2014). In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, it has been argued that goals might spur clustering of the agreements within their own area and serve as an overarching set of principles, eventually modifying the application of other norms (Kim 2016). Indeed, it has been observed that the Sustainable Development Goals are already influencing international and national law, for example European trade and investment law (Huck and Kirkin 2018). In this respect, it seems that goals can indeed provide a tool for orchestration through normative guidance; their soft power can lead to more institutional integration in a fragmented system.

A second defining criterion of governance fragmentation is substantial norm conflicts between institutions. Again, global goals may be instrumental here in the creation of overarching norms, as long as broad support for the goals is present. In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, obtaining such broad support and legitimacy has been pursued by striving for broad inclusiveness in the establishment of the goals. It has been argued that inclusiveness is key to inform deliberative processes in which different participants develop well-informed opinions and 'productive tensions' to drive reflexive reforms (Dryzek and Pickering 2017: 354). This, in turn, could foster the emergence of more flexible and adaptive architectures and facilitate the emergence and consolidation of multilevel and multi-scalar governance solutions that follow principles of institutional variety, polycentricity and analytic deliberation (that is, inclusive dialogues) (Dietz et al. 2003: 1910). In the context of sustainable development, inclusiveness has already been singled out as a key component in the gradual relaxation of strictly sovereignist multilateralism towards what some see as more sustainable, more

participatory and less state-centric formats (Eckersley 2004; Bäckstrand 2006b). Global goals can thus be successful in working towards more synergistic types of fragmentation by reducing norm conflicts, as long as the goals themselves have broad support, which in turn can be achieved by an inclusive goal-setting process.

However, even when global goals offer a common vision, normative ambiguity remains. The Sustainable Development Goals, for example, have been criticized for not providing a clear vision on sustainability (Bernstein 2017). It has been argued that vague institutional elements, such as the ambition of achieving sustainability, coincide with synergistic fragmentation, while more concrete and substantive institutional elements that are necessary for the implementation of goals coincide with more conflictive fragmentation (Fernández-Blanco, Burns and Giessen 2019). Indeed, setting goals that are as numerous and broad as the Sustainable Development Goals is bound to lead to competition for priority (Young 2017). Tension between the goals exists in the form of trade-offs (Langford 2010; Bernstein 2017), and a common global vision on the integration of the goals is lacking (Yamada 2017). Several authors have therefore highlighted the importance of systems to manage priorities (Griggs et al. 2017) and called for prioritization of goals (Spangenberg 2017). Given that goals must consider national circumstances, leaving prioritization and integration to the individual states is a logical choice. However, the adoption of integrated analytical approaches and models at the national level is lagging, posing a considerable risk for continuation of the same ‘siloeed’ approach that has been criticized in the past (Allen, Metternicht and Wiedmann 2018), with conflicts remaining between different issue areas.

A third defining criterion of different degrees of fragmentation is overlapping actor constellations. Global goals can, again, help reduce fragmentation. Notably, the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 brought an unprecedented call for action from a plethora of stakeholders, including civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The involvement of such a multiplicity of actors at different scales leads to an increasingly polycentric system. Following a recent study by Jordan and colleagues (2018: 19), the effectiveness of such a polycentric system requires the presence of overarching rules or goals ‘to provide a means to settle disputes and reduce the level of discord between units to a manageable level’. Especially the private sector is becoming a strong political actor in such polycentric systems, and some UN agencies see its role in achieving sustainable development as indispensable (UNCTAD 2014). The UN Global Compact, for instance, is a key network created to encourage businesses to commit themselves to the Millennium Development Goals, and now the Sustainable Development Goals. So far, almost 10,000 companies have joined the Compact, thereby committing to a set of goals to conduct business that is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Global Compact

2019). The Sustainable Development Goals have even been called a ‘great gift for business’ for giving a clear set of long-term global priorities with which the private sector can align their strategies (Pedersen 2018). In this sense, global goals do offer guidance for a new group of actors to join the global governance system and commit to a same set of behavioural norms at the global level, perhaps steering towards more cooperative or synergistic governance fragmentation.

On the other hand, the involvement of the private sector in governing sustainable development has invoked sharp criticism as well. Large transnational companies, predominantly from Europe and the United States, have been able to represent their sectoral interests during the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (Scheyvens, Banks and Hughes 2016; Weber 2017) and have been given an active role in the form of public–private partnerships. Yet these public–private partnerships do not always lead to the desired results (Scheyvens, Banks and Hughes 2016). It has also been argued that the private sector is effectively pushing for its own corporate interests (Koehler 2015). Indeed, companies tend to engage with those goals that are most relevant to their own business interests (Abshagen et al. 2018), focusing more on ‘doing no harm’ than on ‘doing good’ (van Zanten and van Tulder 2018). Some observe also a lack of attention by business actors for those goals that are predominantly relating to environmental sustainability (Poddar, Narula and Zutshi 2019).

Taking all this together, it seems possible that goals offer an overarching set of norms, leading to more normative agreement and institutional integration, be it through soft modes of governance or orchestration. On the other hand, the involvement of particularly powerful private actors and the cherry-picking of goals could also lead to the strengthening of specific complexes around certain goals and not others. This would then result in a more modular global governance architecture, where synergistic fragmentation is present within specific complexes, but cooperative or even conflictive fragmentation is present between complexes.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Global governance through goal-setting, as an increasingly influential mechanism of global governance, poses important questions for academic research and policy analysis. For example, we need to better understand how, to what extent and with what effects global goals and their norms are embedded and integrated in existing governance arrangements at global, national and local levels. Also, what further governance reforms are needed to implement and reach the goals at various levels? The concept of orchestration in global governance constitutes an important new research area as well, focusing for example on the extent to which ‘powerless’

steering may have powerful effects on actors' behaviour (Chapter 11; see also Abbott et al. 2015).

Another important research question is to what extent and how the rhetoric of integration and policy coherence between the Sustainable Development Goals takes shape in governance arrangements at national and subnational levels. While the Sustainable Development Goals are meant to be indivisible and implemented coherently, unavoidable trade-offs and prioritization between goals need to be dealt with at the national and subnational levels. The question is then how the often-siloed national and subnational governance arrangements give shape to the Sustainable Development Goals, who is involved in prioritizing the goals and whether and how the rhetoric of this process of 'leaving no one behind' is being realized.

As a form of governance through goals, the Sustainable Development Goals show a level of ambition and comprehensiveness that surpasses all other forms of governance through goals. This makes them 'one of the most intriguing new global initiatives in sustainable development and environmental policy' (Biermann, Kanie and Kim 2017: 29). Governance through goals as a mechanism of global governance is not likely to disappear, nor is it likely to become less dominant with the termination of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It will therefore remain of utmost importance, both for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and for any future effort of global goal-setting, to continue critical examination of the various effects of global goals at the global, national and subnational levels.

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