

**"Processes of Autonomization in/of International Organizations
– the case of the World Trade Organization (WTO)"¹**

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1. Introduction

"We are born in organizations, educated in organizations, and most of us spend much of our working lives in organizations. We spend much of our leisure time paying, playing and praying in organizations. Most of us will die in an organization, and when the time comes for burial, the largest organizations of all – the state – must grant official permission." (Etzioni 1964: 2).

Amitai Etzioni states in the beginning of "Modern Organizations" that we are living in an *organizational society*. He concludes that organizations seem to be omnipresent in people's life (Etzioni 1964: 2). Some scholars in IR could argue that the Etzioni's statement proves true for international organizations (IOs²) in international/world society, too – in particular so called Global Governance approaches. By observing IOs one can conclude that they are receiving increasingly importance in I/international R/relations. Not because of their number (Wallace and Singer 1970) or the number of states becoming members of an IO (Rochester 1986; Archer 2001; Rittberger and Zangl 2003) but for the changing role and function of IOs in international relations (Barnett and Finnemore 2002). IOs take over more and more duties and responsibilities for their member states in nearly all fields of international political cooperation. Their function is no longer limited to facilitate cooperation between member states. To the contrary, IOs built up an international order for states.

Since their very first establishment until today, IOs were created to facilitate cooperation between states. In the beginning of the 'IO era', IOs were created as instruments for states with a particular focus. But if we look on IOs today, many of them have a much broader action frame. They deal with different issues in various contexts and are responsible for tasks they were primarily not designed for. These functions do not merely facilitate interstate cooperation but allow IOs to generate certain norms and rules, distribute and enforce them, monitor states and sometimes sanction them if they do not obey an accepted norm. In this sense, IOs become gradually independent from member states although most of them were once created as their means³. They are establishing a certain level of global order that has consequences for member states behaviour (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Karns and Mingst 2004). As one result of this process IOs become actors in their own rights, they begin to live a life of their own, follow *their* own agendas and fulfil *their* organizational tasks (Ness and Brechin 1988; Pentland 1989; Barnett and Finnemore 1999).

The paper suggests using the notion *autonomization* as a label for such processes. Autonomization is defined as a process in which IOs become gradually more independent

² Although the notion "international organization" is a generic term for many different forms of organizations (international non-governmental and governmental organizations, trans-national profit and non-profit organizations, business international non-governmental organizations and many more) it is used here only in terms of international governmental organizations.

³ Exemption are in general courts of justice like the International Criminal Court founded in 2002.

from their member states and are able to make decisions by their own and (to a certain extent) to exert some pressure on member states to follow rules and accepted norms. Although, these observations are often made in empirical studies a theoretical concept being able to describe *how* autonomization of IOs could be explained is mostly missing. Therefore the conceptualization of IOs is fuzzy and there seem to be black boxes when it comes to processes of autonomization.

This paper addresses this problem. It argues that IR approaches cannot grasp this problem because they focus too narrowly on states or state-IO-relations and fail to conceptualize IOs as actors in their own rights. Therefore the paper suggests to analyze IOs as *organizations* in a sociological sense and to fill the gap in IR by approaches from organizational studies. The paper is divided in five sections. The first section exemplifies autonomization processes in IOs and concentrates mainly on the GATT/WTO. The second part deals with theoretical concepts of IOs in IR. In particular it focuses on IOs as actors in Global Governance approaches and shows why these approaches cannot fully grasp the status of IOs as actors. Even the perception of IOs as bureaucracies has some shortcomings to analyse IOs in their own rights. The third section concentrates on Organization Studies and describes how they can benefit and what organizational approaches are most adequate for the problem. Afterwards the concept of an organization will be described briefly and the preliminary theoretical insights of the foregoing chapters will be translated and applied to IOs. The paper concentrates on the notions of membership and environment and draws some primarily conclusions on the interrelation between IOs and their environment. Here the WTO will be used to illustrate the conceptual benefits. The fourth part offers a theoretical approach how autonomization can be analyzed and in the fifth section the preliminary insights will be concluded.

2. IOs - From Interstate Cooperation to Managing International Relations

Since their establishment⁴, IOs were created to facilitate cooperation between states in a particular issue area. Mainly, IOs dealt at the interface between states and try to generate rules and norms so that states can deal with each other on the issue. In the beginning of the "IO era", IOs were created as instruments for states. States were the only members of an IO and

⁴ It is not easy to mark a starting point for IOs. The general starting point for states foundation is the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1618) and the Westphalian Peace in 1648. Sovereign states were founded but contacts between states were either belligerent or – if peacefully – existed merely on a merchant base or in an exchange of occasional envoys. Interstate cooperation started after the Congress of Vienna and the foundation of International Commission on the Elbe (1821) – one of the Rhine in 1831 and one of the Danube in 1856 – to manage the free navigation of these rivers. These commissions weren't under control of particular nation states but independent (Woolf 1916: 373). The idea of establishing a group of experts and administrators carrying out particular functions on behalf of states was taken further by the International Telegraphic Bureau in 1868, later named International Telegraphic Union (Archer 2001: 11).

the only relevant actors in international relations. They used IOs as means and occasions to meet other delegates and to negotiate contracts (Archer 2001: 3-30). If we look on IOs today, many of them have a much broader action frame. They deal with different issues in various contexts and are responsible for tasks they were primarily not designed for. These functions do not merely facilitate interstate cooperation but allow IOs to generate certain norms and rules that become binding for states. In this context, IOs become gradually independent from member states although they once created IOs as their means. The paper defines these processes as autonomization.

Such processes can be detected in many IOs. This general observation will be exemplified in the following section before starting the theoretical considerations. The WTO/GATT system is a good example because it started as a treaty and developed over time to one of the most important IOs having great effects on international trade.

The GATT was constituted in 1947 by 23 member states in order to lower trade barriers and to enhance free trade between states. The member states looked for an *instrument* being conducive to free trade without limiting states' sovereignty. At the beginning, GATT was not more than a treaty containing certain principles and the intention to reduce trade impediments between states.⁵ Even though, it was planned to build an International Trade Organization (ITO) as the logical completion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. But at the end of the day, the member states (in particular the USA) decided not to build an IO with rule-making competences because those rules could become binding for states and could limit states' sovereignty (International Organization 1947; Irwin 1995: 323-325; Krueger 1998).⁶ In the following trade rounds the tariffs were lowered⁷ and non-tariff-measures were eliminated so that as a result international trade increased⁸. In the Uruguay Round (1986-94) the members showed the will to tackle some failings of the former GATT system that became obvious in former rounds. The GATT was perceived as "a system characterised by legal uncertainty and political weakness" (Winham 1998: 353). The member states agreed that, because of the high degree of interdependence between states (Jackson

⁵ In the introduction chapter of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1947) one can find the following formulation " by entering into reciprocal and mutually advantageous *arrangements* directed to the substantial reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade and to the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international commerce, have *through their Representatives agreed* [...]" (GATT 1947). This formulation approves that the GATT was a label for those aspects agreed upon their member states. At this time, the GATT was not more than a bilateral treaty to reduce trade impediments.

⁶ The ITO failed because the US Congress didn't support the project to build an international trade organization with *actor-competence*. Many other states bounded their ratification on the decision of US and as a consequence the ITO collapsed before it was established (Ott 1997: 5 et sqq.).

⁷ The average tax for industry goods was in 1947 at 40% and went down to 4% at the end of the Uruguay Round in 1994.

⁸ The average merchandise export grows 6% per year and the overall trade volume was in 1997 17 times higher compared to 1950 (World Trade Organization 2003: 11f.). The success of the GATT/WTO system is still lasting, "[i]n 2004, the world economy recorded its strongest growth in more than a decade [...] World GDP grew by 4 per cent and world merchandise trade rose by 9 per cent in real terms." (World Trade Organization 2005: 2).

1990; Krueger 1998; Jackson, Davey et al. 2002), they needed a more powerful organization to monitor trade agreements and to settle disputes between members (Jackson 1990). At the end of the Uruguay Round the WTO was founded and began its life on 1 January 1995; however it was not planned to found an organization rather to strengthen the GATT system (Krueger 1998: 1-4).

The WTO was established – in terms of international law (see Chapter 3) – as an international organization founded on a treaty base with organs, an independent secretariat, and specific functions for its member states. The legal personality of the WTO derives from its function to develop, maintain, and monitor trade rules agreed upon their members and settle trade disputes between them (White 1996: 27-55; World Trade Organization 2003: 9-21; Klein 2004). Therefore, the mechanisms of the WTO were completed compared to the former GATT system. Besides continuing trade liberalization (i.e. reduction of tariffs and non-tariff measures) a Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) was developed to monitor member states' trade policy (World Trade Organization 2003: 53 et sqq.) and an advanced Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) was established to provide an instrument for conflicting states to settle bilateral trade disputes in order to prevent tariff wars and economic crisis in the long run (World Trade Organization 2003: 55 et sqq.).⁹ These mechanisms foster the WTO as an important step "toward a more rule-oriented system" that will allow "better adjustment of frictions between nation-states, as well as greater predictability and reliability for entrepreneurs" (Jackson 1998: 175). Contrary to the weaker GATT, the WTO has the capability and the means to maintain, monitor and enforce trade rules and norms. Therefore the WTO could be perceived as an *actor* embodying a sort of supranational order, i.e. world trade order that helps to reduce the anarchy between states by establishing clearly framed patterns of states' behaviour.

This sketched development is even more astonishing because the GATT was designed as an instrument for member states interest. It was not intended to establish an organization on a quasi supranational level authorized to monitor member states' trade policy, in fact, this was one crucial reason why the 23 member states in the beginning did not agree to found the ITO.

This development from an instrument to an actor in international relations is not solely an anomaly of the GATT/WTO system but can be observed in other IOs as well. Martin (2003) stated that the IMF developed from a "set of rules regulating member-states behavior" (Martin 2003: 1) to an independent IO because more authority is delegated to the IMF and its staffs. She used a principal-agent approach to show that the IMF was formerly used as an agent for member states' (as principals) interests. In order to carry out its work efficiently, various

⁹ In this respect the Asia Crisis in 1997/98 was a touchstone for the international trade regime and the WTO. Contrary to the 1930's economic crisis, states didn't establish trade barriers to stop market access for cheap export goods from Southeast Asia. The states – also states in Southeast Asia – complied with WTO rules and avoided the outbreak of an economic world crisis (Irwin 1995; Felke 1999).

functions are delegated to the IMF staffs who gain more autonomy in particular regarding distributional conflicts, data collection, information processing and distribution (Martin 2003: 41 et sqq.). Nielson and Thierry (2003) found out that the World Bank began to follow its own agenda in the 1980's. This agenda ran contrary to the policies of its member states – in particular concerning their environmental policy (Nielson and Tierney 2003: 241f).¹⁰ Furthermore, Pollack analyzed the capabilities of the European Commission and the European Court of Justice as a supranational agency that "can be seen as a function of the efficacy and credibility of the control mechanisms established by the member states to monitor and sanction agency activity" (Pollack 1997: 129). In particular, the European Commission is often conceptualized as a supranational body that generates European policy (Edwards and Spence 1997: 3f) and embodies a "watchdog" for the implementation of accepted rules and agreements (Nugent 2002: 153).

Against this background it could be summarized that IOs have become important actors in international relations establishing to a certain level of order for nation states behaviour. This issue is central to theoretical approaches in IR and received increasingly importance in discussions about global governance since the 1990's.

3. IOs in IR: Instruments becoming actors

Although, there is no commonly accepted definition in International Law about IOs, most approaches in IR define them as "an association of States, established by agreement among its members and possessing a permanent system of set of organs, whose task it is to pursue objectives of common interest by means of co-operation among its members" (Virally 1981: 15). Others rather describe than define IOs by using the characteristics of the Union of International Association, i.e. IOs are

- "a. being based on a formal instrument of agreement between the governments of nation states;
- b. including three or more nation states as parties to the agreement;
- c. possessing a permanent secretariat performing ongoing tasks."¹¹

(Union of International Associations 2005)

These IO-definitions concentrate on the formal relation between states on the one hand and on formal criteria of IOs on the other (like the minimum number of states being a member of an IO). They do define the *international* but not the *organizational character* of IOs. Or they

¹⁰ As a consequence, the member states impede to reject the financial support of the World Bank (Nielson and Tierney 2003).

¹¹ The term "formal instrument" means an agreement that is signed by states (Union of International Associations 2005).

just conceive the *organizational character* in a trivial sense that states *organize* their actions and interactions.

With this preliminary observation in mind the paper discusses first the three main metaphors which are applied to IOs, i.e. instruments, arenas and actors (Pentland 1989; Archer 2001; Rittberger and Zangl 2003). Thereafter, the paper extends the usual metaphors by referring to IOs as bureaucracies and in the last step reflects on their usefulness.

IOs as instruments

As instruments IOs are perceived as functioning for states or carrying out certain tasks for them. This instrumental perspective can be found in realistic and neo-realistic approaches. In fact, those approaches do not pay much attention to IOs. States are conceptualized as being the one and only actors in the international realm following their preferences while acting in an environment characterised by anarchy where states try to enlarge their power and security in comparison to other states. In this respect, IOs are important only insofar as they offer opportunities for states to enforce their interests. Thus, IOs are conceived—by (Neo-)Realists—as operative tools for states, these "institutions largely mirror the distribution of power in the system" (Mearsheimer 1994-1995: 13). That means IOs as such have no power or even influence on states; quite to the contrary, "the most powerful states in the system create and shape institutions so that they can maintain their share of world power, or even increase it." (Mearsheimer 1994-1995: 13).¹²

IOs as arenas

As arenas, IOs offer a forum for states to find agreements. Therefore IOs shape an administrative frame for negotiations (i.e. venue, organizational procedures, agenda-setting etc.) that facilitates an achievement of agreements between states. This perception is shared by neo-institutional approaches. Although neo-institutional approaches share the presumptions of neo-realistic approaches, they believe that cooperation between states can be stable and enduring. States are regarded as key actors in a growing interdependent and interconnected environment that is characterized as unstable and dynamic. In this respect, IOs can be useful vehicles to coordinate the interstate collaboration and help states to solve common problems leading to better results than acting in a non-cooperative manner. In the long run IOs contribute to peaceful coexistence of states by reducing uncertainty and complexity in international relations.

Although neo-institutional approaches assume that IOs can operate as actors in the international system, e.g. by monitoring and sanctioning states' behaviour (Keohane and Nye

¹² The instrumental metaphor of IOs can also be found in Marxist approaches. Marxist approaches perceive that the basic division of the world isn't the division in states but in classes – in particular the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Against this background IOs are perceived as means for the world's bourgeoisie to suppress and exploit the proletariat (Berki 1971).

1972; Krasner 1995), they don't accredit IOs with a similar quality of autonomy in comparison to states; in fact, these decisions are still made by states—and solely by states—under the roof of an IO. In other words, states create mechanisms of self-evaluating and sanctioning through IOs but do not establish IOs as actors decoupled from member states decisions.

IOs as actors

Concerning this metaphor, IOs are perceived as actors on the international stage, but the part they act is disputable. One regards IOs as supporting actors while others perceive them as protagonists.

The role of IOs as supporting actors is pointed out in principal-agent-models. Those are dealing with the question how states (as principals) can use IOs (as agents) to deal with interstate problems. In this concept, states delegate tasks to IOs which they are not able or willing to fulfil themselves. "In this framework, member governments establish the goals that IOs will pursue and then allow the IO to pursue those goals with little interference most of the time. Generally, IOs should be observed to act "on their own"" (Nielson and Tierney 2003: 245). But principal-agent-models only marginally deal with the problem if the agents are not acting the way their creators intended but follow their own agendas. If IOs do not behave the way their creators intend principal-agent-models scrutinize the tools principals can employ "to rein errant behaviour by IO agents" (Nielson and Tierney 2003: 242). In this respect Nielson and Tierney identify four tools of states, "to help them design self-enforcing contracts and thus mitigate agency slippage" (Nielson and Tierney 2003): screening and selection of members, monitoring of IOs decisions, generating procedural checks and balances within the IO or finally, principals negotiate new "contracts" with IO personnel, requiring modified behavior (Nielson and Tierney 2003: 249ff).¹³ Such a theoretical understanding underlines that IOs can gain autonomy through delegation but IO's autonomy is seen as defective and deviant from expected behavior. Therefore, principal-agent approaches analyse the possibilities and means states have or can apply to ensure that IOs act the way they intend.

As protagonists on an international stage IOs are perceived in Global Governance approaches. These approaches are based on the assumption that, because of a growing number of interstate linkages, it becomes necessary to develop, maintain and implement accepted norms and standards on a global scale. In this respect, Global Governance studies perceive IOs either as persecutors of a global order or at least as an indicator for a structure of global order that proceeds. The raising number of international problems that could not be solved by only one state is seen as a major challenge on the one hand and as a proof for the need of international

¹³ The crucial point is that even if states delegate only particular problems to an IO, it could achieve at least to this degree autonomy. Hence, an IO could carry out certain decisions by its own and becomes in a limited but nevertheless important way an actor in international relations (Hamlet 2003).

concerted action on the other (Commission for Global Governance 1995: 370). The interdependency between states becomes most obvious at the interface between economy and politics. At this point the density of institutional arrangements – i.e. IOs like the IMF, World Bank, WTO – to generate global order is most comprehensive and advanced (Mürle 1998; Nuscheler 2002; Slaughter 2003).

The character of IOs in Global Governance approaches varies and is often linked to the notion of norms¹⁴. Constructivist approaches take the meaning of norms serious. While neo-realistic and neo-institutional approaches are based on similar assumptions about the international system, these assumptions are challenged by constructivist approaches (Wendt 1992: 394f.). The main constructivist idea is that reality cannot be regarded from an impartial observers view. Reality is always constructed and depends on the observer's point of view (Uhlert 2003: 391). Constructivist approaches propose that actors are not self-interested and self-serving but orient their behaviour towards logics of appropriateness, i.e. states align their action alongside shared values and norms.¹⁵ Constructivist approaches emphasize a two-sided role of IOs. On the one hand IOs (perceived as arenas) institutionalize and maintain norms. On the other hand IOs (perceived as actors) act gradually independently and contribute to enforce or create norms that shape behavioural patterns for states. These two interrelated but distinct features will be depicted in greater detail subsequently.

As an arena, IOs may be understood as a stage for (international) non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs can use this *stage* to challenge member states—the protagonists onstage—to adhere to the IOs norms and rules they formally accept but in fact sometimes violate. In doing so, NGOs can informally accuse those states disobeying IOs norms and rules. This procedure might exert pressure on rule-breaking states because they could be accused by NGOs while other members are present. This opportunity provides NGOs a certain degree of power and forces states to adhere IOs principles (Katzenstein 1996: 19ff; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Joachim 2001). Furthermore, NGOs can contribute to establish certain rules in IOs because they pretend to be the "good guys" representing values or higher principles and do not act self-interested. This particular opportunity provides NGOs some *moral power*¹⁶ which makes it sometimes difficult for states to counteract. Beside NGOs epistemic communities and advocacy networks can use IOs in a similar way. Their success in

¹⁴ Here norms will be defined as "shared expectations about appropriate behavior held by a community of actors. Unlike ideas which may be held privately, norms are shared and social; they are not just subjective but intersubjective." (Finnemore 1996: 22). This does not require that norms are legally binding or can be sanctioned. It is decisive that norms are shared expectations about what adequate behavior is and what is not.

¹⁵ These shared perceptions about norms and values design an ideal structure in international relations which will be underpinned by those aligning to these norms (Kratochwil 1991; Ruggie 1998), meaning states are influenced by a structure which they corroborate and enforce by accepting and implementing (Wendt 1987).

¹⁶ The notion stems from the four forms of authority Barnett und Finnemore define in their concepts of authority asserted by IOs (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 20ff).

implementing norms through IOs depends – similar to NGOs – on their espoused impartiality and neutrality (Sikkink 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998).¹⁷

More important for the papers purpose are IOs as actors. In this respect, IOs act as norm entrepreneurs, they maintain and enforce norms, they contribute to norm diffusion, in some cases they monitor states by implementing norms or in rarely particular cases sanctioning non-conform states behaviour. In addition to those functions relating to norms, IOs act as experts, as organs for legitimating or as dispute settlement actors in international relations. Below, these different forms will be characterized and exemplified briefly.

Norm entrepreneurs

As norm entrepreneurs IOs generate a pattern for shared expectations about behavior in international relations. These expectations establish an action frame for states. An example is the World Bank giving concrete instructions to lending states how to prepare and carry out development programs in order to reduce poverty. The re-definition of poverty in the 1960's by the McNamara administration is a good example for the relevance of norms. After applying the concept of poverty to people in countries rather than to countries as such the World Bank concentrated on development programs and projects to support poor people in cities or rural areas. The World Banks reformulation of poverty won recognition in member states and became part of national development strategies (Ayres 1981; Ayres 1983). Another prominent example is the World Bank strategy to deal in credits only if lending states improve their good governance by fighting against corruption. In this respect the World Bank cooperates with a couple of INGOs to discuss strategies to fight against corruption (Marquette 2003; World Bank 2006).

Norm Diffusion

IOs have the ability to distribute norms and assist states implementing them. That means they can act as "teachers" of norms (Finnemore 1993). In this regard, Finnemore describes how the UNESCO ""taught" states the value and utility of science policy organizations" (Finnemore 1996: 36) or how the International Red Cross worked on the general acceptance of "standards of treatment and neutrality status for non-combatants, particularly the wounded and medical personnel" (Finnemore 1993; Finnemore 1996: 70).

A general model of international norm dynamics is been developed by Finnemore and Sikkink who differentiate a three-step process of norm emergence, norm cascade and internalization. In this model, IOs are central actors of norm cascade and diffusion because they are seen as impartial and accountable actors and give international norms the stamp of credence (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

¹⁷ Against this background, Kennedy emphasizes the role and power of professionals and legal experts managing norms and institutions and producing, verifying and altering them (Kennedy 2005).

Monitoring

In some cases IOs monitor states whether they internalize the norms or not. They report their results to their members who decide what actions to undertake if a state does not fully implement or follow global norms.¹⁸ An example would be the WTO that has a special monitoring mechanism for states trade policy (Trade Policy Review Mechanism). Another example is the International Atom Energy Agency (IAEA) that monitors states which have accepted to follow the agreement of not using nuclear energy for nuclear weapons (Quester 1970; o.V. 2005).

Sanctioning

Sanctioning competences are rarely appointed to IOs. Sanctions are institutionalized as punishments for the disobedience of a state. In general sanctions constitute the ultima ratio to compel a state to follow the accepted norm. "Legal sanctions constitute the reaction of the legal community as a moral sanction, legal sanctions are socially organized measures; [...] they are applied against or without the will of the person (or the state, MK) against whom they are directed; they are, finally, to be applied by physical force, if necessary." (Kunz 1960: 324). A prominent example is the EU that sanctions states if they fail to keep their new indebtedness below 3%.

Expert

IOs role as an expert is an often mentioned core functions of IOs. They are conceived as producers of reliable data and information. States need information in order to reduce uncertainty and equivocality and make decisions on informative grounds (Keohane 1984). But IOs are not just 'machines' producing data and information. In fact, they are experts for certain issues and can even act as advisors or consultants and in particular cases they can engage in developing options for concerted states' action (Schemeil 2004).

Legitimization

The legitimization function of IOs is already mentioned by Claude in the 1960s. Claude argues that states call the UN in cases in which decisions are not easy to make or if decisions need an explanation or justification. Concerning the UN, Claude proposed that the "collective legitimization has emerged as one of its major political functions". She explained that states use the UN "as a dispenser of politically significant approval and disapproval of the claims, policies, and actions of states" (Claude 1966: 367).

Dispute Settlement

¹⁸ Still, such an understanding suggests that states monitor themselves and their partners via IOs. IOs are just the "watchdogs" that bark but not the dogs that bite.

The dispute settlement ability of IOs can be generated from its function to act as a broker in interstate cooperation. But instead of mediating between states some IOs have a special dispute settlement function and accordant organs. A prominent case is the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM). Although it is no sanctioning institution, it helps states to settle their trade conflicts. In so doing, the DSM suggests certain measures to compensate costs if a state violates accepted trade rules and for examples allows subventions. A decisive advantage of the DSM is that it offers concrete measures to settle the dispute. By so doing the Dispute Settlement Body—which is an independent judging third party—legitimizes certain actions (De Bièvre 2004; De Bièvre 2006).¹⁹

Intermediate Conclusion

In sum it can be concluded that the metaphors of IOs and the approaches sketched above concentrate mainly on the relationship between states and IOs and analyze to what extent the one could exert influence on the behaviour of the other and vice versa. Most studies in IR assume states as being dominant actors. IOs are only created to assist states and to tackle international problems. They are means to reduce transaction costs by establishing different procedures (e.g. general meetings, consultation processes, etc.) and providing relevant information for states' decisions. Constructivists take the power of norms seriously and analyze how states are affected by those norms. But although constructivists point out the power of IOs and their various possibilities to influence states, they concentrate on IO-state relations.²⁰

This concentration on states respectively state-IO relations obstructs the view on IOs as purposeful actors. In order to explain how IOs become partially independent actors, IOs have to be analyzed as organizations with certain interest and agendas on the one hand and as multiple entities embedded in and influenced by a wider context on the other. But this perspective is not covered by IR approaches. Therefore, theoretical perspective from organizational sociology should be applied to adjust the focus on IOs rather than on state-IO relations.

IOs as bureaucracies

To use insights from organizational studies in IR is not totally new. Keohane for example started to use organizational concepts from institutional economy and emphasized that IOs

¹⁹ An important indicator of the success of the DSM under the WTO is the number of cases dealt with that about 2-3 times higher than the number of cases under the GATT system (Jackson 1998: 165). Furthermore the DSM (in the WTO) is not just a mechanism for the USA, the EU, Japan or other economic power, it is also used by developing countries that accuse other states of unfair economic practices (Jackson 1998: 165f). In addition DSM generates publicity having thus an impact on every member state of the WTO because every state wants "to avoid their nation from being "branded" as a rule breaker" (Jackson 1998: 175).

²⁰ This conclusion can first be drawn from IO definitions in international law and is still true for theoretical approaches in IR.

can contribute to reduce transaction costs in interstate co-operations (Keohane 1984). Nielson and Tierney using in their principal-agent approach a theory of the firm to explain delegation from states to IOs. They discuss various opportunities and means for states to take control of IOs (Nielson and Tierney 2003).

Ness and Brechin were the first who tried to bridge the gap between IR and Organization Studies. They conceptualize IOs as *organizations* in international relations and not just as instruments, arenas, or actors. IOs are "live collectivities interacting with their environments, and they contain members who seek to use the organization for their own ends, often struggling with others over the organizational character" (Ness and Brechin 1988: 247). Therefore, Ness and Brechin apply sociological insights from organization studies by referring to central features of organizations developed by Scott to scrutinize the performance of IOs – in particular their efficiency and effectiveness (Ness and Brechin 1988).

Probably the most elaborated theoretical concept to analyse IOs as actors is developed by Barnett and Finnemore. Against the background of their study on the power and pathologies of IOs in 1999, they published a book in 2004 "to understand better why IOs behave as they do" (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 2). They focus on IOs as bureaucracies in a Weberian sense and ask how they gain authority and how they use their power. Barnett and Finnemore elaborate four different forms of IOs authority—rational-legal, delegated, moral, and expertise—and illustrate their concept of authority by analyzing the IMF, the UNHCR and the UN.

They exemplify that how the IMF has risen to a powerful organization (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 45-72). It was originally designed to serve the interests of member states but instead developed by its expertise authority, e.g. its technical advices, knowledge in economic affairs and conditional programs, to a gradually independent organization (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 45-72).

The UNHCR, established in 1951 with an expected life span of three years, evolved from an entirely dependent organization to an organization being able "to capitalize on world events and use its authority to greatly expand both the groups of people it assisted and the kinds of assistance it could give" (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 73). The UNHCR's authority consists of delegated authority, e.g. by helping states to carry out specific tasks of coordinating state-obligations under the Refugee Convention, and their moral authority derived from its mission to help and protect refugees (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 73-120).²¹

The UN's authority derives from their impartiality and neutrality to act as a broker in conflicts. The UN and its peacekeeping culture are used as examples of pathologies in IOs. Barnett and Finnemore show how specific organizational cultures that favour non-

²¹ The delegated and moral authority of the UNHCR can also be seen in their ability to lay down the definition of a "refugee". This definition has become a common accepted notion across nation states that is used internationally and shapes national law (Barnett and Finnemore 1999).

intervention and the cooperation with conflicting parties made the genocide in Rwanda possible or at least impeded an intervention of UN peacekeeping forces. In Rwanda, the UN defined the violence as a civil war in the sense that one could observe reciprocal clashes between the two ethnic groups. Because of the characterization as a civil war, the UN had no basis for involvement under peacekeeping rules. As a consequence, the UN rejected intervention even in the face of mass killings (Barnett 1997; Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 121-155).²²

Against this background, Barnett and Finnemore assert that the power of IOs derives from their authority, their knowledge, and the rules to regulate international relations and constitute a global regulation structure. Barnett and Finnemore (2004) identify three related mechanisms: "IOs (1) classify the world, creating categories of problems, actors, and action; (2) fix meanings in the social world; and (3) articulate and diffuse new norms and rules" (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 31). These mechanisms can have regulative and constitutive effects (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 29-34).

Although the studies and approaches offer some great insights and describe how IR profit from Organizational Studies concerning the study of IOs, they do not create a theoretical concept that explains autonomization processes in/of IOs. Either the approaches use only basic notions from Organizational Studies and translate these notions to IOs without offering a theoretical concept (Ness and Brechin 1988; Barnett and Finnemore 1999) or they provide a conceptual approach to study the authority and power of IO-bureaucracies (Barnett and Finnemore 2004) but limit their perception to IOs as bureaucracies. Barnett and Finnemore present a helpful approach of bureaucracy's authority and explain how IOs as bureaucracies can affect states' outputs and their behaviour. But this approach is not entirely useful to study autonomization processes for at least three reasons.

First, by conceptualizing IOs as bureaucracies, i.e. the secretariat or other independent organs in IOs, Barnett and Finnemore tend to neglect that most IOs have member states—as the notion suggests indeed—as their *core members*. These members are deeply involved in IOs—for example in financing them, accrediting their budgets, or delivering vital equipment. Many IOs are consisting of organs with member states representatives. That means the interrelation between the different sub-organizations is more complex and not just explainable by focusing on bureaucracy alone. However, bureaucracies are important and occupy central positions in IOs (Cox and Jacobson 1973; Cox 1999).

²² This example is worthwhile insofar, as it shows that IO-autonomization does not imply that international problems are solved better or even dealt with more appropriate.

Second, although Barnett and Finnemore deal with the power of IOs they mainly focus on IOs authority. To behave as a bureaucracy is the basic source for IOs power.²³ Their basic characteristics (hierarchy, continuity, impersonality, and expertise) and their concentration on rules and procedures—applying Max Weber (Weber 1990)—is the basis of IOs power. But if so, the central question is why IOs are dealing with issues they are formally not responsible for. Furthermore it is debateable, if there can be any autonomization process at all because IOs as bureaucracies execute their authorities but are not eager to apply for further tasks. In a Weberian sense, bureaucracies serve the goals they are designed for. But this is in fact that kind of understanding Barnett and Finnemore are antagonizing.

Third, Barnett and Finnemore neglect the relevance of the environment in which an IO is imbedded. As organizations, IOs are interacting in and with different environments consisting of various actors, that means for example beside (member) states, other IOs, (international) NGOs, epistemic communities among others. Constructing IOs and environment as counterparts is a useful theoretical construct to overcome the conceptual narrowing of state-IO relations.

Once again, of course, there are some empirical case studies where IOs are scrutinized and the subjects above are discussed. And as a by-product, those empirical case studies come to the conclusion that some IOs behave and act in ways not intended by their creators (Henry, Lingard et al. 2001; Martin 2003; Nielson and Tierney 2003). But in spite of those empirical findings, a theoretical framework to examine IOs in general and how they develop is still missing. IOs remain black boxes because they are closely coupled to states (in IR-theories) and conceptualized as will-less instruments for states to pursue states' own ends. But the above-mentioned empirical studies show that the contrary seems to be true; they are purposeful actors following (to a certain extent) their own agendas. Therefore, it seems reasonable to analyze them as such with the adequate theoretical approaches and instruments that can be found in organization studies.

4. IOs as Organizations – an Organizational Studies Approach

Contrary to IR, scholars from Organization Studies take questions about the meaning and function of organizations as well as their embeddedness in their environment serious. They present a wide range of approaches to analyze IOs. In general, these approaches examine the function of organizations in a society respectively its surrounding environment(s) (Scott 1992: 8-15; Walter-Busch 1996).

²³ "Bureaucracies are not just servants to whom states delegate. Bureaucracies are also authorities in their own right, and that authority gives them autonomy vis-à-vis states, individuals, and other international actors."(Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 5).

Scott differentiates three levels of analysis for organizations dependent on how the phenomenon is to be explained, (1) the behaviour of individual participants in organizations, (2) the functioning or characteristics of aspects or segments of organizational structure, (3) the characteristics or actions of the "organization recognized as a collective actor functioning in a larger system or relations" (Scott 1992: 15).

This paper concentrates mainly on the third level of analysis because it is interested in the process of how IOs buffer themselves from states effects to expand their status of autonomy and enlarge their frame of action. Therefore approaches analyzing the relation between organizations and their environment seem to be especially useful.

Beside the different levels of analysis, organizations are studied from different perspectives. Scott, again, distinguishes three perspectives to conceptualize organizations: a rational system perspective, a natural system perspective, and an open system perspective (Scott 1992: 21f.). (1) From a *rational* system perspective, organizations are perceived as collective entities. Organizations are oriented to pursue concrete goals and thus design a highly formalized social structure aimed for the pursuit of organizational goals (Scott 1992: 22f, 29-50). (2) From a *natural* system perspective, organizations are seen as organic systems, i.e. collectivities whose participants pretend to follow formal organizational goals but in general, there is only one shared organizational goal: the survival of system. All organizational actions, procedures, and resources etc. are coordinated and arranged in a way to achieve this aim (Scott 1992: 23-25, 51-75). (3) From an *open* system perspective organizations are not closed system separated from their environment unlike the rational and the natural systems perspective "but are open to and dependent on flows of personnel, resources, and information form outside" (Scott 1992: 25). The organization is shaped, supported and infiltrated by the environment. The environment is the basic source for systems survival because it consists of the necessary resources and elements the organization needs to exist.²⁴ The organization is not conceived as a monolithic entity but is composed of individuals having "differing interests and value various inducements. They join and leave or engage in ongoing exchanges with the organization depending on the bargain they can strike [...] Viewed from this perspective, participants cannot be assumed to hold common goals or even to routinely seek the survival of the organization" (Scott 1992: 25). In this respect organizations are systems of independent activities "[s]ome of these activities are tightly connected; others are loosely coupled." (Scott 1992: 25).

This perspective seems highly useful for analysing IOs for at least four reasons:

²⁴ This includes the function of legitimization. In some theoretical approaches the environment legitimates the organization therefore the organization has to adjust to environmental demands in order to survive (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

First, this perspective combines two perceptions that are useful for IO studies: IOs and their inner-organizational life *plus* the various relations between organizations and their environment.

Second, the open system perspective provides useful insights concerning the inner-organizational dynamics and structures. Organizations are perceived as consisting of coalitions with different interests trying to use the organization for their own ends. This idea is beneficial for analyzing the relationship between member states, their representatives and IOs. There are many empirical examples showing that member states are building coalitions and counter-coalitions for particular issues to enhance the probability of acceptance for a proposal or to disapprove an approach. At the same time, independent organs in IOs can be analyzed as purposeful sub-actors and it can be theorized that they follow specific interests. Currently, coalition building and changing coalitions can be observed regarding the proposals to reform the UN Security Council.

Third, the perspective allows studying the function of IOs' independent organs, for example the secretariats, as a sub-organizations that processes information or fulfil certain tasks in order to reduce complexity, equivocality and uncertainty for organizational members, i.e. states. This role of IOs secretariats is often stated in neo-institutional approaches that emphasize the framing ability (for example: agenda-setting) for meetings.

Fourth, the perspective offers a theoretical toolbox that helps to resolve the complex relationship between an IO and its environment. The concept of the environment is not limited to states but contains besides states, for example other IOs, (I)NGO, companies, enterprises and the like. IOs are embedded in their environment and they interact with their environment. That means, IOs address norms not just to member states but also to non-state actors for example enterprises when it comes to social or environmental norms. At the same time IOs action could have an influence on their environment and vice versa. INGOs have had some influences on the WTO since the Millennium-Conference in Seattle 1999. As a response to the protests and excesses of anti-globalization activists and NGOs in 1999, the next conference in Doha 2001 was prepared in exclusion from public participation to impede protests. At the same time, the WTO plays a more active role in its interactions and contacts with NGOs, e.g. NGOs delegates are invited to be part in informal meetings and work with interested delegations and secretariat officers.

To fully appreciate the theoretical considerations from Organizational Studies for the study of IOs, one has to conceptualize IOs as organizations by carefully considering IOs characteristics and anomalies. This point is crucial because IOs differ in many ways from individual-based organizations that are the basic objects of research in Organizational Studies (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). Most obviously, the membership in IOs differs notably from that in formal organizations like enterprises or administrations. Formally, states are the relevant members of IOs whereas individuals are the members of formal organizations (Scott 1992: 18f.). Ahrne

and Brunsson define organizations having other organizations as their members as meta-organizations. A state is (itself) a particular form of organizations and IOs are in this respect meta-organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). They examine differences between organizations and meta-organizations and argue that theories from Organizational Studies do not conceptualize meta-organizations as organizations because they focus solely on individual-based organizations. Therefore, Ahrne and Brunsson call for a theory of meta-organizations and present an outline of that theory (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005). They explain various differences between organizations and meta-organizations following from their different membership. They conclude that the function of an organization is heavily affected by the kind of members they have (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005: 5ff).

Against this background, the open system perspective has to be translated in order to apply the theoretical concepts to IOs and to exhaust its conceptual value. According to the short remarks in the foregoing chapter and the analysis of meta-organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005 b; Ahrne and Brunsson 2005), there are at least three basic (interrelated) notions that must be translated in order to use them for an IO analysis: membership, environment, and organization-environment relation. In the following, the three concepts will be sketched briefly and illustrated with regard to the WTO.

Organizations interact and observe their environment to make sensible decisions or produce those outputs demanded by the environment (Scott 1992). In this sense the environment is perceived as a residual item, which contains all non-organizational elements (Jurkovich 1974: 381f; Mintzberg 1979: 267-271). Because of the vague definition of the organizational environment one could conclude that the organization is a well defined term respectively the organization has clear defined boundaries. According to this observation, it is the purpose to shed some light on both concepts and the way they are interrelated. In general there exists a consensus in the academic field of Organizational Studies about the notion *organizational environment* as "[...] everything outside the organization [...]" (Mintzberg 1979: 267). The environment is the counterpart of the organization, which means that a definition of the organization, here the IO, provides an understanding of the (international) organizational environment in addition. The border between an organization and its environment is marked by the organizational membership (March and Simon 1993). Hence, IOs and their borders can be defined by their membership.

(1) Membership

In terms of formal definitions, states are the (only) members of IOs. States establish IOs, they decide about the IO structure, their function and their tasks. They decide about IO budget and produce decisions. Although some IOs consist – beside states – of other non-governmental actors as members, e.g. the ILO (see above), states are conceptualized as the dominant actors

in IR and international law because they implement IO decisions in national policies (Archer 2001; Rittberger and Zangl 2003). Concerning the WTO, it consists of 148 member states. The WTO is run by its member governments and all major decisions are made by their members, either by ministers (who meet at least once every two years) or by their ambassadors or delegates (who meet regularly in Geneva). In general, decisions are taken by consensus and the members share equal voting rights.²⁵ However, Ehlermann and Ehring question the members' equality and show that despite the formal equality there are major differences in the ability to maintain vetoes (Ehlermann and Ehring 2005).

Beside the formal definition of IOs membership, IOs consist of secretariats and independent organs that are members as well. As already mentioned, some empirical as well as theoretical studies in IR prove that secretariats respectively IOs bureaucracies exert some influence on member states (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). The function of the general-director in the WTO or the Dispute Settlement Mechanism managed by a group of three (possibly five) independent experts are examples for non-state actors in IOs (Jackson 1998; World Trade Organization 2003: 55 et sqq.). The paper does not assert that both forms are equal but that they are both meaningful parts of IOs membership.

Therefore, the paper proposes to differentiate between political members and administrative members. Political members are involved on different levels and fulfil different tasks. Therefore, the paper proposes to differentiate between three levels of political membership to IOs: the *state* as the most formal level comprising all citizens; the *government* as the group of individuals approving decisions and proposals as well as implementing rules and norms nationally; the *states' representatives* as those individuals directly involved in an IO, e.g. working in the Council for Trade and Goods or another WTO committee.²⁶

The administrative members are the secretariats and other independent organs established in IOs. The distinguishing characteristic of administrative membership is their independence. Herewith the paper does not claim that administrative members have no political conviction or consciousness but there is (formally) no political power that instructs administrative members to behave in a certain manner.²⁷ Their loyalty does not belong to a state (although every administrative member is also a citizen of a member state) but to the rules and norms of the IO. They are – contrary to states' delegates or ambassadors – exclusively bound to their job description and not to an instruction of a political member.

²⁵ In this respect, the WTO is different to other IOs such as the IMF, where voting rights are weighted: the larger a country's quota in the IMF—determined broadly by its economic size—the more votes it has. For example, the total voting power of the USA is 17,08 whereas the total voting power of Kiribati is 0,01 and that of Sweden is 1,11.

²⁶ To clarify this point, this differentiation is not an equivalent of differentiation made in organization charts between managers or leadership and other inner-organizational levels.

²⁷ Formally the director-general is independent and cannot receive instructions from any government. In the World Bank, the director-general is traditionally nominated by the USA, currently Paul Wolfowitz.

(2) Environment

Even though some actors in IOs environment can be identified, the concept *environment* is somehow vague and unclear. Contrary to membership, belonging to the environment is not clearly defined and depends first and foremost of the organization observed (Scott 1992 a; Scott 1992; Scott 2002).²⁸ From the perspective of an organization, the environment contains a plenty of information—more information than the organization can perceive and process. Therefore organizations make a choice and select certain aspects to which they respond (Hedberg 1981: 8). According to this aspect, the environment can be distinguished between a relevant and a non-relevant organizational environment. “In a sense, the environment is inside an organization. The real world provides the raw material of stimuli to react to, but the only meaningful environment is the one that is born when stimuli are processed through perceptual filters” (Hedberg 1981: 8). The relevant environment of an IO doesn't have to be the same like that of another IO, e.g. the IMF is probably an important part of WTOs environment but it is probably not as important for the World Tourism Organization. But again, if and to what extent a part of the environment is relevant for an IO depends on the IOs perception or more precisely on the perception of those parts of the IO dealing with a particular environment. For example, the disregard of Chinese enterprises concerning intellectual property rights by treating products from other WTO member states is probably part of the environment of the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights but it is perhaps not as important for other WTO-councils.

It can be assumed that states or more precisely inner-state actors are part of the environment. They hold particular expectations concerning the IO and pose their demands on the IO or try to influence their national government. An example might be that specific enterprises depending on export trades are probably highly interested in results of the WTO in order to sell their products whereas other import depending enterprises probably try to influence their government to better protect their national markets in order to guarantee their sales (Charnovitz 2001). Beside inner-state actors, other IGOs as well as national and international NGOs are a meaningful part of an IOs environment. They can pose their demands and are (gradually) able to affect IOs' decisions, e.g. particular decisions of the IMF and the World Bank determine the range of potential decisions in the WTO (Winham 1998; Peet 2004; Winters 2004; Head 2005). Another example is the influence of I(N)GOs on the WTO is the Millennium-Conference in Seattle 1999. Furthermore, scientific experts and consultants can be part of IOs environment because they possess knowledge and expertise in certain fields that

²⁸ Some authors – for instance Hedberg (1981) and Scott (1992) – examine environments not merely an environment and hint that organizations deal and interact with multiple environments (Hedberg 1981; Scott 1992). According to Scott, every organization exists in a specific physical, technological, cultural and social environment. Within these different environments the organization interacts in many ways with their environments and reciprocal exchanges occur (Scott 1992).

are relevant to the WTO. IO members (either political or administrative) can possibly use their expertise to get informed on certain issues or to receive relevant information for the decision making process (Kennedy 2005).

(3) Organization-Environment Relation

Although it seems to be reasonable to differentiate between IOs and their environment by analyzing IOs membership, one has to keep in mind that those identified as members of an IO can be part of their environment as well. Therefore, the paper suggests not to understand membership as a fixed characteristic but as a role in or function for the organization (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978: 30; Scott 1992: 83; Luhmann 1999: 24f). It is not an individual or a state as a subject belonging to an IO rather it is the states' or individuals' role and function in and for the IO that draws the distinction between organization and environment. A state, for example, can be a member of the WTO as well as of the IMF, the ILO, the UN, the EU or the NAFTA. Even if these IOs share some similarities, they are dealing with different issues and every IO is part of the environment of the other. In other words, only those activities and behaviours that are part of the members' role define the organizational border. Those activities and behaviours that are not embedded in organizational processes are part of the environment, e.g. the work and behaviour of an US ambassador in the Council for Trade and Services is part of the WTO whereas the same ambassador can be a member of a NGO that could be part of WTO's environment. In this respect the paper argues to focus rather on the activities in IOs than on specific actors or sets of actors. It is in the words of Weick "to stamp out nouns in their efforts to understand organizing" (Weick 1979: 44; Weick 1995: 187). Even though, the paper identifies actors inside and outside the IO, it is not the actor rather their role and function that are important for further research.

Open system approaches build on the assumption that organizations need their environment because it provides those elements the organization requires to produce any output. That comprises the whole amount of information the organization can potentially process in order to build a basis for organizational decision making (Klimecki, Laßleben et al. 1994: 9f.). Furthermore, the environment serves as a source of resources used by the organization, e.g. money, people, machines, technical assistance, knowledge etc. (Scott 1992: 169 et sqq.). In this regard actors in the organizational environment play a key role, too. They supply materials and resources the organization needs for internal processing of decisions and at the same time they are demanding for those outcomes the organization generates (Scott 1995). Thus, relations between an organization and its environment are reciprocal in many ways (Scott 1992: 20f.). Organizations are dependent on reciprocal interpretation and interaction with their environment. They collect data and interpret information in order to gain a better understanding, improve their organizational knowledge – with respect to future decisions and output – and ensure their survival within the environment (Daft and Weick 1984: 286; Daft

and Huber 1987: 9f). "Organizational interpretation is formally defined as the process of translating events and developing shared understanding and conceptual schemes [...]" (Daft and Weick 1984: 286). The goal of organizations, viewed as sensemaking systems, is to make their environment more predictable and thereby reduce equivocality and uncertainty for their members. This description of the organization-environment relations proves perfectly true for IOs and their environment. It is the general task of IOs to generate collective binding decisions for member states. That is exactly what the WTO does in international trade. It generates rules that are collectively binding for its member states. Thus, the WTO reduces equivocality and uncertainty in international trade by creating rules that mirror expected behaviour among member states (White 1996: 86-110). These WTO rules are maintained by the Trade Policy Review Mechanism that monitors and controls whether national trade policies are in line with WTO rules. At the same time the Dispute Settlement Mechanism provides a procedure how to behave if potential trade disputes emerge. Even if IOs don't have the capacity to set binding rules for states, they do produce archetypical resolutions – like recommendations and declarations, e.g. the ILO, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), or the World Health Organization (WHO). These recommendations "are often treated by states as important as traditional sources of international law" (White 1996: 106) because they establish a legal ground to refer to, in particular in those areas such as health and employment, where there is little customary law (White 1996: 103-106).

5. Explaining Processes of Autonomization in/of IOs

In order to explore how IOs become independent actors and how processes of autonomization can be explained, it has to be made clear what the organizational character of an IO is. Because if we think of IOs as organizations concerning to the definitions discussed above, it doesn't make much sense to think about autonomization in terms of getting independent from member states. Because as the notion suggests, member states are members of the IO, therefore it can hardly be conceptualized how an IO or in general an organization can increase its dependence vice versa its members.

I would therefore suggest differentiating between member states or more precisely member states governments (as members) and member states representatives on the one hand and the administrative members who are involved in day-to-day activities within an IO on the other. The latter will be labelled the (IOs) core. Autonomization then means the degree to which the core gets independent from their environment, that is on the one hand the inner environment, i.e. member states influences and on the other hand the outer environment that does contain all other non-IO elements.

A theoretical organization concept that deals with this question of how organizations can increase their independence vis-a-vis their environment is the System Theory as proposed most prominently by Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann 1999).²⁹ Luhmann understands organizations as social systems that can simply be divided from environment by decisions. Concerning Luhmann decisions are the only operational element of an organization. Organization's function is to absorb uncertainty that exists because the organization faces and constructs an environment that consists of more information and irritation than the organization can process. To absorb uncertainty organizations produce decisions—organizations consist of nothing else than the communication of decisions. These decisions are recursively linked to each other. Thus, they can be described as autopoietic social systems on the basis of decisions (Luhmann 1988; Luhmann 1997; Luhmann 2000).

Decisions are generated by decisions and every organizational behaviour or action is communicated in the form of decisions. However, since the variety of possible “decision communication” is high, organizations need to reduce complexity while, at the same time, ensure that decisions can connect to previous decisions in the system. Every organizational decision has to be connected to a former decision otherwise it cannot be an organizational decision. The connectivity of decisions on decision ensures that communication does not come to a halt. By this process organizations can achieve autopoietic or operative closure vis-à-vis their environment (Luhmann 1991; Luhmann 1993; Luhmann 1999).³⁰

Teubner broadens Luhmanns concept of autopoietic closure (Teubner 1987). While Luhmann conceives autopoietic closure as an all or nothing concept, Teubner argues for different levels of the notion of Autopoiesis. Concerning to Teubner, subsystems can gain autonomy to the degree they are able to constitute their system's components in self-referential circles. Autopoietic closure or autonomy can be achieved if and only if the subsystem is able to combine the self-referential circles of system's components to a hyper-cycle (Teubner 1987). Teubner distinguishes between different system's components that are elements, structures, processes, borders, environments and the organizations identity. Organizations can increase their autonomy and become gradually more autopoietic to the degree they are able to constitute their system's components in a self-referential manner and enchain these

²⁹ Another theory is the neo-institutionalism of the so-called Stanford School. The complex relation between IOs and their environments organization-sociological can described by approaches from a neo-institutional perspective of the so-called Stanford School can be useful (this neo-institutionalism has nothing to do with the liberal neo-institutionalism in IR). Neo-institutional approaches offer a concept how organizations adjust to their environmental demands while at the same time keeping the way to produce decisions and actions through buffering their actual work activities from their formal structure (Meyer and Rowan 1977). This approach could be useful to explain how secretariats follow instructions from their member states on the one hand, while on the other hand enlarging their scope of activities and action.

³⁰ If the differentiation between states or states' governments and the core isn't made then the question about autonomization doesn't make much sense. It is obvious that IOs are autopoietic and therefore independent organizations because the IO is constituted by its members and every decision produced is a decision that refers to and is linked to a former decision of the IO. Against this background it has to be proved whether there are inner-organizational sub-systems that are organizations, too.

components. That means organizations have to produce decisions by decisions, structures by structures, processes by processes, borders by borders, environments by environments and identities by identities and enchain all these recursive linkages to gain total autonomy (Teubner 1987: 101 et sqq). According to Teubner, the decisive step for an independent organization is that the organization is built up on a constitution and on rules that are a legal basis for their members. These rules establish an order and a pattern for members' behavior in and for the organization. The important step for organizations autonomy—autopoietic closure respectively—is that every organizational decision is linked to a former organizational decision that is linked in the long run to the constitution.³¹ This construct is self-constitutional if the organizations' constitution and rules construct the organizational membership and vice versa (Teubner 1987: 117 et sqq.).

To what extent the WTO is an independent organization or autopoietically closed and how autonomization processes take place cannot be discussed in detail now, but in the following the paper hints how autonomization in/of an IO can be studied.

Applying this concept to IOs, it can be hypothesized that the autonomy depends on a set of rules that constitute its existence and work descriptions. If so, the core is able to link every decision it makes to a former decision and in the long run to the set of rules which is the fundamental basis of its work. In addition, these recursive linkages provide the core its legitimate justification for its decisions. The core can increase autonomy if it is able to change constitutional elements without accrediting this change by the IOs member states. The core can receive greater autonomy by reproducing its border vis-à-vis their inner and outer environment. This can take place if the core can describe and define the membership role by its own, that means if the members of an independent organ, e.g. the secretariat of an IO, can decide who gets a job and how the work of the members position is defined. The independent organ can increase its autonomy if it can decide without referring to member states decisions or if it can structure itself by referring to its structure. So, if it depends on the independent organs ability to decide how to structure itself and how to fulfil its function (of absorbing uncertainty) it can increase autonomy. It depends whether the core identifies itself as serving their own norms and values instead of member states. The persuasion to contribute to the performance of organizational norms and goals is the very important step for triggering autonomization.

Regarding the WTO it seems that the Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) is a good candidate to scrutinize the autonomy of an organizational sub-system. The DSM is procedure that is built up on clear rules and a timetable about what are the relevant steps to be taken and how long each will take. Every DSM structures and processes itself by referring to its former

³¹ In other words, to be identified as an organizational decision every decision has to be linked to a former organizational decision.

structures and processes and/or the set of rules that constituted it. That means during the dispute settlement process the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) has clear rules and procedures they can refer to. Furthermore, the DSB has clear defined number of members. Their membership is not linked to individual characteristics but to their expertise which fits the demands for the position they are holding in a dispute settlement process. It is not questionable if and to what extent the DSB is able to change the set of rules and in this respect the constitution it is established by.

6. Conclusion and Prospects for Further Research

The presentation started with the question how to explain IOs autonomization processes. The paper argued in the first step that although the question of global order is a central question of IR they fail to conceptualize IOs as actors in their own rights. Only some studies work on the authority and power of IOs and their bureaucracies (Ness and Brechin 1988; Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Barnett and Finnemore 2002; Barnett and Finnemore 2004) but a general theoretical concept to explain *how* IOs emerge as actors is still lacking. Thus, theoretical considerations from Organizational Studies could be worthwhile as they put the concept of *organization* in the center of their studies and offer conceptual frames how to study the relations between organizations and their environment. In this regard, the paper argued for a perspective that conceives organizations as embedded in an environment on the one hand and on the other hand as containing of different coalition with different interests. In the next step, three basic notions (membership, environment, organization-environment relation) have been applied to IOs and have been briefly illustrated. In the last step, the paper suggested to explain autonomization processes by referring to a system theoretical concept.

Coming back to the initial question, the paper provides insights in at least two ways. First, a general frame can be established that reveals the different actors inside and outside an IO and to what extent they are relevant for IOs. Second, the paper sketches the links and relations between IOs and their environment and suggests that the source for autonomization lays in the IO itself and more precisely in their ability to make decisions that are recursively linked to former decisions they produced. Emancipation from states' couplings occurs if IOs are able to construct and reconstruct their component in self-referential circles.

Although the paper offers some clues about how to approach a conceptual examination of IOs in order to fill the mentioned gap, a comprehensive theoretical instruction has to be elaborated in-depth. The two concepts of membership and environment can be useful as they help identifying relevant actors inside and outside the IO. But further work has to be done to explain how the identified actors affect IOs and how they relate to one another. The paper

hints how autonomization can be triggered but there has to be carried out a much more detailed analysis to conceive autonomization.

In this respect, the paper tried to open the identified 'black box' and described whom and what to study but the black box is still not transparent. However, the paper pleads for an organizational perspective that can contribute to study IOs because it concentrates on the relationship of organizations and their environment and the interplay of members and organs inside organizations.

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