



Global governance conceptualization and the case of hotel classification

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Global governance
Regulation
Hotel classification

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the establishment of international hotel quality regime via the current conceptualization of the world order as global governance (GG). It asks: What are the major characteristics of the concept of GG, and to what extent it captures adequately changes in the global political order? The concept of GG refers to macro-structural and micro-operational groups of characteristics. The GG literature tends to focus more on the macro level and less on the way GG events operate internally. The focus on the structural attributes leads to a consensus among researchers regarding the applicability of GG conceptualization, between international management events before and after the 1980s. Based on the above distinction between GG macro and micro characteristics and its application to the case study on international hotel classification system, the paper argues that GG conceptualization can be also applied to international governing events before the 1980s, albeit with varying degrees.

1. Introduction

In a recent review of the research on global governance (GG) in the last few decades, Wiess and Wilkinson argue that: “While the term arose to describe change in the late twentieth century, its association with that specific moment has frozen it in time and deprive it of analytical utility” (2014: 208). One of the ways the authors suggest to improve the analytical capacity of the concept, is looking backward to history: “Peering into the past through the lenses of global governance makes one realize that, like globalization which once seemed novel but is not, global governance also is not new” (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014: 212).

This paper takes up the challenge, by looking at past world management event in the eyes of GG as a current conceptualization of the world order. I use the term “event” in a broad sense, referring to initiatives by international organizations (IOs) or global governance institutions to apply new international rules or regulations in their respective areas of concern. The paper asks: What are the unique and defining characteristics of GG, and how applicable they are to international governing events before the 1980s? I differentiate between macro-structural and micro-operational characteristics, and argue that while past international management events lack the former, almost by definition, they may hold many of the latter. This fact qualifies them to be part of the GG phenomenon, albeit with some variations. Additionally, it calls into question the dichotomous view in

international relation (IR) studies of world order before and after the 1980s.

The paper analyses the historical establishment of international hotel quality regime via the current conceptualization of the world order as GG. This regime was developed gradually during the 1950s and 1960s, within the International Union of Official Tourist Organizations (IUOTO, the predecessor of the World Tourism Organization and the UNWTO today), as one of the mechanisms to face the growing tourism activity around the world after World War II and to advance the contribution of tourism to world economy. The result of this historical debate is what is known today as the formal hotel classification (HC) based on five star ranking.

In the last three decades IR literature has been highly occupied with capturing the fundamental changes within the international arena and world politics. A common and widespread conceptualization¹ of these changes is global governance (Rosenau, 1992, 1995; Weiss, 2000; Murphy, 2000; Wilkinson, 2005; Dingwerth and Pattberg, 2006). In many aspects, as will be discussed below, it is a mirror picture of the rise of the concept of governance to describe the shift in local national governing and its challenges (Jessop, 1995; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998; Lobel, 2004; Ansell and Gash, 2008). The era of governance in both the local and global sphere is perceived as one that began in the early 1980s and continues to the present (see: UNCGG, 1995).

As many scholars indicate, governance is not a new concept, nor is it

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¹ GG is referred to as an organizing framework for understanding the changing world order in recent times and not as a theory by itself (Judge et al., 1995; Stoker, 1998; Levi-Faur, 2012). This conceptualization is however subject to critical review by various IR theories. See for example: Ba and Hoffmann, 2005, and Lederer and Muller, 2005.

new to IR field of study (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014). What is new is the current usage and the meaning attributed to it (Hoffmann and Ba, 2005). Governance in the international level is a framework concept for multitude political structures and arrangements. Although the IR analytical literature² offers various definitions for GG (Rosenau, 1995, 2007; Finkelstien, 1985; Stoker, 1998; Weiss and Thakur, 2010) they all share a common ground which emphasizes a transition from old governing patterns to contemporary ones as a result of the changing global environment. The transition is reflected in various aspects, all of which became the characteristics of the GG conceptualization. These include the decreasing centrality and changing role of states and IOs, increasing involvement and contribution of the non-state sectors, the dispersion of the locus of authority, and the multiple levels of activity with ramification to the global scene.

These macro-structural aspects became the prominent characteristics of GG. Although the literature refers to the micro-operational characteristics (e.g. interaction between actors, negotiations, decision making, implementation), they receive much less research attention, and are not well-comprehended analytically. The focus of the GG literature on the structural aspects of this phenomenon can be explained by the fact that it is the major signifier of the change in the management of the world order: the rise of new players in the global arena, the declining power of states and international organizations in this arena, the rise of global initiatives outside the traditional channels, and the autonomous operation of GG regimes. However, while this focus defines a boundary as to whether and how GG conceptualization might apply to a broader context, an equivalent emphasis on the micro-operational level raises questions whether GG is a wholly new phenomenon. In other words, did old events of international management have attributes of GG to the point that we could consider them part of that phenomenon? If that is the case, we may argue that the concept of GG should be treated as a continuum from past to present, and that all world management regimes, since at least the establishment of the UN in 1945, hold to some extend GG features.

To probe this argument it is necessary to develop a detailed map of the unique characteristics of GG, which is currently missing in the literature, and to compare them with an empirical international management case that represents the so-called “old order”. The paper does this exercise on one particular event – the establishment of international HC by IUOTO, which began in 1949 and ended in 1982.

From a macro level the initiation of the international HC regime represents a traditional IR case, in which countries come together under the auspices of an IO to discuss and decide upon an issue of mutual concern and cross-border impact. Moreover, only states enjoyed the status of members with the right to vote, the decision structure was seemingly formal and hierarchical, and the issue was simple and straightforward. However, a deeper review reveals many micro-operational signs of what is called today GG framework and its associated advantages and challenges, as will be discussed later.

The paper unfolds as follows. The first section lays the GG conceptual framework on which the case will be analyzed. The second section presents a historical overview of the initiative to establish internationally harmonized HC by the IUOTO. The third section analyses the case in light of the conceptual framework, and establishes the potential contributions of the case to GG literature. The final section summarizes and offers some implications from the current case to future research in GG. But, first, I will present the methodological and empirical bases of the paper.

2. Methodological and empirical framework

This paper uses a case study as a method to analyze the establishment of international HC as an example of GG. The use of case studies is prevalent in the GG research literature (see for example the collections in Wilkinson, 2005; and in Ba and Hoffmann, 2005). But case study is suitable for this research also because at the center of this research stands the aspiration to review new hypotheses for analytical generalization within existing theory (Yin, 1985), and because it analyzes the phenomenon and its attributes comprehensively using multiple sources (Gerring, 2007).

The HC case is unique in combining the necessary components to allow the review of the question of interest of this paper: An international management event that occurred before the 1980s; that was led by formal international organization; that dealt with a cross border issue; that faced difficulties and used various strategies to overcome them. Also important for the case selection was the fact that the story reached its conclusion and was limited in time frame. All these together, made the case qualified to the objective of the paper.

The current case study is based on one major empirical Source: the historical record of the IUOTO (UNWTO today) regarding the initiative to establish international HC. The records were collected from the organization's archive in Madrid during the summer 2015, and include several types of documents. The records cover about 30 years (1949–1982), a period that begins with the first discussion of the issue in the organization's General Assembly, and ends with the submissions of the Regional Committees' reports for the adaptation of the regulation to their respective geographical areas. Although HC continues to be a subject of concern in the organization also after this period (for example: WTO, 1985, 1989; UNWHO and IHRA, 2004; UNWTO, 2014), and even regional tourism organizations (from example: HORTEC, 2009; ECC-Net, 2010), the formulation of the policy principles took place within this time frame.

3. The conceptual framework

Answering the question of this paper requires proceeding in two consecutive steps: to look into the characteristics of the GG conceptualization, and to compare them with the actual details of the case in point. This section provides a characteristics map of GG, while the next sections will present first the case story, and then an evaluation of the match between the case and the GG characteristics. The review of the rise of governance conceptualization, together with the discussion on the advantages and challenges of such regimes will serve as a basis for outlying the characteristics of GG for the purpose of comparison.

The rise of governance as a conceptual underpinning of the new order in the international arena represents a somewhat similar shift in the local and national arena. In broad parameters, they both share the same causes and effects of the new governing order of the public sphere, and almost the same definition, albeit in different levels (Weiss and Thakur, 2010). Researchers even use similar phrases to describe the change: “from government to governance” (Rhodes, 1996) or “governance without government” (Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992). Since the phenomenon of governance in the local and global arena has much in common, the two levels are strongly interconnected today (Smouts, 1998), and the discussion on governance in the local level tends to be more detailed about the characteristics of this conceptualization, I shall review them both.

3.1. The rise of the governance conceptualization: a review

Governance is not a new concept, neither in the local nor in the international level (Weiss, 2000; Hoffmann and Ba, 2005). Governance is the act of governing, which is managing collective actions for public goods. But while traditionally the concept was used to describe the acts of governments, when there was almost full overlap between governing

² The analytical literature on GG represents one fraction of the overall literature on the subject. Other literatures see it also as a phenomenon, a project or review it as a normative concept. This paper refers only to the analytical literature.

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