

Global Governance and International Order

Anna Caffarena*

1. Global Governance: a International Relations Perspective in Time of Change

Some years ago, in the often-cited article *What Is Global Governance?*, Lawrence S. Finkelstein argued that «we say “governance” because we don’t really know what to call what is going on»¹. More than ten years later, Klaus Dingwerth and Philipp Pattberg² reached a rather similar conclusion, noting that «in contemporary academic debate about world politics, “global governance” is all over the place» and it is so because «almost any process or structure of politics beyond the state —regardless of scope, content, or context— has within the last few years been declared part of a general idea of global governance».

If this is the reason behind its success, the label global governance can be said to have been used conveniently to set the reflection on the management of supra- and trans-national issues³ within the supposed flux of change occurring in the political sphere, while avoiding the daunting task of addressing the nature and consequences of change in its own right. Not surprisingly Dingwerth and Pattberg underline that «most of the works on global governance stop short of pondering why they are using the newly coined term —rather than, say, more old-fashioned terms such as international organization or international politics— and what is implied by their use»⁴. Instead of trying to make sense of what was going on in the political sphere —supposedly as an effect of globalization—, scholars and practitioners alike took a shortcut: gave it a name and moved forward to consider those which could be conceived as practical instances of governance itself, the expectation being apparently that the full picture will eventually come out and prove more tractable.

As a result, from the perspective of International Relations at least, many issues still need to be clarified. Some, in fact, are the very basic ones that thinking in terms of governance raises because of the structural difference between the international sphere and the domestic one, in which the concept was first coined in close connection with that of government. To mention a couple of these issues:

* Università di Torino, anna.caffarena@unito.it.

¹ L. S. Finkelstein, *What Is Global Governance?*, in «Global Governance», 1, 1995, p. 368.

² K. Dingwerth, P. Pattberg, *Global Governance as a Perspective on World Politics*, in «Global Governance», 12, 2006, p. 185.

³ The definition put forward in 1995 by the Commission on Global Governance in its Report *Our Common Neighborhood* goes as follows: «Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. [...] At the global level, governance has been viewed primarily as intergovernmental relationships, but it must now be understood as also involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs), citizens’ movements, multinational corporations, and the global capital market. Interacting with these are global mass media of dramatically enlarged influence».

⁴ K. Dingwerth, P. Pattberg, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

the very nature of international public policies, for example, and the issue of their implementation, given the decentralized nature of the international system⁵. Can a policy which is implemented very unevenly in different domestic domains still be considered as such or should it rather be conceived as a collective decision of the international community whose implementation is a matter of national authority? If collective decision turns out to be a more accurate formulation, shouldn't we go back to the traditional conception of international politics to render the process? Even the fundamentals require more thought: if governance is in essence about «creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action», as Gerry Stoker put it⁶, one would expect extensive reflection on trust and responsibility/accountability, which is instead rather lacking in the literature.

Among the still puzzling issues, one stands out as quite relevant and rather urgent. It is the relationship between global governance and the present international order. Can global governance be conceived distinctly and can it live independently of the highly institutionalized multilateral order in which most of the cooperative endeavours which developed after the Second World War have been «embedded»⁷? The relevance of the question lies in the fact that this order is itself undergoing change, and its viability as it now stands has recently been called into question. Multilateralism as its organizing principle⁸ and the high level of institutionalization which used to characterize it, a level that suggested it could be rendered as «constitutional»⁹, are both under challenge. One way of tackling this twofold phenomenon affecting the present order to shed light on its possible impact on governance is to analyze the relation between globalism and multilateralism and between governance and institutionalization in turn. Before doing so, the relationship between governance and order as a specific conception of world politics must be briefly considered.

2. From the Domestic Realm to the Global Political Sphere

The term governance entered the field of international relations in 1992, when James Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel edited *Governance without Gov-*

⁵ International public policies are crucial as they are the primary tool of governance conceived as a steering mechanism. «Global Governance» is defined as an «international public policy journal» by C. N. Murphy, *Global governance: poorly done and poorly understood*, in «International Affairs», 76, 4, 2000, p. 800.

⁶ G. Stoker, *Governance as Theory: Five Propositions*, «International Social Science Journal», 155, 1998, p. 17.

⁷ The concept of «embeddedness» was developed by Young, who argues that «for the most part, issue-specific regimes are embedded in overarching institutional arrangements in the sense that they assume —ordinarily without saying so explicitly— the operation of a whole suite of broader principles and practices that constitute the deep structure of international society as a whole», O. R. Young, *Institutional linkages in international society*, «Global governance», 2, 1996, p. 2.

⁸ Cfr. *Multilateralism under challenge? Power, international order, and structural change*, edited by E. Newman, R. Thakur, J. Tirman, Tokyo-New York-Paris, United Nations University, 2006.

⁹ J. G. Ikenberry, *Liberal Order and Imperial Ambition*, Cambridge, Polity, 2006, esp. ch. 4, *Constitutional Politics in International Relations*. Clark, reflecting on the sources of legitimacy, suggests that multilateralism may be conceived as a «principle of constitutionality» in current international society, I. Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 220-21.

ernment¹⁰. After a long period of neglect, the term had begun to be used more frequently in many fields during the Eighties. In Political Science, its success was prompted by the fact that it was no longer used as a mere synonym for government. It was conceived as a distinct conceptual tool capable of rendering the functions normally associated with the exercise of authority in increasingly fragmented political systems¹¹. As T.G. Weiss noted, this development was «part of an intellectual struggle to capture the various units of governance that are not instruments of the state», and governance itself can be conceived as the practice of setting the rules for organizing the public realm so that these units can legitimately and effectively take part in the management of common affairs¹².

In a sense, governance enabled researchers and decision-makers to deal with the complexification of the internal political sphere, a process which had a twin called «domestication» in the international political sphere¹³. This wording—far from uncontroversial—tells us why International Relations so keenly welcomed the «decoupling» of government and governance, as it provided the discipline with a much needed conceptual tool for tackling the growing «efforts to bring more orderly and reliable responses to social and political issues that go beyond capacities of states to address individually»¹⁴, efforts which were notably carried out in a decentralized political system.

This structural feature of the international sphere implies, of course, that global governance must be a product of cooperation, while the kind of cooperation which can go under this label is a function of the meaning we attach to the adjective global. First of all, global may be used as a mere synonym for «large-scale», i. e., involving most or all members of the international community: an option which would downplay the novelty of governance. Secondly, global may hint at the fact that governance is intended to include all the actors who have gained a role in framing issues, putting them on the international agenda, and addressing them: beside states, IGOs, NGOs and many others. This more inclusive set of actors would in itself justify replacing the term cooperation—which suggests an essentially inter-state endeavour, often carried out with the assistance of IGOs conceived as arenas rather than proper actors—with governance. Moreover, the inclusion of non-state actors of different kinds calls for a reorganization of the global political sphere so as to ensure their legitimate and effective participation in the collective management of common issues, i. e., governance if we adopt the definition worked out for the domestic domain¹⁵. A well known case sheds

¹⁰ *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, edited by J. Rosenau, E.-O. Czempiel, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

¹¹ A. M. Kjær, *Governance*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004, p. 12.

¹² Common affairs is the wording used by the Commission on Global Governance. T. G. Weiss, *Governance, Good Governance and Global Governance: Conceptual and Actual Challenges*, in «Third World Quarterly», 21, 5, 2000, p. 800. The conception of governance he adopts is borrowed from M. Bôås.

¹³ Cfr. M. G. Hermann, *One Field, Many Perspectives*, in *Visions of International Relations*, edited by D. J. Puchala, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2002, p. 19.

¹⁴ T. G. Weiss, L. Gordenker, *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*, Boulder (Co.), Lynne Rienner, 1996, p. 17.

¹⁵ Krahmann, for example, argues that governance at different levels is the very same sort of enterprise, cfr. E. Krahmann, *National, Regional, and Global Governance: One Phenomenon or Many?*, «Global Governance», 9, 2003.

light on a third meaning which can be attached to the term global: the role of the World Bank in promoting a specific model of governance, i. e., «good governance»¹⁶. This policy shows how governance —of which the promotion of a specific kind of governance can be considered an instance— often connects different institutional levels, in addition to including different kind of actors.

What we have just described is thus a specific form of cooperative undertaking whose aim is to promote «more orderly and reliable responses to social and political issues that go beyond capacities of states to address individually»¹⁷. Since in principle it may be both multiactor and multilevel, it entails a reorganization of the political sphere which may take place implicitly through the design and implementation of public policies, so that the latter appear to be both a vehicle and a tool of governance.

In this discourse, the issue of international order remained in the background. Governance implies an «orderly» conception of world politics: in general terms, it is the existence of shared principles and norms¹⁸ which allows actors to collectively define goals and pursue them in a decentralized political system¹⁹. Sovereignty —the fundamental norm of Westphalian order, forming its deepest institutional level— has long been the basic criterion of recognition as players of this game, recently providing the states with an instrument to defend their primacy while reorganizing the global political sphere to include actors of different kinds. The principles, rules and practices corresponding to order's more superficial institutional layers —multilateralism, in contemporary world politics, and the working of IGOs which embody multilateralism itself²⁰— did to some significant extent impact the way problems have been framed and tackled²¹. For this reason, mechanisms of governance can be conceived as having been embedded in this order.

So, while governance may well prove to be a means of long-term transformation of order beyond its modern form, leading one day to a «new global order»²²

¹⁶ The World Bank used the wording «good governance» for the first time in 1989 in the Foreword of its *Sub-Saharan Africa, From Crisis to Sustainable Growth, A Long Term Perspective Study*, Washington, The World Bank, 1989.

¹⁷ K. Dingwerth, P. Pattberg, *op. cit.*, note that global governance should be used as a specific conception of global politics.

¹⁸ M. Finnemore defines norms as «standards of behaviour» which give rise to a «legitimate behavioral claim», cited in A. Florini, *The Evolution of International Norms*, «International Studies Quarterly», 3, 40, 1996, p. 364.

¹⁹ The source —material/structural or cognitive/ideational— and nature of such constraints will not be addressed here. As Leonard put it, it is relevant that such forces «shape world order and subsequent governance structures», E. K. Leonard, *The Onset of Global Governance: International Relations Theory and the International Criminal Court*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005, p. 177.

²⁰ «Because global organizations create most of the multilateral forums where regimes [to be understood as mechanisms of governance] negotiated, because they help identify the common interests that become bases for new regimes, and because these states often give secretariats the responsibility for monitoring compliance, international organizations do provide one of the best sites for beginning an investigation of global governance» (C. N. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 793).

²¹ Power relations in the international realm should never be underestimated of course, but the specificity of the present order is that much power was exercised within and through institutions.

²² J. N. Rosenau, *The New Global Order. Underpinnings and Outcomes*, in Id., *The Study of World Politics. Globalization and Governance*, New York, Routledge, 2006, vol. 2.

conceived as the site of constitutional principles and norms, the present order has rightly been considered a constant by those reflecting on governance. Consequently, little attention has as yet been directed to the (dynamic) relationship between order and governance. The issue recently gained relevance because of the expectation that the former may be undergoing change and that this process would reverberate on the latter.

3. Global Governance and the Multilateral Order

Given the widespread concern that multilateralism might soon undergo severe stress as a combined effect of the changes which have been occurring in world politics, the apparent disaffection of the US, and the mixed feelings of the main emerging powers, the time is ripe to ask if global governance can be conceived distinctly and if it can exist independently from the highly institutionalized multilateral order in which it has been and still is embedded.

In order to answer this question, the nature of such embeddedness is crucial. If we assume that governance developed within the fabric of present norms and rules «accidentally», so to speak, as a response to growing interdependence and the increasingly supranational breadth of the issues to be dealt with, its destiny may well be independent of that of multilateral order: a change in the latter would simply entail some degree of adaptation on the part of governance. By contrast, if governance is conceived as coessential with the principles and norms of this order, then a significant change involving either multilateralism as its organizing principle or the level of institutionalization which characterizes it can reasonably be expected to influence its prospects. To explore the nature of the relationship —accidental or intrinsic— linking the present highly institutionalized multilateral order and global governance, we shall consider the relationship between globalism and multilateralism and between governance and institutionalization.

Let's look at the second pair first. Governance can hardly be conceived in a thinly institutionalized domain, as we emphasized while mentioning its relationship with order²³. Global governance will need some *significant* level of institutionalization to develop. This is so because it takes place in a decentralized realm characterized, as we have it, by structural incentives for players to act out of self-interest and consequently in a highly reactive fashion to seize the opportunities which the specific circumstances offer. How far the de-institutionalization process should go to threaten the functioning of governance mechanisms and how much significance attaches to the multilateral form of the institutional fabric in which global governance has been embedded will be taken up after having briefly examined the first pair.

²³ The concept, after all, was developed within the domestic domain. As far as the international system is concerned, a «thin», as opposed to «thick», institutionalization would entail the existence of sovereignty as a criterion of legitimate statehood and no other institution —such as multilateralism— to counterweigh its negative effects in terms of collective action which implies some form of mutual responsibility/accountability.

Can governance be conceived as global independently of multilateralism? The inclusion of the whole international community in the decision-making process, while imperfect and substantially reflecting differences in capacity, is due to the adoption of the universalistic, non-discriminatory principle which is a defining feature of multilateralism, not surprisingly conceived as the international variant of procedural democracy²⁴.

The inclusion of the whole international community in a joint cooperative endeavour reflected the social construction of the indivisibility of some goods, such as peace—leading to the creation of the UN to attain collective security—, and bads, such as global warming. This indivisibility, leading to the indivisibility of the community of states dealing with indivisible issues, is itself a product of the working of multilateralism, which at the same time promotes respect for general rules and diffuse reciprocity²⁵. Reciprocity entails mutual responsibility/accountability: a trait which suggests that multilateralism was expressly created within the inter-state system to counterbalance the negative externalities of sovereign decision-making.

The same driver of inclusion operating at the inter-state level is at work as a lever of the reorganization of global public realm to include actors other than states²⁶. The principle of procedural democracy which multilateralism embodied in the international sphere, after all, implies that all those who will bear the effects of a decision have to be involved in the decision-making process. As socially constructed global issues require that multiactor and multilevel forms of cooperation be addressed, the terms of the participation of different subjects will be settled in application of this principle. It is not surprising that a new form of «enlightened multilateralism»²⁷—and not its substitution with a different principle—is called for to ensure the working of global governance in the future.

The relevance of multilateralism for the cohesion of the global community of actors now involved in the different governance endeavours is clear: with no inclusive guiding principle and (consequently) without the supporting framework of socially constructed indivisibility, diverse actors operating at different levels—national, regional and global—would end up experiencing limited and ineffective responses to problems which are global in the sense that they are cross-layer and require the participation of many actors to be dealt with effectively. Reasonably, the first to suffer from this development would be the wider scale

²⁴ C. Reus-Smit, *The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions*, «International Organization», LI, n. 4, 1997.

²⁵ Among the different constitutive elements of multilateralism—general rules of conduct, indivisibility and diffuse reciprocity—a virtuous relationship develops, so that the strengthening of each reverberates on the others. However, the direction of this dynamic is still unclear, and a general pattern may not even exist, cfr. *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, edited by J. G. Ruggie, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993.

²⁶ A recent book captures how multilateralism has moved beyond the state system to include nonstate actors, cfr. *The New Dynamics of Multilateralism. Diplomacy, International Organizations, and Global Governance*, edited by J. P. Muldoon et al., Boulder (Co.), Westview Press, 2010.

²⁷ M. Castells, *Global Governance and Global Politics*, in «PSOnline», 38, 1, 2005, p. 15, available at: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=285500> (accessed 23/02/2012).

of governance. Accountability mechanisms of national/local and, to some extent, regional governance instances would persist, with the effect that national/local interest would prevail in the decision-making process entailing the negative externalities that are normally associated to the «sovereign» management of issues. In conclusion, it is difficult to think of a form of governance which is global—inclusive in terms of actors and scales—independently of a multilateral framework operating at the international level, whose significance with respect to the governance we have experienced so far, therefore, cannot be overestimated.

Because of the widespread expectation that the present multilateral order may soon be undergoing a significant process of deinstitutionalization²⁸, how far such process should go to threaten the functioning of governance mechanisms is a question which needs to be considered while reasoning on the perspective of global governance. Many signs suggest that we may soon end up with a «concert» type of cooperation, carried out by the so-called «coalitions of the willing» in a rather casual fashion, i. e., when interests coincide to a sufficient extent and somebody takes the lead. Such a fragmentation of groups and issues will threaten global governance so that it will no longer be a resource for humanity to tackle the most relevant challenges of our times. Multilateralism—a rather remote principle—may not attract much attention from the public, but the risk of collapse of the only way we know of promoting «more orderly and reliable responses to social and political issues that go beyond capacities of states to address individually» should.

²⁸ *Global Trends 2025*, the much cited NIC (National Intelligence Council) report, thus depicts the traits of the future international scenario characterized by multipolarity without multilateralism: «In such a world, we are unlikely to see an overarching, comprehensive, unitary approach to global governance. Current trends suggest that global governance in 2025 will be a patchwork of overlapping, often ad hoc and fragmented efforts, with shifting coalitions of member nations, international organizations», and so on (p. 81). Many instances support this conclusion, as multilateralism appears under stress where it seemed to deliver more—such as in Europe—and in functional areas of high relevance, such as trade—where the WTO Doha Round has been stalled for some time.