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PART II

ACTOR-CENTRED APPROACHES

Actor-Centred Approaches to Knowledge and Expertise in International Politics

Andrea Warnecke and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara

Actor-centred approaches foreground the agency and authority of individuals, organizations, and other collective actors in the production, diffusion, and contestation of knowledge and expertise in and on international politics. We can call such actors epistemic or knowledge actors. They seek to shape the discourses and practices that make up international politics by using increasingly globalized, though certainly unequal, patterns of knowledge production, communication, and transmission.

In principle, this broad definition of knowledge actors encompasses any actor that seeks to shape the discourses and practices that make up the international. In practice, however, being perceived as an actor with epistemic authority in a specific field of international politics presupposes the recognition of particular knowledges as expertise or, in other words, as delineated bodies of knowledge that are deemed relevant to understanding and practising international politics (Sending 2015). Due to this emphasis, actor-centred knowledge studies have tended to focus on widely recognized types of epistemic actors, such as academic experts and eminent individuals (Bode 2015; Posner 2001; Sides 2011; Skocpol 2014; Zaidi 2021), professional and epistemic communities (Adler and Bernstein 2004; Haas 1992a; Johnstone 2004), international bureaucracies and practitioners (Autesserre 2014; Haas 1990; Jolly et al. 2009; Kortendiek 2020; Oksamytna 2023; Seabrooke 2014; Weinlich 2014), think tanks and NGOs (Bliesemann de Guevara 2014; Joachim 2007; Rich 2004; Selee 2013; Shen 2017; Stone 2021), or coalitions, movements, and networks (Fouksman 2017; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Madsen and Christensen 2016; Wedel 2009), to name but a few.

The epistemic authority of knowledge actors depends on larger processes of legitimization that can include both formalized and idealized scientific standards as well as practices of contestation of a more heterodox character. Early theorists of formalized epistemic authority include prominently Peter M. Haas (1992a), who proposed the concept of ‘epistemic communities’. Haas defined an epistemic community as ‘a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within

that domain or issue-area' (Haas 1992a, 3). His seminal definition did not stipulate a shared scientific or disciplinary background, but emphasized the existence of shared norms, causal beliefs regarding the link between policy and outcome, and notions of validity in addition to a common objective (Haas 1992a, 3; cf. also Adler and Haas 1992; Johnstone 1991; Wenger 1998). In this approach, knowledge and information are conceptualized as an important dimension of power, and networks of knowledge actors as contributing to shaping state interests and behaviour in the coordination of international policy in conditions of uncertainty. The epistemic communities literature subsequently developed increasingly sophisticated conceptualizations of the interface between policy and knowledge actors—from a simplified transfer of knowledge between advisory/consultancy and policy actors to the co-production of knowledge across a range of policy fields, be it nuclear politics (Adler 1992), environmental agreements (Haas 1992b; Peterson 1992), trade (Drake and Nicolaidis 1992), or international law (Johnstone 1991, 2004, 2011).

Yet, this approach also attracted a range of critique of its centring on recognized elite experts. Scholars have emphasized, for instance, the epistemic authority of social actors and movements in particular issue areas. In the area of environmental politics, for example, Toke (1999) questioned the dominant role of scientific expert communities and highlighted instead the role of grassroots environmental groups (see also Nilsen and Cox, Chapter 48, 'Social Movements and Insurgent Social Theory: Making Theoretical Knowledge Through Collective Action'). Critical, decolonial/postcolonial, and feminist scholarship has further unpacked patterns of hierarchy, domination, and exclusion of actors in the production and diffusion of knowledge in global governance (see also Poopuu and Kurowska, Chapter 42, 'Structural Approaches to Knowledge and Expertise in International Politics'). These scholars have explored, among others, the knowledge contribution of African intellectuals (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021), the agency and omission of non-Western feminists in global institutions (Basu 2016), how (post)colonial legacies and continuities shape the production and producers of knowledge on the Global South (Escobar 1995; Karshenas 2016; see also Tripathi, Chapter 11, 'Coloniality of Knowledge (Re)Production: Individual Entanglements and Collective Solidarities in Epistemic North-South Relationships'), the negative effects of 'development expertise' in countries of the Global South (Easterly 2013; Ferguson 1990), the systematic sidelining of indigenous knowledges and knowers in international governance (Joranson 2008; Speranza et al. 2010; Yeboah and Daniel 2021; see also Querejazu, Chapter 60, 'Pluriversal Knowledge and Shamans: The Aymara Yatiris as Knowers and Diplomats'), or the role of Western and non-Western intermediaries in the production and transmission of these knowledges (Fouksman 2017). Others have complicated this critique by showing how political and/or economic elites in the Global South have sometimes readily adopted Global Northern experts and ideas in their domestic power struggles (Dezalay and Garth 2002; Hochmüller 2023; Moe and Müller 2018).

Yet other scholars have moved away from the focus on epistemic communities and actors altogether. Eyal and Buchholz (2010), for instance, suggest changing the concept of the 'intellectual' from a focus on individuals to an understanding of a multiplicity of actors and forms of 'interventions' through which knowledge and expertise enter the public sphere. Others have drawn attention to epistemic practices and the wider arrangements—historical situations, material arrangements, and institutional settings—in which epistemic actors and their practices are situated (Bueger 2014; see also Bliesemann de Guevara and Warnecke, Chapter 20, 'Practice Approaches to Knowledge and Expertise in International Politics'). Generally speaking, contributions on epistemic actors in international politics have increasingly drawn on sociological theories, in particular from Science and Technology Studies (STS; see Vorlíček, Chapter 6, 'Science and International Relations: Knowing and Making the International'), to show the manifold complexities of epistemic agency and authority and the forms of co-production that emerge between the scientific/expert and policy realms. The focus of knowledge and expertise studies in international politics has thereby gradually moved away from studying selected actors towards their embeddedness in practices, contexts, structures, and relations.

The chapters in this Handbook section reflect the trajectory of actor-centred approaches to knowledge and expertise in international politics, moving from epistemic actor types and their particularities to networks and to questions of the co-production of knowledge. The first two chapters focus, respectively, on international organizations (Glaab and Kortendiek) and legal professionals in the field of atrocity crimes and human rights violations (Christensen and Madsen), as two particular types of epistemic actors in global governance. The next two chapters then move to the relation between knowledge and different types of actor networks. They focus, on the one hand, on staff movements between governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies and how the interconnections thereby created contribute to the tacit background knowledge involved in international policymaking (Warnecke), and on the other hand, on strategic uses of knowledge in power struggles between private networks set up to consciously shape or manipulate the policy process for their own benefit (Kostić and Bliesemann de Guevara). The three final chapters in this section offer different ways of approaching the co-production between experts and policymakers. They look, respectively, at deep co-production understood as the holding of multiple expert and policymaking roles by single individuals (Waisová), the role of quantification and related expertise in global governance (Bandola-Gill), and the move from a concentration on scientific results understood as products to more attention on the process of making these products relevant and usable at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Lidskog and Sundqvist). With their focus on both actors and practices, these last chapters build the bridge to the subsequent section on practice approaches to knowledge and expertise in international politics.

Overview of the chapters in this section

The first two chapters in this section zoom in on particular epistemic actors in global governance. In Chapter 13, 'The Politics of Knowledge Production in International Organizations', Katharina Glaab and Nele Kortendiek focus on the role of international organizations (IOs) as actors and sites of knowledge production and expertise in different policy fields of global governance. The authors give a comprehensive overview of the epistemic roles of IOs, their sources of expert authority, and pertaining debates. They shed particular light on the question of who participates in epistemic processes in/by IOs and how certain forms of expertise gain recognition and become influential. Specifically, they show that, while IOs rely on the depoliticization of their knowledge production processes and products, their epistemic authority is nonetheless always contested, limiting the supposed neutrality of IOs' expertise and epistemic interventions.

Chapter 14, 'Legal Knowledge and Expertise in International Politics', by Mikkel Jarle Christensen and Mikael Rask Madsen zooms in on the epistemic agency of legal experts in international law and politics, drawing on insights from their empirical work on international adjudicatory institutions that deal with atrocity crimes and human rights violations. Employing Pierre Bourdieu's concept of (different types of) capital, they argue that jurists and networks of legal professionals may function as transnational power brokers in international politics and governance. They show how this has been the case at specific critical junctures when legal knowledge and expertise affected the creation of new international adjudicatory institutions, their legal frameworks, and normative goals in the two legal fields under study. To ground this argument, the authors trace how in these fields elite jurists succeeded in giving direction to the development of new legal concepts and practices that contribute to shaping the spaces in which international politics unfold.

The next two chapters move the focus towards the role of different types of networks and their connections with knowledge and expertise in international politics. In Chapter 15, 'Informal Ties and Expertise in Global Crisis Governance: An Exploration of Network Methodologies', Andrea Warnecke draws her readers' attention to tacit and background knowledge held and circulated by staff of governmental and non-governmental organizations in global crisis governance. Specifically, she reviews methodological and conceptual developments in social network analysis (SNA) to explore their potential for analysing the role and circulation of informal expertise between different types of organizations based on their interpersonal ties. Showing that standard SNA cannot capture the complex ties involved, Warnecke develops a two-fold research strategy that draws on the two-dimensional framework of director interlocks. She suggests combining multiple network analyses of the boards and management teams of large international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to enable an exploration of metrics that describe network properties, identify hubs and cliques, and thereby inform qualitative research into the significance and impacts of these interpersonal ties and the knowledge they help circulate.

In Chapter 16, 'Intimate Networks and Strategic Knowledge in Peacebuilding Interventions', Roland Kostić and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara narrow the analysis to a particular type of network in global governance, which they call 'intimate network': 'flexible private webs of intervening actors who strategically produce knowledge and use it outside of their formal roles to shape the narratives, policies, and practices of interventions in self-interested ways'. The authors first unpack the concepts of strategic narratives, flexible networks, and intimacy underpinning their analytical approach and highlight the central role strategic knowledge production and dissemination plays in the activities of intimate networks. The chapter then turns to an empirical example to illustrate the purchase of their conceptual framework, namely an intimate network forged by US diplomat Richard Holbrooke and the strategic knowledge produced and used by it. They show how Holbrooke's intimate network, through its strategic knowledge production and use, sought to influence the actions of intervention agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while bypassing the formal institutions, frameworks, and decision-making processes of the peacebuilding infrastructure.

The final three chapters offer different takes on the co-production between expertise and policymaking. In Chapter 17, 'Deep Co-Production of Human Security at the Science–Politics Nexus', Šárka Waisová proposes the concept of 'deep co-production' as an actor-focused addition to the wider debate on the co-production of policy-relevant knowledge. Rather than concentrating on the entanglements between knowledge- and policymakers, the chapter draws attention to multi-professionals and to co-production as a cognitive, intra-personal process, in which expert knowledge is produced by knowledge-intensive individuals who hold multiple professional roles simultaneously. Through the case of the 'making' of human security, the chapter illustrates these intra- and interpersonal forms of interactions and interplay between science and policymaking in deep co-production of policy-relevant expertise.

In Chapter 18, 'Quantified Expertise: Connecting Science and Politics in Global Governance', Justyna Bandola-Gill makes a double-move to address the questions of who the experts in international politics are and what they ground their legitimacy on. The author first analyses expertise as constitutive of global governance, showing how epistemic structures, and specifically the mechanism of legitimation of experts and their knowledge, underpin global governance. In a second step, the chapter turns to quantification as a key practice of expert authority production in global governance. The chapter theorizes 'quantified expertise' in global governance by focusing on three central processes: 'toolification' (the production of specific quantified instruments); 'narrative translation' (between universalistic numbers and specific contexts); and 'brokerization' (the expansion of the role of statistical experts from producers of metrics to coordinators and enablers of their use). These processes, Bandola-Gill argues, are of increasing importance and distinguish quantification from other forms of advice-giving and expertise in global governance, hence warranting increased scholarly attention.

In Chapter 19, 'From Product to Process: Science and the Making of International Environmental Governance', Rolf Lidskog and Göran Sundqvist draw their readers'

attention to the scientific experts and policymakers in the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Drawing on the academic fields of STS and international relations (IR), they show how currently existing political processes and connections between scientific experts and political decision-makers at the IPCC are hidden 'backstage', while presenting the frontstage image of seemingly autonomous and policy-neutral science, especially in the IPCC's assessment reports. The authors argue that, rather than hiding behind this frontstage image, the IPCC could make scientific knowledge more relevant for policy and practice through a shift from focusing on scientific results (products) to focusing on the processes of making these results reliable and useable. They suggest that by utilizing its manifold connections to political actors, the IPCC could thus better support political work to achieve the climate targets of the Paris Agreement.

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