Abstract: With its emphasis on formal and informal governance as well as different types of power and authority other than rational-legal, the ambivalent and notoriously vague narrative of global governance has gained disciplinary celebrity in International Relations. More specifically, it raised the question of agency in a broader sense as it remains to be determined which entities can serve as ‘global governors’. Unfortunately, much of this discussion is framed in substantial terms as global governance continues to advance an ‘add new actors and stir’ approach. Drawing on individualistic ontologies, actors in global governance are oftentimes portrayed as singular elements, acting as unified, bounded, and self-directed entities. Against such a background, the paper advances the notion that governance is never conducted by just one actor. Configurations of governance hence can be considered as the very interaction in which agency is constituted in the first place. Drawing on relationism as well as the emerging paradigm of inter-organizational relations, the paper advances a typology to discuss configurations of overlapping and converging mandates and responsibilities between regional and global governance. Despite the fact that much if not all governance on the global scale today is characterized by organizational overlap, we do not know how this affects world politics nor do we have the conceptual tools to study this. To advance such an inter-organizational perspective, the paper discusses recent and older contributions contributing to the emerging paradigm of inter-organizational relations, proposes a typology to consider configurations and involved actors, and briefly outlines how such a framework could be advanced to study the US in its multiple configurations. It will be argued that this helps to reconstruct how the US makes sense of and mediates between overlapping engagements in different configurations as well as expose patterns of competition and conflict or cooperation and commonality between regional and global governance.

Keywords: global governance, inter-organizational relations, international organizations
1. Introduction

The ambivalent and notoriously vague narrative of global governance has left the discipline of International Relations (IR) in a peculiar state (Hofferberth 2015). Given the “near-celebrity status of global governance” in current IR thinking (Barnett/Duvall 2005: 1), the intellectual engagement with actors other than the state – international organizations (IOs), non-state actors such as NGOs and multinational enterprises, as well as multi-stakeholder partnerships – recently experienced a rejuvenation. In particular, IOs today are assumed to play an important role in world politics and consequentially occupy a prominent spot in the intellectual landscape of IR and are prominently featured in global governance accounts (Karns/Mingst 2010; Weiss/Kamran 2009). In fact, while not synonymous, the broader notion of global governance to consider formal and informal processes of governance as well as different types of power and authority other than rational-legal in the enduring absence of global government, obviously, provides a strong intellectual rationale as well as a conceptual framework to engage with international organization(s). By the same token, “international organizations – however weak or inadequate to the task – are integral to global governance” and one cannot make informed statements about the current state of global governance without taking international organizations into account (Weiss/Kamran 2009: 72).

Overall, global governance has clearly opened up the discipline of IR and specifically helped to overcome the discipline’s state centrism as we transition from “international relations to global society” (Barnett/Sikkink 2008). However, specifically IOs but also most other actor groups are ‘thrown’ into global governance in a “add new actors and issues and stir” fashion (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014: 210), which for obvious reasons does not satisfy the intellectual needs surrounding these actors. Just as Finnemore (2014: 223) argued recently, global governance for the most part notices, states, and describes new actors but does not fully probe into or explore “the causes and character of proliferating new actors” or their agency. IOs in this context differ from other actors simply because there is a formal-legalistic answer as to how they are created and institutionalized. However, advancing rational-legal acts of creation to constitute IOs as research objects seems to be at odds with the broader notion of global governance and does not capture governance dynamics that stem from overlapping organizations and interaction with other actors. More importantly, the current study of IOs serves as a telling example for the larger issues global governance experiences when theorizing agency and actorhood since it runs the danger of focusing on particular IOs and assuming their autonomous agency instead.
of considering them as products of interaction. Put differently, focusing on single actors, be they IOs or other non-state actors, as ‘elements of global governance’ seem to suggest that these actors are somehow independent of each other which ultimately reproduces an individualistic ontology. In this light, despite the notion to embrace the complexity of governance processes at the global level, global governance continues to assume actors to be unified, bounded, and self-directed (Porter 2009: 89ff).

Against such a individualistic ontology, the paper argues that by their very definition, governance processes on the global scale involve and constitute multiple actors who mutually reproduce and limit themselves in their agencies. Hence, an individualistic ontology ultimately is bound to fail when studying global governance as it cannot embrace its inherent complexity. Put differently, in global governance we can think of actors to be involved in and constituted by overlapping and dense organizational configurations. World politics, by the same token, reflects the outcome of interaction characterized by almost endless complexity which instantly qualifies and limits any notion of actor autonomy. While this notion for the longest time dominated (and impeded) the discussion on IOs (Barnett/Finnemore 1999: 704ff), the paper argues that a full embrace of a global governance logic (and the idea of increased interconnectedness on which it rests) by its very definition qualifies the autonomy of any actor involved in the processes of world politics and hence has to be situated in an ontology that considers relations to be the origin of agency. Instead of assuming actors to be “ontological primitives of analysis” and thereby advance them as explaining variables for diverging outcomes (Jackson/Nexon 1999: 291), the paper advances a broad inter-organizational perspective which maintains that in order to understand any particular actor in global governance, said entity has to be studied in its interaction and in relation with others.

Drawing on and connecting to what Emirbayer (1997) discussed as relationism, the paper in this context situates and relates recently published contributions on the issue of inter-organizational relations. Drawing on organizational sociology, these publications share a certain interest in inter-organizational relations “concerned with understanding the character and pattern, origins, rationale, and consequences of such relationships” (Cropper et al. 2008: 4). Such a perspective gained relevance recently simply because of today’s dense net of global governance characterized by institutional overlap. ‘Problems without borders’ such as transnational crime and terrorism, trafficking of people, weapons, and drugs, global warming, and many more (Weiss et al. 2005: 286), which have been created and intensified by processes of globalization and increased interdependence, not only diminish state capacities to maintain the integrity and welfare of their citizens. These
problems have also created converging mandates and responsibilities among and between over 300 self-standing IOs that exist today as well as countless informal and non-state governance arrangements, networks, and partnerships (Pevehouse/Nordstrom 2004: 106). State delegations today have to navigate a complex web of regional and global governance while we as scholars know very little on how actors make sense and reconcile overlapping and potentially diverging commitments towards different formal and informal governance arrangements or the implications that stem from being involved and engaged in different organizational configurations at the same time.

Assuming that states continue to play an important role in global governance, the paper conceptualizes the US as a prism of inter-organizational relations and proposes a framework to study the US in its various organizational configurations. According to the CIA World Factbook, the US holds membership or observer status in a total of 88 different IOs of which many overlap and converge. At the same time and in addition to regional and global commitments to formal IOs, the US engages in informal governance arrangements such as ad hoc coalitions, the G20 or networks and partnerships with non-state actors such as the UN Global Compact or, more specifically, limited in its scope, and hence less well-known, the Voluntary Principles of Security and Human Rights. To better understand these efforts and engagements in different organizational configurations, the paper proceeds as follows. In a first step, the paper introduces and discusses the notion of inter-organizational relations by concluding that this new agenda, while still in its infancy, can be considered as an important building block to better understand global governance. Following this section, the paper attempts to systematize recent contributions and offers distinctions and dimensions for theorizing organizational configurations. Following this theoretical debate, the US and its organizational configurations including UN, OAS, and NATO as formal IOs and other, more informal organizations will be introduced. By outlining ideal-type distinctions of inter-organizational configurations the US is involved in, it is hoped to show that rather than assuming global governors with which the US interacts, these very actors are constituted only in relation to the US and through organizational configurations. In this sense, it will be argued that an inter-organizational perspective helps to better understand both regional and global governance as well as how particular actors mediate and shift their engagement between them.

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1 See https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html, accessed on March 18, 2015. This number is topped by almost every European state which, in 2000, on average, held membership in more than one hundred IOs (Pevehouse/Nordstrom 2004: 113).
2. The emerging paradigm of inter-organizational relations

As the term suggests, the study of inter-organizational relations is intellectually related to the study of international organizations. Traditionally, IR approached this subject from a state-centric perspective and focused on the issue of IO autonomy. Within the paradigmatic debates of the 1980s and 1990s, for example, we saw realists and institutionalists debating whether IOs mattered in world politics. While debating how much influence was exercised by and through IOs, the concurrent frame of this debate was that IOs were not discussed as purposive political actors on their own (Barnett/Finnemore 1999: 702ff). Obviously, this limited focus on IOs came under attack in global governance which, albeit varying in kind and degree, generally emphasizes their “authority and autonomy as actors” (Karns/Mingst 2010: 18). However, as will be shown further below, while trying to emancipate itself from established IR theories, global governance has yet missed the opportunity to fully engage IOs from within an inter-organizational perspective. In this context it is safe to assume that, just as realism was allowed “to set the research agenda” for IO studies in the 1980s and early 1990s (Martin/Simmons 1998: 742), the inter-paradigm debates of the 1990s, their focus on IO impact, and their implicit individualistic ontologies influenced and continue to influence global governance perspectives on IOs today.

One major avenue of this influence results in the irritating practice of studying and emphasizing the relevance of singular IOs in global governance. It is mainly irritating because global governance, as introduced and discussed by Rosenau (1992), is defined by its multidimensional, polyarchic character which results from the interplay of different actors involved. If nothing else, global governance reflects activities that cannot be undertaken by just one actor but in their very constitution depend on other actors and interacting with them to create meaning, purpose, and direction. Put differently, “[g]overning globally is never a solo act” (Finnemore 2014: 223). Hence, global governors depend on mutual recognition as such as agency remains relational and is constituted in interaction. However, global governance – both by opponents as well as proponents – is sometimes reduced to the simplistic idea that more and new actors are now involved in world politics and this itself raises the quality and efficiency of governance (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014: 210). Given the substantive direction of impact of most global governance contributions and their unwillingness or inability to overcome the prominence of individualistic ontologies in IR, global governance basically limited itself to a debate which other actors also matter in world politics. In other words, there is a clear substantial focus to go beyond IR’s
notorious state centrism but there remains a gaping lack in global governance when it comes to providing an ontological alternative to considering individual actors and their pre-socially assumed agency (Porter 2009: 87ff).

In fact, adding new actors and focusing on them in a singular fashion only reproduces this practice since it separates actors from their environment and assumes them to be independent and self-directed. Consequentially, in its current state, much of global governance thinking is advanced “without resorting or referring to any theory of action” to explain new global governors which, again, are mainly stated and then reported on (Strauss 1993: 48). Hence, while opening the discipline in terms of adding new actors, global governance did not – or at least not equally well – provide theoretical frames to relate them and conceptualize agency and governance as the outcome of their interaction (Porter 2009: 89). While adding actors to the list, we have yet to go beyond the commonsensical definition of an actor as an “entity that is able to serve as the subject of a sentence with active verbs – an entity constituted as the author of a particular action or set of actions that is performed ‘in the name of’ the actor” (Jackson 2003: 55).

Ironically, by advancing the notion that more actors are involved in global governance and that we need to conceptualize them in a broader, more polyarchic fashion, we have only reinforced the notion of individualistic agency by considering, albeit now multiple, still discrete actors (Finnemore 2014: 223). Put differently, while global governance reminds us to think governance in other terms than government (Rosenau/Czempiel 1992), we have yet to come up with alternatives for thinking agency in individualistic terms (Jackson/Nexon 1999).

Obviously, such a general statement does not do justice to many research projects attempting to go beyond mainstream global governance and hence needs to be qualified immediately. For example, within the study of IOs, one approach which goes beyond assuming discrete actors is to apply the open-the-black-box-logic. Just as states are only imagined as unified actors in foreign policy analysis, so are IOs as many break down into different sub-organs or, in the case of the UN, even different organizations, at least from an international law perspective.\(^3\) Such internal divisions and the fact that when studying the

\(^2\) Anecdotal evidence for this can be found in our own language: Just as we are used to say that the US, Germany, or Burundi as state actors did something, from a global governance perspective we now also accept and understand the sentence that the UN, the G20, Greenpeace or ExxonMobil did something without raising the question who acted within and on behalf of these organizations.

\(^3\) Organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization or even UNESCO and UNCTAD are clearly related to and situated within the larger UN family but at the same time represent independent legal entities (Weiss et al. 2010; Smith 2006).
UN one is really studying multiple organizations has long been recognized and documented in UN studies (Weiss et al. 2010; Smith 2006). In addition, picking up on the principal-agent debate and emphasizing bureaucratic and organizational dynamics, IR scholars discovered different sources of authority within IOs which, over time, can even create pathologies between the purpose of the organization and how it acts (Barnett/Finnemore 1999: 715ff). Such a disaggregating perspective has been advanced and applied to different IOs and indeed added to our understanding and knowledge of particular IOs. However, these approaches do not relate the disaggregated organization to others outside of it, solving the above-stated problem only internally so to speak. Thus, one can conclude that neither these approaches nor “global governance studies [in general] try to offer a theoretical model to grasp inter-organizational relations” (Franke/Koch 2013: 90). This is indeed surprising since because of their very activities, global governors are constituted through their conflictual or cooperating interactions:

“Global governors compete, conflict, cooperate, delegate, and divide labor in a host of ways we have not always examined systematically, but should. Those trying to influence global policy may be in direct and obvious conflict as when advocacy groups clash with states or with each other. Outcomes then may range from victory for one side, to compromise of many types, to more dysfunctional eviscerations of the formally victorious policy by the losers […]”(Finnemore 2014: 223)

Based on such considerations, a recently emerged paradigm interchangeably described as either inter-organizational or inter-institutional relations certainly gained momentum. Revisiting early contributions on interorganization theory and network analysis (Jönsson 1986), the last few years saw multiple contributions concerned with institutional density and organizational overlap in global governance (Franke/Koch 2013; Koops 2012; Brosig 2011; Biermann 2011). Leaving aside the question whether this can (or should be) considered as another emerging paradigm or an “inter-organisational turn” (Koops 2012: 71), these contributions clearly represent a growing awareness of as well as an intellectual response to increased interconnectivity and organizational overlap in today’s world politics. Such overlap stems from the character of new issues such as transnational crime and terrorism, trafficking of people, weapons, and drugs, or global warming which can all be described as ‘problems without borders’ and hence do not sit well with neatly defined and bounded actors, be they states, IOs, non-state, or informal governance arrangements. Rather, they demand close cooperation between different actors in which no single actor maintains full problem-solving capacity or remains fully autonomous (Weiss et al. 2005: 286).4

4 We can think of this assumption as one of the core features of global governance (Hofferberth 2015:...
Given the perception that world politics is increasingly characterized by such new issues, institutional density and organizational overlap become political reality. Hence, it becomes instrumental to understand “how IOs and other sorts of organizations interact, cooperate, use one another for their own purposes, and how they sometimes compete with each other” (Franke/Koch 2013: 86). While this is the common core of the contributions considered here as part of this new paradigm, it will be shown in the next section that not all of them are critical of the notion of discrete actorhood in global governance. While some ‘merely’ share an interest in theorizing external relations between different constituents such as states, IOs, NGOs, multinational enterprises, or other informal institutions of world politics, other argue that it is the very between that defines and determines governance (Biermann 2011). In a nutshell, inter-organizational relations exist ‘out there’ and wait to be discovered through the lenses of a new paradigm. However, the emerging research agenda of said paradigm lacks a theoretical core and remains as diverse as the discipline in which it is advanced, including a narrow and a broader understanding of the very term ‘inter-organizational’ as well as different foundational commitments to different theories and ontologies. As Biermann (2011: 174) argues, inter-organizational relations are still infant stage as well as “in a period of experimentation”. Being very much aware of the danger of disciplining and constraining research when discussing and systematizing different contributions, the next section attempts to contribute to the debate by offering certain distinctions in the modest hope of providing opportunities for dialogue and some ideas for cumulative research.

3. The different ways of theorizing inter-organizational relations

As Franke/Koch (2013: 93ff) and Biermann (2011: 173) remind us, we can think of inter-organizational relations in two different ways. Taking serious the semantic meaning of organization, we can conceive these relations in a narrow fashion by discussing the interplay between legally constituted and formally recognized international organizations. Based in such a framework, inter-organizational relations can be thought of as “the links, relationships and modes of interaction between two or more [formally and legally recognized] international organisations” which calls for a “research agenda that examines the origins, processes and outcomes of partnerships between [formal and intergovernmental]
organisations” (Koops 2012: 72f). Said interaction can come as unintended consequences of overlapping and converging mandates or as fully intended, purposefully structured, and formally declared links (see below). Since interaction evolves over time, different organizational relations are likely to feature different degrees of cooperation, ranging from short-term, ad hoc interaction to more institutionalized and formalized exchange. As Biermann (2008: 161) argues, ‘mature inter-organizational relations’ are based on “(1) regular, intense contact; (2) formal and informal rules of behavior; (3) regular channels of cooperation of varying formalization; and (4) long-term orientations as opposed to ad hoc cooperation”. However, independent of the degree, maturity, and intensity of interaction, in this narrow understanding there is no constitutive effect granted to inter-organizational relations. Rather, we can conceive of them as a function of the existence of independent yet somehow in their mandates and responsibilities overlapping organizations. Consequently, this perspective is often advanced when thinking IOs from a respective issue area or when discussing different IOs (co-)operating in a specific field.5

While clearly advancing our understanding of world politics, defining inter-organizational relations exclusively as such relations that exist between formal IOs does not fully take into consideration the broader arguments advanced in global governance and hence somehow remains at odds with this perspective. As argued in the last section, global governance cannot be reduced to the interplay between formal intergovernmental organizations but specifically involves non-state and informal actors as well. As admitted by Koops (2012: 75), limiting oneself to inter-organizational relations between formal IOs to some extent seems to be motivated by a policy-oriented and problem-driven focus. It also appears to be a matter of practical considerations since relations between formally constituted organizations are (more or less) clearly defined in official documents, unilateral declarations, and bilateral or multilateral agreements (Law 2007a: 46f). Hence, they can directly be accounted for and be studied as the inter-organizational essence of any specific relationship between two or more organizations. However, as part of the broader argument advanced here, there seems to be little reason to reduce inter-organizational relations exclusively to interaction between formal IOs. Rather, to do justice to all sorts of inter-

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5 Given the prominence of the EU in different policy fields and the ensuing “organisational overlap, dispersed competencies and mutual dependencies” (Brosig 2011: 147) caused by the parallel emergence and development of regional and global governance, we see this formal view of inter-organizational relations often advanced in European Union studies on interaction with and within the UN system (Laatikainen/Smith 2006) or in relation with other organizations (Jørgensen 2009; Galbreath/Gebhard 2010). For an example how such a perspective can be put into research practice by focusing on a particular policy area, see Law (2007b) and its discussion of how different IOs (co-)operate in the security field.
organizational configurations, one has to include dynamics between states, NGOs, enterprises, and other informal institutions, networks, and partnerships as well since all these entities have the potential to become important for the creation and provision of order on a global scale (Franke/Koch 2013: 86). More importantly, following Finnemore (2014), it is the very interaction between these actors that creates and legitimizes them as ‘global governors’ in the first place. Whereas the narrow perspective on inter-organizational relations does not have to be concerned with specifying its actors since they are created through formal processes of international law, the broader perspective which includes all kinds of actors allows one to endogenize the constitution of agency into processes of interaction (Jackson/Nexon 1999). Put differently, it is their embeddedness in inter-organizational configurations understood as constituents of world politics and spaces for ongoing interaction which, coming in different shapes and forms, creates actors in the first place:

“The starting point is a relational one which gives analytic primacy to the links between organizations. Inter-organizational relations vary strongly, particularly in the density of ties, the number of partners in a given configuration and the degree of institutionalization. They shape the role definitions of organizations and their identities.” (Biermann 2011: 173)

Following this thought, we can think of inter-organizational relations to be much more relevant and important since, assuming a certain long-term duration or at least repeated instances of interaction, they exercise a constituting effect on actors and their interests as well as identities. For our discussion on agency in global governance, this implies that we cannot look for ‘global governors’ per se but have to look for them in inter-organizational configurations. Such configurations can span multiple layers and levels, including national, regional, and global ties. They also vary in their numbers of actors involved as they come in dyads, triads, and even organizational sets or fields as well as anything in between. Most likely, configurations pertain or respond to a certain issue but might also include “the entire spectrum of issue-areas in global governance today” as more and more issues are characterized by cross-cutting dynamics (Biermann 2011: 173). More importantly, from the standpoint of any particular actor, each configuration only represents a certain part of their overall involvement and engagement in global governance, meaning that any actor is involved in multiple configurations at the same time which might or might not overlap as some of these configurations include the same actors in different ways while others completely differ as to who is involved. Bringing in the age-old problem

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6 As argued by Jackson/Nexon (1999: 304), configurations are ubiquitous in relationism and come in different shape and form. Ultimately, they all represent a certain aggregation of processes of interaction over time which justifies speaking and thinking of them as a new entity.
of aggregation, we can even think of two separate configurations situated on one level (e.g. two regional organizations consisting of different member states) becoming part of a larger configuration on another level (e.g. within the UN). Put differently, inter-organizational configurations themselves can be thought of as actors involved in yet other configurations on a more aggregated level and, vice versa, the actors in a particular configuration represent configurations themselves in other settings (Franke/Koch 2013: 93ff).7

Having said this, the constitutive effects of any particular inter-organizational configuration might be limited and potentially only constitute the actor within their particular configuration. In other words, hypothetically, the EU and its individual member states might operate under a certain mode in its relation with NATO which might differ fundamentally from how the states conceive of themselves and act as European states in the UN. Such organizational complexity, again, is a consequence of global governance in an increasingly interconnected world (Brosig 2011: 148ff). Thinking world politics in this way, however, allows one to relate the different “systems of rule at all levels of human activity – from the family to the international organization – in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions” (Rosenau 1995: 13). While clearly more challenging, such a broad, “holistic [and] multilevel” perspective seems to do more justice to the conceptual idea of global governance (Biermann 2011: 173). However, it remains unclear how to theorize such a perspective without running danger of being lost in overwhelming complexity or infinite regress. In other words, there is a strong conceptual and ontological argument to be made to (a) consider all sorts of actors to be potentially involved in inter-organizational configurations and (b) consider the implications of being involved in such interaction to be constitutive for actors otherwise unspecified as ‘global governors’. However, there is much less clarity on how to follow up on these foundational arguments. As Franke/Koch (2013: 99) rightfully say, “[f]or now, Pandora’s Box seems to be open” and we yet struggle to find ways of dealing with this.

In the following, I would like to suggest some preliminary theoretical propositions that in my view follow from a broader understanding of inter-organizational relations involving and constituting all sorts of different actors. The purpose of this exercise is to establish the idea of inter-organizational configurations as a heuristic tool to study and conceptualize agency in global governance as well as to distinguish between different ideal-types of inter-organizational configurations and theorize implications that follow.

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7 Ultimately, Franke/Koch (2013: 94) argue, it is “human beings only” who possess the competence to act defined through “corporeality, reflexivity, and the aptitude for abduction”.

from their set-up and overlap for actors involved. The dimensions of these distinctions thus have to be broad enough to include all sorts of different configurations, which, by necessity, reduces complexities and does not do empirical justice to individual configurations. However, considering different dimensions of inter-organizational relations in theoretical terms might help organize and systematize different configurations and thereby produce a more comprehensive picture of global governance. Assuming a relational rather than an individualistic ontology, there is an overlap between those “dimensions describing the relating organizations and [those] describing the nature of the relationships through which they are linked” (Cropper et al. 2008: 9). In the following, it is argued that most if not all configurations and their actors involved can be discussed and structured in terms of (1) their origin and ongoing mode of operation, distinguishing purposeful from unintended overlaps, (2) their oscillation between cooperation and conflict to the degree whether they can be considered functional or dysfunctional from a problem-oriented perspective, and (3) their internal hierarchies constituted through different structural positions as well as their ‘external relevance’ and status relative to other configurations. These dimensions allow us to distinguish and systematize inter-organizational relations without substantializing the notion of agency and actorhood in the first place.

First, in terms of their origin and ongoing mode of operation, one can distinguish configurations which arise out of conscious efforts of cooperation to solve problems that are perceived as being intractable otherwise. Put differently, inter-organizational relations can be motivated by perceived reciprocal dependencies in problem-solving. Such dependencies, once recognized and realized by the involved actors, stipulate efforts to reach out and cooperate, either in formal declarations or in informal ways. However, when not fully realized (yet), different actors involved in a configuration can either be aware of each other and engage in inter-organizational relations knowingly or not. Conscious and deliberate efforts of reaching out to others in this context are based on the perception of any given social problem to be beyond individual problem-solving capacities as their solutions is perceived to be delivered only through collective action (Franke/Roos 2010: 1066). The alternative origin and mode of operation for inter-organizational configurations on the other hand follows from unintended (and potentially unwanted) overlap. While this overlap is not consciously and politically expressed by any actor, the fact that there are overlapping mandates and converging responsibilities still warrants to conceptualize actors to be engaged with each other from an analytical perspective interested in certain problems and issue areas. Beyond conscious efforts to cooperate explicitly expressed in political statements, we can hence conceptually perceive of configurations which include
actors that are not even aware of the fact that there is inter-organizational overlap. In such a situation, we can think of actors pursuing their objectives independently until they ‘run’ into each other.\(^8\)

Obviously, we should think of this dimension (and the other two outlined below as well) as a continuum in which all-out conscious efforts vs. complete ignorance of each other constitute the two extremes. In most cases, we would expect actors to be somehow aware of organizational overlap and converging mandates and hence make a conscious effort to reach out to others to engage problems collectively simply because it is likely to increase efficiency and cooperation. Conscious efforts to create inter-organizational overlap might also be explained by accumulating resources via relations with others (Kolb 2013: 20). The UN, for example, included and specified its own relations with regional arrangements in their charter in chapter VIII (Herz 2014: 242f). Realizing the need and the potential of extended cooperation, the narrative of global governance has only added to the idea of shared responsibilities and increased efficiency through collaboration. In fact, as Biermann (2011: 176f) argues, one can see a “partnering norm” in global governance that assumes increased efficiency and legitimacy precisely through creating partnerships with other actors in the process of governance. For theoretical purposes, though, we need not limit our analysis to include only deliberately created configurations but can also perceive of them as unintended and accidental consequences of organizational overlap and enlarged responsibilities, reflecting ‘merely’ a partial and shared dependency but no intended effort to expand and increase efforts of collaboration. We can also think of configurations which are only partially initiated through conscious efforts of cooperation while in reality there exists much more overlap between the different actors that includes other areas as well. In one way or another, though, we can think of configurations as either ‘owned’ or ‘unowned’ by the actors involved in them (Jackson/Nexon 1999: 302).

Second and related to the first dimension, we can distinguish different configurations in terms of how much they cooperate and how much conflict exists between involved actors. While configurations can be characterized by mutual interest and consent to cooperate, they can also be competitive and conflictual (Cropper et al. 2008: 5f). It is thus not the functional efficiency of problem-solving that defines inter-organizational configurations but rather their political and contested nature. Cooperation and conflict in this

\(^8\) Given that IOs such as the UN or the EU advance broad agendas and assume ‘universal’ responsibilities, we can assume such dynamics on such aggregated levels (Brantner/Gowan 2009: 41ff) but also between each of them and their respective member states as the organizations and their bureaucracies are more likely to develop and maintain independent agency (Barnett/Finnemore 1999).
context can be thought of in procedural terms (i.e., how much or how little contact and exchange as well as the spirit in which these are conducted). Increased cooperation in this dimension would include a continuum ranging from information-sharing to liaison relations to coordinating policies to joint-decision making (Biermann 2008: 165). The latter also indicates that one can think of cooperation and conflict in terms of outcome. This assumes that actors in any configuration, while being qualified in their autonomy, maintain enough independent agency to make independent decisions and thereby act in accordance or in opposition to the overall consent established between everyone involved in any configuration. Put differently, while constitutive of the actor and its interests within a particular configuration, the fact that said actor engages in multiple and different configurations at the same time retains enough autonomy and independence for the actor to act in adversarial fashion and contrary to proposed decision-making within the configuration (Cropper et al. 2008: 9).

In other words, we can distinguish inter-organizational configurations in terms of how much they succeed or fail to influence involved actors to act in light of collectively established decisions. Put differently, even when endogenizing agency and being concerned with what constitutes actors in the first place, implementation and execution to some extent remains on the level of individual actors and is not altogether forwarded to the configuration. Consequentially, based on the degree of cooperation and conflict, inter-organizational configurations vary in terms of how binding they are. Given the absence of complete authority for any configuration over its members, even if there is a collectively shared assumption of bindingness, actors always have a choice to comply or not. Ultimately, “norms and standards [as well as decision-making] cannot spread across institutions without the action of someone” (Brosig 2011: 154). Put simply, inter-organizational configurations differ as to how much involved actors take them into consideration when making their decisions and hence differ as to how much we can think of them as independent actors (Archer 1992: 79ff). From a commonsensical perspective, one would expect a positive correlation between the first dimension and the degree of cooperation: The more actors attempt to create deliberate cooperation, the better they can deliver on it. However, we can also think of examples where non-deliberate configurations produce

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9 Note that it stands to reason but is not conceptually determined that increased cooperation is based on and reflects an increased degree of awareness and recognition as discussed in the first dimension. Hence, the first and second dimension reinforce each other as more conscious efforts to cooperate are likely to lead to more cooperation.

10 Obviously, literature on implementation comes into play here and helps us to further understand if and under what conditions actors act accordingly to what has been discussed with others.
cooperative outcomes whereas even purposefully stated agreements lead to conflict. In fact, going back to the issue of organizational autonomy, one can assume a certain organizational “self-centeredness of organizations”, meaning that organizational autonomy is perceived as a valuable asset in and of itself which organizations are reluctant to give away by engaging in in-depth inter-organizational cooperation (Biermann 2011: 176f). Hence, deliberate agreements and expressed declarations of cooperation are clearly not the sole determining factor of inter-organizational configurations as most of them continuously oscillate back and forth between cooperation and conflict.

From a policy-oriented and problem-solving perspective, the discussion of cooperation vs. conflict highlights that there is both potential for functional as well as danger of dysfunctional overlaps and inter-organizational dynamics. While overall performance and outcome in light of socially shared and collective problems lie within the configuration and no longer with individual actors (which considered themselves to be incapable to solve the problem on their own to begin with), few configurations will develop enough autonomy to be considered as independent actors themselves. At the same time, once initiated, inter-organizational configurations are likely to further constitute mutual dependencies over time. However, this is open in terms of whether it will stipulate more cooperation or more conflict. One the one hand, we can think of further specialization and closer interaction should the original problem be perceived to be addressed adequately through initial cooperation (Brosig 2011: 164). In other words, if there was enough overlap to convince actors to engage in cooperation and this cooperation is perceived as fruitful, it is likely to stipulate further cooperation. Having said this, inter-organizational relations can be thought of as constituting contingencies within a path-dependency in favor of more cooperation. While we find closely guarded autonomies as well as miscommunication and misperception across organizational boundaries, we nevertheless can expect at least some configurations to be bound on a trajectory of increased cooperation, specifically if there origin lies in some form of consent for working together (Biermann 2011: 176f).

However, again, theoretically we could also assume the non-existence of such consent to begin with. Instead of stipulating further cooperation, the absence of such a consent and the fact that cooperation is based on mutual unwillingness to engage with each other, we could also assume further tensions and conflict arising out of reciprocal dependencies. More a marriage by necessity than one by love, we find this for example among some of the inter-organizational configurations within the UN which involve civil society and other non-state actors. While there has been some recognition of having to work together, relations between the UN and the private sector have always been characterized by re-
luctance and mutual mistrust at the same time (Wapner 2007). As such, simply because of overlapping and mutual interests suggesting potential for cooperation, we should not necessarily draw the conclusion that inter-organizational configurations always stipulate further cooperation. Again, it seems to depend more on the mindset in which the interaction was initiated in the first place. Ironically, even in dynamics that were born out of necessity and are not characterized by conflict, the very fact that different actors interact with each other much more closely over time makes it more difficult to establish clear causalities for any given outcome. In other words, even if no one is happy with inter-organizational cooperation, it still occurs and can be studied to better understand the outcome which often lies beyond the individual actor involved (Brosig 2011: 164).

Third, to complete the dimensions of systematizing inter-organizational configurations, one has to study them with an awareness that different structural positions exists within them as well as the remember that different configurations will have different ‘external relevance’ and status relative to other configurations. As to the first, it has been argued above that configurations can either be dyadic or involve multiple actors. Independent of the precise number, the very fact that different actors engage in cooperation already constitutes internal hierarchies based on different structural positions which entail different potentials to influence collective action (Franke/Roos 2010: 1068ff). Different positions can simply follow from actors possessing different capacities and resources relevant for the configuration or can be part of the organizational set-up which created the configuration in the first place by ascribing certain competencies to certain actors (e.g. a permanent vs. a non-permanent seat). Both aspects can change over time as either different capacities and resources become more relevant or different actors prove to be more committed and efficient as they pursue the objectives of the configuration. However, whether they are institutionalized and thereby accepted and to some extent fixed or implicit and potentially contested and subject to change over time, structural positions to a great extent affect the work of any configuration and can be used to distinguish between different configurations as they determine the roles of individual actors involved as well as they overall outcome (Huxham/Beech 2008: 570ff).

In addition to considering internal hierarchies of different structural positions within a configuration, we can think of inter-organizational configurations from the perspective of the involved actors to have a certain value vis-à-vis other configurations simply because actors involved in a particular configuration are also involved in others at the same time. Put differently, for any actor there is a relative value to engage and commit to a particular configuration which is determined in comparison with other configurations.
Based on multiple, parallel engagements in different configurations, the relative value of a particular configuration might well differ for different involved actors. Determining factors, among others, include increased chances of reaching a favorable outcome, past experiences of productive cooperation, intended and expressed commitment to particular configurations over others, or simply the perception that the particular configuration might be the most efficient means to reach objectives. Obviously, the relative values of different configurations become important should the actor perceive these configurations as interchangeable since both operate in terms of similar mandates and objectives. In fact, if an actor perceives different configurations to be close enough in their purpose, it is their relative values that creates opportunities for forum shopping as actors are able to choose where to take certain issues (Karns/Mingst 2010: 274f).

Consequentially, there is rivalry and competition not only between different actors and hence within any given configuration but also between configurations vying for the ongoing support of their members. Internal competition can be thought of as attempts to acquire strong(er) structural positions to better influence collective outcome, either in formal terms (e.g. permanent membership in the Security Council) or in more informal recognition as an equal power (e.g. the BRIC countries in the G20). External competition between different configurations focuses on presenting the configuration as the most efficient window to solve certain problems. Basically, individual actors perceive certain configurations to be more or less adequate and important and thereby constitute their individual hierarchy of different configurations. Obviously, these differ since actors are involved in different configurations and are likely to ascribe different values to those they share. Increased organizational overlap is likely to increase such competition since configurations depend on the ongoing engagement and commitment of their individual members. While the overall commitment of any actor in different configurations should not be understood in a mechanical, zero-sum fashion – more commitment to one does not automatically imply less commitment to another –, one can still expect certain configurations being the preferred choice for specific types of problems. This competition ultimately weakens neglected configurations to the point where they no longer play a role at all (Brosig 2011: 149).

Studying individual hierarchies and comparing them, one can develop a map of inter-

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11 Obviously, the relative value of any configuration can only be studied from the perspective of individual actors and hence represents more an individual than an inter-organizational characteristic. However, since it immediately follows from the fact that any individual actor is engaged in multiple configurations at the same time, it is included in this typology.
organizational configurations that reflects shared commitments between different actors. Overall, such aggregations would reflect which configurations are likely to be sought out by different actors when facing certain problems. Unclear or diverging hierarchies would imply that different actors assume different configurations to be more relevant which can constitute political conflict in and of itself (e.g. the debate surrounding Iraq in 2003 between the Coalition of the Willing and the UN). Instead of aggregating, one could also analyze inter-organizational configurations based on an individual actor and the expressed relative values for the different configurations the actor is involved in. This perspective would allow us to determine how a particular actor mediates and deals with overlapping engagement. This could either come in a clear division of labor between different configurations or, more likely given the complexity at hand, result in ad hoc and unsystematic shifting between different configurations over time. Ultimately, this distinction reveals that there are different ways of studying inter-organizational configurations, depending on which point of access the researcher chooses. Assuming agency on the national level for illustrative purposes and in order to not get lost in infinite regress, I will propose in the following section to think of the US as a prism of different inter-organizational configurations, reflecting and mediating conscious and cooperative as well as potentially unintended or even conflictual engagements in different configurations. In this context, the different dimensions outlined above can be applied to the different configurations the US is engaged in as well as the overall interplay of different configurations that follow from these overlapping engagements.

4. The US & organizational configurations – a brief illustration

As argued in the last section, there are multiple ways of advancing the proposed typology of inter-organizational configurations. In this paper, I suggest to think of the US and its engagement in different organizational configurations as a prism of inter-organizational dynamics. While ultimately an empirical question, the US obviously holds formal memberships in different organizations and engages with multiple actors in other ways. As suggested in the typology, we can think of these engagements as different inter-organizational configurations featuring different sets of actors, mandates, and responsibilities. While some represent dyads (e.g. US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue) or triads (e.g. NAFTA), others are defined by regional or even universal membership (e.g. United Nations). Each configuration can be typologized by applying the different dimensions of formal/informal, deliberate/unconscious, and cooperative/conflictual. Conceptualizing
the US as the prism, we can also think of each organization characterized by a certain structural position the US holds within as well as a comparative value the configuration holds for the US. Again, due to overlapping memberships and converging mandates, the US has to mediate between different configurations and decide when and how to engage with them. Determining whether or not there is a pattern to inter-organizational engagement and connecting this to the typology of different configurations not only reveals how the US is engaged in regional and global governance. It also allows one to conclude on the configurations themselves by outlining what makes them successful and hence attractive to the US.

While the state itself represents an organizational configuration with various constituting actors occupying different structural positions and different processes on a subnational level, for our purpose here it serves to think of the US as being cohesive enough to engage in relation with other organizations (Ringmar 1996). Put differently, for the analysis in mind, the processes that constitute the US are treated as analytical primitives whereas the same is not applied to inter-organizational configurations the US is engaged in. On an ontological level then, such an approach is able to study agency in inter-organizational configurations without assuming it prior to the analysis by thinking of it as not distinct from the social relations in which it is embedded but rather as something that evolves and changes dynamically over time (Jackson/Nexon 1999: 291ff). Instead of reifying US agency in global governance by thinking of it as a bounded and self-directed actor interacting with other bounded and self-directed actors, the paper assumes that interacting in different configurations and the ensuing processes from this determine not only the US as well as other actors the US interacts with but also the configurations in their overall outcome for global governance and the ongoing establishment of world order (Franke/Koch 2013: 99).

To study both the actors involved in and constituted by the different configurations as well as the configurations themselves, the paper proposes to consider (a) expressed understandings of the US towards specific configurations, (b) expressed understandings of the US within specific configurations, and (c) expressed understandings that exist between the inter-organizational configurations. Such understandings are conceptualized and then reconstructed as causal narratives, giving meaning and plot to each configuration as well as their overall set-up and inter-play (Somers/Gibson 1994: 58ff). However, given organizational density and the prominent role of the US in world politics in general, no research

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12 For a more general and substantial argument why one might want to consider the state as an important actor and starting point in global governance, see Karns/Mingst (2010: 64ff).
can hope to capture the US in all its configurations. To generate a large enough variety, the paper advances a 2x2 matrix distinguishing configurations with limited or global membership as well as particular or universal mandates. In order to ensure interaction between different configurations, in terms of particular mandates and issue areas, the selection is biased towards configurations providing security governance as well as governance for the global economy. Each of these configurations also varies in terms of their degree of formality/informality as well as whether they feature the potential for binding rule-making and hence represent different degrees of organizational autonomy vis-à-vis participating actors. Table 1 summarizes the selection of organizational configurations relevant for the US in the security and economic realm.

In the following, the listed configurations are briefly introduced and discussed in their relevance for and potential effects on the US. Given its universal membership and commitment to nothing less than world peace, the UN represents the only truly global organization in world politics today and hence constitutes an important configuration for the US (Smith 2006). Given its global reach, one can hypothesize that the UN constitutes the most important framework for the US and its commitment here is echoed in other configurations, specifically so since these themselves are influenced by the UN and the configuration pursues the goal of achieving and improving international co-operation (Franke/Koch 2013: 97). At the same time, the US holds a crucial structural position within the UN and history clearly shows attempts of utilizing the UN (Archer 1992: 68ff). Founded around the same time (1948) but in a regional mindset, the Organization of American States promote collaboration and political integration within a geographically defined part of the world and hence represent a prime example for regional governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Mandate &amp; Responsibilities</th>
<th>limited</th>
<th>universal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>limited</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>World Economic Forum</td>
<td>G7/G8/G20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>universal</td>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>UN Global Compact</td>
<td>UN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The US & selected organizational configurations
Dating back to the First Conference of American States in 1889, the idea of a political organization in the Western hemisphere predates the UN. Hence, one can hypothesize that the OAS constitutes an important organizational configuration for the US which continues oscillates between cooperation, conflict, and consensus (Shaw 2004). Finally, within the right column, we find the G7/G8/G20 arrangements which invite states only partially based on a formalized membership criterion (size of national economies) but also on recognition, command of certain resources necessary to provide global governance, and, based on that, perceived problem-solving capacities (Conzelmann 2012).

Neither of these three IOs are limited to a particular functional mandate and hence clearly exercise converging responsibilities. From the US perspective, they consequentially represent important yet also overlapping configurations with which the US has frequent interactions. In addition to mapping these configurations form the US perspective, we can outline relations and understandings expressed between these configurations. Hence, from the US perspective, there is a relative value to each which depends on the other configurations and their performance. Obviously, article 52-54 in the UN Charter discusses other configurations under ‘Regional Arrangements’. However, the practice of regionalism within the UN has changed over time and can be considered as important for overall US-UN relations as well as for the US in general (Pugh/Waheguru 2003; Katzenstein 2005). In addition, both the UN and the OAS are currently reconsidering how to approach the G20 and some consider these relations to be “at the very center of world politics” (Franke/Koch 2013: 99). It thus stands to reason to expect that each configuration offers in their self-descriptions references to the other configurations which are characterized either by the notion to cooperate or by perceiving certain conflicts and rivalry between them. at the same time, assuming different constituencies, we might expect all three configurations to operate at least to some extent with limited efforts to engage deliberately in with each other to promote collective problem-solving.

Moving to the left column, we can consider different configurations the US is engaged in which are limited in their mandates and responsibilities. These configurations represent functional organizations dedicated to a specific, albeit oftentimes rather broadly defined purpose or issue area. While problems in world politics are oftentimes defined by their cross-cutting nature and intrinsic complexity – one can easily think of terrorism as a security and social issue or of global environmental degradation as a developmental and security issue – configurations can still be distinguished by their primary objectives such as providing security or creating a stable global economic environment. As to the first objective, we find NATO and its commitment to collective security to be relevant for the
US. Founded in April 1949, NATO is just insignificantly younger than the UN or OAS. ‘Surviving’ the end of the Cold War, one can hypothesize that NATO has successfully reinvent itself and the US remains fully committed to its mission (Wallander 2000). Since very different in its focus, set-up, and the actors participating, we can perceive of the World Economic Forum as another configuration exclusive in membership and dedicated to a particular responsibility in world politics which the US reconcile with. Defined by a multi-stakeholder approach (Pigman 2007), including this configuration allows to consider dynamics related specifically to non-state actors while clearly overlapping with the mandates of the WTO and the UN Global Compact. These two configurations are open for all actors and involve states (WTO) as well as both state and non-state actors (UN Global Compact). Since both are dealing with the issues of sustainable economic growth and human rights in order to promote a strong, stable, and sustainable global economy, one would expect to find overlaps and duplications the US has to make sense of and mediate.

This selection of configurations the US in engaged in obviously represents only a small section of ‘those out there’ and hence by definition remain selective. However, featuring different sets of involved actors (both state/non-state as well as inclusive and exclusive membership) and dealing with different issues of global governance (security, economy, and everything in between), one could reasonably assume that studying the US within these configurations as well as the relations and interaction between them offers a good first account of (a) how the US navigates between different configurations and hence between the regional and the global as well as (b) how these configurations themselves handle and come to terms with inter-organizational overlap and potential competition. Overall, the paper assumes that agency in all cases neither exclusively lies with the US nor with the respective configuration. Rather, taking seriously the notion of inter-organizational dynamics, agency is initially constituted (and more importantly over time reproduced) in interaction (Emirbayer 1997; Emirbayer/Mische 1998). More specifically, in terms of methodological implications, studying these configurations from a processual perspective implies to not take either their meaning nor agency of involved actors for granted but study how it emerges form within:

“A[ction] is not be perceived as the pursuit of preestablished ends, abstracted from concrete situations, but rather that ends and means develop coterminously within contexts that are themselves ever changing and thus always subject to reevaluation and reconstruction of the

13 Obviously, US agency is solidified in the sense that it would not cease to exist should the US cancel their engagement in these different configurations. However, as a ‘global governor’ involved in these configurations, the US is not only granting agency to other actors but also amplifies its own.
As (Franke/Koch 2013: 96ff) argues, we can reconstruct meaning and agency of configurations by studying the effects that they bring about as well as self-descriptions in the form of mission statements, communiqués, interview, and other documents. Consequentially, focusing attention on the US as the prism, the paper proposes to first reconstruct how the US understands each configuration and its engagement within. Among other documents, this will include remarks made by the President and reports from the US Department of State and its Bureau of International Organization Affairs. Such remarks are aggregated to narratives through which the US makes sense of the unfolding dynamics of global governance (Ringmar 1996: 451ff). Focusing on the inter-organizational dynamics between the different configurations in the second step, the paper proposes to reconstruct them as collective “systems of meaning” (Jackson/Nexon 1999: 305). Somewhat parallel to the reconstruction of state documents but on an aggregated level, this will include applying hermeneutic text methods to documents issued by the configurations themselves. Specific attention will be paid to how configurations relate to each other and what meanings are ascribed thereby in order to make sense of organizational overlap and converging mandates. While this will include the analysis formal documents such as uni- or multilateral declarations and agreements organizing inter-organizational relations (Law 2007a: 46f), it will also include documents not directly targeted at or related to other organizations and potential cooperation stated in order to define one’s own role and position in regional and global governance.

5. Conclusion & Outlook

Obviously more a research proposal than a finished study, the paper shares the criticism voiced by others recently that global governance suffers from an “add new actors and issues and stir” approach (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014: 210). While such an approach not only leaves global governance vague and unspecified, it also offers only substantial answers to who governs the globe while lacking an ontological debate on agency and how this is constituted (Avant et al. 2010). This can best be seen in the study of IOs in global governance which is mainly conducted based on singular case studies discussing the role of a particular organization in global governance. By studying individual organizations in such a singular fashion, global governance ironically reproduced an individualistic ontology apparently not suitable to embrace the complexities of multi-dimensional, polyarchic, and overlapping governance understood as an activity. Such an ontology no doubt works well
when dealing with formal-legal defined actors. However, the transition from government to governance on a global scale demands a new framework since acts of governance on this level are never conducted in isolation nor are the relevant actors involved easily defined in the first place. Put differently, the question of agency in global governance – the question of who becomes a ‘global governor’ – is itself a political question constantly negotiated and contested. Answers to it should not be assumed a priori based on theoretical commitments to certain paradigms. Rather, the paper argued that it might be a promising avenue for research to think of agency emerging out of interaction and as political outcome itself. Instead of stating first and then reporting on assuming relevant actors as ‘new elements and pieces’ in global governance (Karns/Mingst 2010), it is argued that their very constitution as actors needs to be endogenized in our studies to better understand who is involved in global governance and how it is delivered (Finnemore 2014).

With this larger debate in mind, the paper turned to the recently emerged paradigm of inter-organizational relations. While still very much in its infant stage, contributions to this paradigm share the notion that relations between organizations are important because “empirically we can observe that organisational overlap, dispersed competencies and mutual dependencies between policy fields are increasing and actively fostering organisational interplay” (Brosig 2011: 147). However, above and beyond the shared observation of increased relevance and hence a common interest in studying inter-organizational relations, different approaches exist which feature very different notions of how to conceptualize both organizations as well as their increasingly overlapping relations. Given the complexity of the issue at hand, such diversity is surely to be welcomed. For the sake of clarity, however, it was not sufficient for this paper to only refer to different publications. Instead, conceptual distinctions between them seemed to be in order. Following a broader conceptualization advanced by Franke/Koch (2013) and Biermann (2011), the paper argued that inter-organizational relations cannot be limited to formal-legal constituted organizations but need to include all sorts of different entities engaged in different configurations. These configurations themselves can be considered as constituents of world politics as they provide spaces for ongoing interaction in which ‘global governors’ constitute themselves as such. Ultimately, from a relational perspective, it is in these configurations in which global governance takes place (Finnemore 2014; Emirbayer 1997).

As observed and stated in global governance and discussed in the proposed typology, very different configurations exist in world politics today. Ranging from small to global, from deliberate to unconscious or even unwanted, from binding to voluntary, from formalized to informal, each plays a certain and distinct role in global governance overall. Their
constituting parts are either states, IOs, or non-state actors, each of which represents a configuration itself on a less aggregated level (Jackson/Nexon 1999: 304f). Coming together in certain configurations initially constitutes and then reproduces the agency of ‘global governors’, leaving us with a broad diversity beyond state centrism as argued in global governance. To understand their relational interplay and how they constitute agency, it was argued that any typology of inter-organizational configurations has to be broad in order to apply them to all different manifestations. Systematizing these different constituents of world politics and thereby understand how they constitute actors as well as and how actors act and make sense through and with them helps to contribute to a more “comprehensive framework of global governance” dealing with complexity and change on both the global level as well as subsequent levels in order to provide normative guidance for dealing with pressing problems (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014: 213).

Not having put the proposed framework into analysis yet, the last section had to limit itself to outlining how one could think of the US and selected configurations it is engaged in. While lacking empirical results and insights and while clearly not solving all conceptual problems, I hope the paper still showed how such a framework might help to better understand regional and global governance by advancing an ontological alternative to studying singular and isolated actors, be they states, IOs or non-state. As argued by Jackson/Nexon (1999: 296ff), reifying agency makes it impossible to explain change. Global governance, however, as introduced by Rosenau (1992), is all about change. Consequentially, the dilemma to deal with change one cannot explain limits global governance and leaves it in its peculiar and ambiguous state between policy recommendation, empirical observation, disciplinary narrative, and emerging theoretical alternative to replace other paradigms in IR (Hofferberth 2015; Weiss/Wilkinson 2014). Holding on to individualistic ontologies, it leaves us with the notion that multiple actors are now engaged in global governance yet we do not know why or how these actors became ‘global governors’ in the first place (Avant et al. 2010; Finnemore 2014). Focusing on the question of how agency is constituted in relations and discussing it in inter-organizational configurations allows us to intellectually tackle the changing dynamics underlying global governance. At least that is the hope while dealing with immense complexity and tinkering with Pandora’s Box of what makes the world hang together (Ruggie 1998).

14 One explanation, sometimes advanced explicitly, is “that other meta-phenomenon of the last two decades” which we conveniently describe as globalization (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014: 208). While clearly intensifying problems that lie beyond national politics and hence calling for new actors with new responsibilities, increased globalization alone does not (or at least should not) determine global governance or who becomes a ‘global governor’.
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