Abstract: Ever since the term ‘global governance’ has been introduced to the discipline of International Relations (IR), it has been criticized for its conceptual vagueness, ambiguity, and loose definition. In fact, how to speak and think of global governance — whether as a mere description of current world politics, as a conceptual and theoretical perspective to better understand and explain it or as a normative notion to be realized through global policy — remains unclear. The paper argues that this condition of collective confusion continues to last not because of a lack of debate on the topic but rather because of the multiple understandings and usages that are advanced in these debates. Multiple, partly overlapping and partly contradictory understandings advanced in the discourse today constitute global governance as a disciplinary ‘floating signifier’ full of different meanings. It is argued that precisely because of this, global governance has obtained its ‘celebrity status’ within and beyond IR. Advancing a singular definition of global governance thus appears to be an arbitrary exercise as well as unnecessary disciplining. Rather than reducing the meanings of global governance to develop a precise definition and answer what it is, the debate in and of global governance would benefit from more self-reflected awareness as to when and how which meanings are invoked. To provide a framework for this, the paper aims to shed light onto the different meanings of global governance within IR and beyond by reconstructing them and offering a taxonomy of different global governance understandings.

Keywords: Global governance, IR theory, sociology of the discipline
1. Introduction

More than 20 years ago, Rosenau/Czempiel (1992) introduced ‘global governance’ to the discipline of International Relations and its study of world politics. Perceiving ground shaking real-world transformations such as “hegemons declining”, “borders disappearing”, and “authorities being challenged by citizens in the squares of the world’s cities”, Rosenau (1992: 1) and many others felt that 1990s marked a turning point in history. In the first editors’ note of Global Governance, Coate/Murphy (1995: 1) for example argued that it was a time of “great hope and great hopelessness, a time when ideological fault lines have disappeared, while the global rifts of wealth and power have widened”. Enthusiastic and energetic as well as anxious and skeptical, the early publications contributing to the emergence of global governance in the early 1990s can in retrospect be understood as a twofold challenge. First, in disciplinary terms, conventional ways of studying global problems were criticized. Second, in political terms, measures designed to solve them were deemed as failing. An abundance of case studies at their hand and eager to challenge dominant views on and of world order and global politics at a time when real-world events clashed with conventional wisdom, global governance fell on fertile ground, both intellectually and politically, and quickly became attractive, in and beyond IR (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a).

The attractiveness of global governance can be explained by the fact that it tried to deal with the growing complexity of global issues and their solutions as well as providing answers on how to study them. Both academics and policymakers were keen to relate to the notion of increased complexity of ‘the world out there’ since both struggled with it. Ironically, as Weiss/Wilkinson (2014b: 207) convincingly argue, everyone continues to struggle today as global governance became such an overused and overextended concept. Because of its different speakers and audiences, there are multiple, partly overlapping and partly contradictory understandings in the discourse today. This observation itself is not new. Ever since the early ‘mission statements’, different authors, some sympathetic to global governance and some not, have criticized its vagueness, ambiguity, and loose definition (Finkelstein 1995; Latham 1999; Murphy 2000). Lawrence S. Finkelstein (1995), in response to Rosenau for example, saw no clear answer to the critical question

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1 It is interesting to note that in the opening chapter and throughout the book, the authors spent more energy on defining governance itself rather than specifying it in terms of its global dimension (Sending/Neuman 2006: 653). While Rosenau (1992: 3) for example discussed global order and the “concept of governance as it operates in world politics”, he did not use the term global governance.
of what global governance is and what it entails (as well as what it does not entail). In fact, with global change being all the rage, he remarked that compromises in terms of clarity and conciseness were made to the point that “‘global governance’ appears to be virtually anything” (Finkelstein 1995: 368). This state of conceptual vagueness, although being discussed manifold and fierce, remained throughout the first decade as two prominent proponents admitted and criticized at the same time in their state-of-the-art review (Dingwerth/Pattberg 2006). As a recent debate between Weiss/Wilkinson (2014b); Murphy (2014); Finnemore (2014) concludes, confusion continues to last as the slippery nature of global governance remains its most notorious feature.

In this paper, I argue that this slippery nature is not so much a function of a lack of conceptual work on global governance. Rather, the confusion originates in the simple fact that global governance is continuously (and deliberately) used to describe different things. Dingwerth/Pattberg (2006: 189-196) already distinguished between an analytical and a normative use and thereby between a perspective to look at world politics and a normative notion to be translated into political programs. Some understand it as a new approach to be related to established ones within IR (Karns/Mingst 2010) while others see in global governance the potential of a new disciplinary narrative beyond IR. As such, global governance has to be related to and will change previous ways of studying world politics as it entails ‘something new’ (Barnett/Sikkink 2008: 78-83). While this view features a rather prominent role for global governance, others contend that it is more descriptive than theoretical and thus at best describes current conditions of world politics, oftentimes with a too optimistic or even naive outlook (Murphy 2000). Even more so, for the skeptics, global governance remains a phenomenon which existence is still contested (Waltz 1999; Sterling-Folker 2005). However, despite skepticism, we can see global governance already transforming the field institutionally. Today, there is not only a journal specifically dedicated to global governance, one can also study at global governance centers, attend global governance workshops and conferences, and obtain degrees in global governance (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 5).  

These introductory remarks already indicate that global governance has become a floating signifier, within IR and beyond. Instead of analytical precision, the value of the term lies in the fact that everyone in academia and policy-making can relate to it.

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2 Since Hoffmann/Ba (2005b: 5) feature a short list of global governance centers, it suffices here to point out to examples of new degrees in global governance. These include, among many others, a MSC in Global Governance and Diplomacy at the University of Oxford, the MA in Global Governance at the Florida International University and the Balsillie School of International Affairs as well as multiple graduate certificates in the US.
Contrary to others (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b), I do not see this as a problem, at least as long as different meanings are advanced and discussed in a cautious, self-reflective, and self-aware fashion. The intention of this contribution therefore is not to ‘sharpen’ global governance conceptually by advancing and arguing for a specific understanding of it. Rather, drawing on Dingwerth/Pattberg (2006) and adding to their ‘taxonomy of uses’, the paper intends to shed light on the different meanings of global governance and their implications. From a Rortyan perspective, it is the contingency of (global governance) language in use and the meanings created thereby that constitutes a term (Rorty 1989: 9ff). While it is not my intention to argue that one understanding of global governance is better than the other, I intend to spell out potential sources of confusion, fault lines of contestation, and challenges originating from the different usages of the term. By structuring the different usages, I believe we can move beyond Finkelstein’s potentially too disciplining question and his provocative answer of global governance being “virtually anything” (1995: 368) and thereby advance the discussion in and of global governance.

To do so, the paper proceeds as follows. First, in order to retrace potential sources of current confusion, the historical context of the emergence of global governance is discussed. This is done by reconstructing, admittedly in crude terms, a political and a disciplinary dimension of this context. Second, a conceptual taxonomy of the different meanings of global governance is offered by spelling out different understandings and applications. Third, I will conclude on what I perceive to be two challenges within global governance which follow from this reconstruction. Understood broadly as a perspective on and of world politics, it will be argued that a plurality of meanings is not only inevitable but also beneficial for the discourse of global governance. As Patterson/Monroe (1998: 319) argue, it is not the precision of a narrative but rather ongoing references to it and the meanings constituted thereby which determine how we “make sense of our place in the world”, both in terms of our normative commitments and in terms of disciplinary positioning. Reconstructing the different meanings of global governance thus not only helps to structure and advance the discussion in and of global governance, it also reveals disciplinary practices and normative biases in the debate.

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3 From a Rortyan perspective, Finkelstein’s question (“what is global governance?”) seems problematic as it suggests the existence of a finite answer and the possibility for unifying the different meanings and usages of the term. Instead of trying to absolutely define global governance – an arbitrary exercise given its conceptual and abstract nature as well as the fact that it is constantly used and thereby changed in its meanings by both academics and politicians – we should be more concerned with the different meanings and different usages of it advanced in language games and therefore rephrase the question to “what is meant by global governance?” (Rorty 1989: 9-12).
2. Contextualizing the emergence of global governance

The study of governance and order on a global scale – something Murphy (2000: 796) described as “world polity” – has always played an important role in IR in one way or another. In fact, we can think of global governance in such an encompassing way that it becomes synonymous with the broader enterprise of studying international relations and world politics itself. As such, we can think of it as a rather old concept (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 2f). However, in order to develop and advance a more specific and analytically sharper term, various authors added various elements to global governance. Three defining elements stand out which, in one way or another, distinguish global governance from other approaches to world politics: (1) the potentially global scale of governance problems and solutions, (2) the analytically assumed involvement of other actors beyond the state to deal with these problems, and (3) the idea of ‘order’ as a normative precept and the most basic requirement to provide governance. While each element by itself is by no means unique to the global governance discourse – Nye/Keohane (1973) already argued for the inclusion of a transnational sphere ‘beyond the state’ much earlier for example – taken together, these three elements created a certain intellectual momentum which origins can be dated back to the early 1990s. At that time, different authors weaved these three elements together in a fashion that led to the emergence of a new approach distinct enough to separate it from traditional ones. Introduced into a discipline suffering from and struggling with its self-made straightjackets of state-centrism, paradigm wars, and rationalism, this new approach, despite its vagueness, quickly gained space and established a new discourse to be reckoned with (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 3-5).

In order to contextualize the period of emergence of this discourse and thereby consider potential sources of the contemporary state of confusion surrounding it, one has to start with the term itself and the way it was introduced in its early stages. “[B]orn from a marriage between academic theory and practical policy” (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 208), global governance from its beginning interested both academics and political practitioners which shaped its emergence and further development. From its first inaugural, global governance was situated in and related to two overlapping yet at the same time distinct contexts: The first context of emergence was constituted by real-world developments which happened prior and parallel to the incipient academic reflection. This dimension has always been considered, specifically so by the early proponents of global governance. In their opening remarks, Hewson/Sinclair (1999: 3-5) therefore connected the emergence of global governance to the two real-world developments which stood out at that time:
The end of the Cold War and the perceived notion of living in an increasingly globalized world. In addition to real-world developments, more recent accounts on the emergence of global governance also discussed the disciplinary context (Sinclair 2012; Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b). To reconstruct this context, global governance and its emergence must be related to other relevant perspectives and themes in IR during the early 1990s. Although obviously informing each other, for the sake of clarity, real-world developments will be discussed separately before the paper turns to the disciplinary dynamics. In order to create space for the disciplinary reconstruction, which I consider to be less discussed in the discourse so far, the historical contextualization will be kept short.

2.1. The real-world context: change, hope, and fear

Based on self-reflections of authors who wrote ‘in the early years’ (Rosenau 1992; Hewson/Sinclair 1999), it is safe to assume that the end of the Cold War as well as “that other meta-phenomenon of the last two decades” (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 208) – globalization – informed and framed the initial thinking of global governance. Even the briefest account of historical developments need to touch upon these two and outline how both suggested that change and complexity rather than stability and parsimony became the name of the IR game in the 1990s. As to the first, “after the end of the Cold War” not only become a popular first line for publications, it also became an intellectual reference point. Fascinated and at the same time terrified by the upheaval it might bring, the question of systemic change rose to prominence. While not yet clearly defined, global governance “emerged as a key vantage point on [the] central question of our times” which was focused on “global change, its sources and implications” (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 3). Gaining intellectual momentum, global governance for the first time in the lifespan of an academic IR generation no longer put explanatory emphasis on stability and continuity and many scholars embraced this opportunity to show how traditional ways of thinking in IR had reached an impasse, adding an academic dimension to the political turmoil which was experienced ubiquitously.

The underlying logic which prompted and promoted such new thinking thus was the idea that if the very foundation of the international system could change dramatically

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4 Note that the idea of perception already suggests that we should think of global governance and its context in a mutually constitutive fashion: Because of an academic notion that is being advanced, we perceive of ‘the world out there’ in a different way while real-world developments at the same time stimulate our analytical approaches towards them. This argument will be discussed further below.

5 For a discussion of the concept of generation in IR as a discipline and in politics in general see Steele/Acuff (2012).
and if the discipline was neither able to predict nor deal with the consequences of this development in an adequate fashion, maybe the disciplinary focus was limited. Rather than assuming the centrality of the state and discussing rather detailed questions about relative vs. absolute gains (Powell 1991), the likelihood of cooperation (Axelrod/Keohane 1985) and the degree of independence of international organizations (Abbott/Snidal 1998), to name just some of the issues that were prominently discussed in the so-called neo-neo debate (Baldwin 1993), global governance advocates became interested in more fundamental and broad questions and were willing to challenge the discipline of IR in more radical ways. In a nutshell, the end of the Cold War and the perceived and assumed changes that it brought with it made IR scholars ‘bolder’ and willing to raise new questions and issues.\textsuperscript{6}

The feeling of living in a period of fundamental change and the perceived need to raise new and more comprehensive questions was further propelled by the notion that the 1990s marked a time of increased globalization, the shrinking of distances, and overall a feeling of being more interconnected than ever before.\textsuperscript{7} Although of a much longer history both in real-world trends and linguistics, the debate on globalization became a “major academic growth industry” (Scholte 2005: 51) at around that time and was thus ‘felt’ and ‘perceived’ in a much more intense fashion during the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{8} The ensuing explosion in publications just further contributed to and consolidated the contemporary experience of living in a world in which time and distance had become compressed. Real-world developments but also perceived, imagined, and assumed shifts, increased opportunities to experience the world through traveling and communication, as well as an ever faster pace of technological advances all contributed to the emergence of a global consciousness and imaginary which, as a background, became influential for all debates in social science and beyond (Scholte 2005: 101ff).

Within the emerging global governance discourse, the notion of living in a globalized world became summarized under the heading of ‘increased complexity’. To be more precise, there were two globalization experiences in the early 1990s which influenced global governance thinking. First, the character of global problems appeared to be changing. Because of this, nation states were perceived as no longer being able to guarantee the secu-

\textsuperscript{6} The same logic of willing to ‘risk more’ applies to and in that sense also spurred the emergence of constructivism within IR as will be discussed below.

\textsuperscript{7} Note that the report of the Commission on Global Governance echoed and reinforced the notion of globalization by referring to a “global neighborhood” (Commission on Global Governance 1995).

\textsuperscript{8} While initial discussions can be found in several academic fields as early as the 1980s, according to Waters (2001: 2), there were only 34 publications focused on globalization in the \textit{Library of Congress} in 1994. Within six years, however, this number had reached 284 to further explode to 5,245 in 2005 (Scholte 2005: 52).
rity and welfare of their citizens. Politicians and academics alike in one way or another felt helpless to grasp yet alone govern global issues anymore. In reaction to this, the second experience reflected an explosion of non-state actors and the new roles they assumed within global governance. A “growing disillusionment with state capacities” (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 209) thus lead to more and more non-state actors getting involved in world politics. Proponents of globalization were keen to highlight this development and interpret it at the end of the nation-state as these new non-state actors acted ‘transnationally’ (Ohmae 1994, 1999; Florini 2000). While non-state actors and the extent of their involvement remained heavily debated in a discipline inclined to privilege the nation-state – see for example the almost polemic response from Waltz (1999) – even moderate observers recognized the limitations of an exclusively state-centric approach in a globalized world with global problems and transnational actors.

Summarizing the argument so far, contemporary experiences of living in a world of ‘increased complexity’ fundamentally affected and at the same time promoted global governance in and beyond IR. In fact, some of what was only perceived and assumed first quickly became an academic argument and vice versa, adding to the vagueness and confusion surrounding the concept. The changing nature of global problems, the new role of non-state actors, and the limitations of traditional modes of governance were all rather ‘felt’ than proven. Based on these experiences, real or perceived, global governance became the intellectual shortcut and political answer for living in and dealing with a more complex world. Taken together, these ‘ground-shaking events’ created an atmosphere of change, hope, and fear. “[S]eizing upon this time of change” (Rosenau 1992: 1), global governance quickly gained intellectual space and momentum in IR as it provided at least some sort of framework which other perspectives and long-held IR theories no longer offered. Emphasizing the novelty of contemporary developments and experiences, however, became more important than spelling out the details and implications of this conceptual framework. Global governance basically emerged at an exciting time of change, hope, and fear instilled by the perception of both fundamental and ubiquitous change. Out of enthusiasm as well as desperation, an ambiguous historical context was translated into and interpreted from within an ambiguous concept.

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9 It will be spelled out below that Rosenau himself connected his framework to a methodological perspective that appears to be rather familiar with the social constructivist arguments of the early 1990s as he attempted to propose something analytically sharper.

10 The experience of ubiquitous and fundamental change and the optimism and despair resonating in global governance was by no means limited to the academic world. The notion of a new world order in general and many different reports published and policy measures taken in the early 1990s all echoed
2.2. The disciplinary context: between overlaps and distinctions

Both the notion of change and the idea that other actors beyond the state provide governance, obviously, have been entertained in IR prior to the 1990s and in other discourses as well. Broadly speaking, global governance intellectually connected to the study of intergovernmental organizations, international law, and transnational actors. At the same time, global governance argued that intergovernmental organizations and international law as organizing principles for world politics have failed and criticized IR for being too narrow and limited if attention was given to these aspects only (Sinclair 2012: 15ff). In order to advance a more comprehensive perspective, global governance drew on different intellectual predecessors and peers. As with any new research agenda proposal though, global governance emphasized its status as a new approach more than its intellectual connections to existing ones. In fact, one can argue in hindsight that global governance did not develop its ‘near-celebrity status’ (Barnett/Duvall 2005: 1) by explicitly referring to peers and predecessors but rather by distinguishing itself from them. Considering the broader disciplinary context of IR during the 1990s, three developments and features for the emergence of global governance stand out in particular: (1) the parallel emergence of (social) constructivism and the opening of the discipline to alternative knowledge claims, (2) the English School, regime theory and the study of transnational actors as ontological peers and predecessors, and (3) the (allegedly non-)normative commitment of mainstream IR towards rigorous analytical theorizing instead of committing to international policy.

2.2.1. The parallel emergence of (social) constructivism

Much of what has been said about the real-world context of global governance above can equally be applied to the emergence of constructivism intended to provide yet another new way of thinking IR. Drawing on the English School as well as on a broader corpus of philosophical and sociological literature, a number of scholars refused to study international politics from the dominant perspective in which outcomes were traced back to strategic interactions among rationally calculating states with differing material capabilities. First labeled ‘interpretive analytics’ (Kratochwil/Ruggie 1986: 766) and ‘reflectivist
approaches’ (Keohane 1988: 389), this intellectual current became known as ‘social constructivism’. In order to avoid the pitfalls of structural determinism and reductionism, constructivism proposed to conceptualize agency and structure as being mutually constitutive (Wendt 1987: 350ff) and thereby succeeded in destabilizing the previous consensus that studies of international politics should be based on epistemological realism, the rational-actor model, and a positivist methodology (Fierke 2007: 172ff). Put differently, in its moderate form, social constructivism succeeded in seizing the middle ground between traditional and more radical approaches in IR and therefore became the most fundamental change the discipline of IR experienced so far (Kratochwil 2000; Adler 1997).

Just as global governance, constructivists were interested in and spurred on by the end of the Cold War to challenge more boldly previous assumptions about world politics. Thus, despite the lack of explicit references between global governance and constructivism, one can argue they intellectually influenced each other. In his opening chapter, Rosenau (1992: 18f), for example, argued that “the essential dynamics of any global order are, in effect, both independent and dependent variables in the endless processes whereby the patterns that constitute the order are maintained”. If one relates this argument to the constructivist tenet of mutual co-constitution of agency and structure, it is no surprise that, just as constructivists, Rosenau (1992: 18f) argued in favor of “eschewing the scientific procedure of designating independent and dependent variables, replacing it with a method of sensitivity to the interactive complexity of global order”. Rejecting simple causality in favor of more complex interrelations became the underlying mantra advanced in global governance and by constructivists alike. In fact, just as Hoffmann (2005: 113f) argues, global governance and constructivism are based on the same mechanism of mutual constitution. The difference is that the latter advanced their arguments from a more theoretically inspired perspective and discussed methodological implications while the former was more concerned with this dynamic interplay from a substantial point of view and in terms of its implications for world order.

While it is cumbersome to speculate why we find limited reference and exchange between constructivism and global governance, for the purpose of this paper it is more important to spell out the implications for global governance that stemmed from their parallel emergence. In a general sense, the emergence of constructivism in IR created intellectual space and opened up the discipline towards new knowledge claims and substantial issues. To account for and keep in touch with change in world politics, IR loosened its disciplinarity as to what were accepted topics, accepted methodologies, and accepted knowledge claims (Smith 2007). Global governance benefited from this development as it
filled some of the gaps caused by the disciplinary shake-up of introducing constructivism. In a more specific sense, constructivism saved global governance from fighting the same methodological battles twice and allowed global governance to focus on substantial issues of world order and change. At the same time though, this left global governance in its awkward position of not immediately relating to the traditional set of IR theories or at least of never quite clarifying these relations. While constructivism positioned itself in relations to other theories and thereby created a new ‘middle ground orthodoxy’ (Kra- tochwil 2000), global governance somehow remained at odds with the larger theoretical landscape of IR. Precisely because global governance avoided to engage in paradigmatic battles, it allowed the established paradigms to develop their own versions of global governance (Sterling-Folker 2005; Hoffmann 2005). This disconnect to the traditional IR landscape, it will be argued, contributed and continues to contribute to the confusion of global governance as it can be understood either as an approach within IR or as a new field beyond IR.¹¹

2.2.2. Ontological peers and predecessors: the study of transnational actors, the English School, and regime theory

When considering the disciplinary context of global governance, the study of transnational actors, the English School, and regime theory stand out in particular since they served both as reference objects and approaches to differentiate from. Just as with constructivism, we find global governance in one way or another connecting to and drawing on them yet at the same time not engaging with them in explicit dialogue (Dunne 2005; Young 2005). The shift of attention within global governance towards non-state actors, for example, can intellectually be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. In that sense, the seminal collection of essays on transnational actors first published as an International Organization special issue in 1971 and then later as an edited volume by Keohane/Nye (1973) already challenged IR’s state centrism which later became the ‘signature move’ of global governance. Neither Rosenau (1992) nor Hewson/Sinclair (1999), however, connected to these early studies on transnational actors, although Keohane/Nye (1973) already calling for a new paradigm which could serve “as a substitute for the state-centric analytic framework” (Nye/Keohane 1973: xxv). In contrast to global governance in the 1990s, though, the 1970s apparently were not ripe for this idea. Rather than succeeding

¹¹ At the same time, this non-commitment to traditional IR paradigms constitutes for many the attractiveness of global governance as it was from its beginning influenced by an analytic eclecticism approach which recently gained much attention in IR (Sil/Katzenstein 2010).
in supplanting IR’s state centrism, their failure to “produce a theory of transnational politics” – at that point the be-all and end-all standard for new research agendas – as well as intellectual “counter-attack[s] of realism” left the study of non-state-actors at “the sidelines of theorizing on either side of the Atlantic” (Risse 2002: 257f).

The fact that the 1970’s research agenda on transnational actors did not prosper in the short run, however, turned out to be beneficial for global governance in the long run (Barnett/Sikkink 2008: 71f). Because of this early discussion, global governance was able to challenge IR state centrism anew while at the same time “bringing transnational relations back in” (Risse-Kappen 1995). It could use intellectual space already fought for and yet present itself in a different light. For those who already had studied transnational actors before, global governance offered a new frame to relate to and re-state the relevance of their studies on non-state actors and private authority in world politics (Keohane 2001; Cutler et al. 1999; Hall/Biersteker 2002). For those who had argued against their consideration before, global governance appeared to be a much larger contender one had to react to (Waltz 1999). The difference between the 1970s and 1990s obviously was that the renewed interest in transnational actors immediately connected to real-world developments and thereby made a stronger case. As such, while the early studies failed, global governance succeeded in turning non-state actors into relevant actors in international relations. Although with a certain intellectual delay, it was only in and because of global governance, that the question of “who governs the globe” was raised anew and with renewed fervor (Avant et al. 2010).

Given that the study of transnational actors remained to some extent vague in the first place, it might not be such a surprise that global governance was able to reintroduce this notion with some sense of novelty. As to the other two peers and predecessors, the English School and regime theory, global governance had to relate more specifically simply because both marked obvious reference points in the theoretical landscape of IR. As to the English School in particular, Rosenau (1992: 2) did not distinguish his approach in substantial terms but rather by historical circumstance:

“[M]ost prior attempts to delineate global order [referring, among others, to Bull’s Anarchical Society] have not been propelled by a world undergoing change in the fundamental arrangements through which the course of events unfolds. Our advantage is the perplexity induced by recent developments, an awe that enables us to pose questions that might not otherwise get asked and to identify alternative lines of development that might otherwise not get explored.” (Rosenau 1992: 2)

The quote reflects “striking parallels between the governance paradigm and the idea of international society which came to dominate international-relations thinking in Britain
after 1945” (Dunne 2005: 72). Despite these parallels, however, Rosenau saw no need to engage with the English School explicitly. This is surprising as the parallels entail central tenets such as a shared interest in world order and how to theorize it, the important role ascribed to institutions, and the normative commitment to not only study but also improve these. The lack of intellectual engagement might partially be explained by the fact that the English School itself remained ambiguous in respect to some of its central concepts (Dunne 2005: 74f). It is more likely though that global governance, at least as originally proposed by Rosenau (1992), was skeptical about the state-centric ontology of the English School. The idea of ‘order’ as a normative precept did not prove enough of a shared interest to fully connect global governance and the English School. Although there would have been much to learn from each other, being caught up in their own respective debates prevented a mutually beneficial dialogue between global governance and the English School (Dunne 2005: 74ff).

Regime theory, on the other hand, appeared to be a much more likely candidate for exchange due to its “significant impact on scholarly thinking in the 1980s” in general but also due to its focus on governance in particular (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 11). Yet again, we only find limited connections between regime theory and global governance, at least in explicit form. Rosenau (1992: 8f) himself simultaneously connected his approach to and differentiated it from regime theory as he recognized that the “concept of international regimes [...] is presently very much in vogue in the study of world politics” yet argued that governance is the “more encompassing concept”. In his view, regime theory accounts limited themselves to specific issue areas instead of considering the provision of governance on a global scale. Global governance therefore embraced but at the same time superseded regime theory by situating singular regimes within a broader governance perspective and relating them to each other. Phrased more emphatically, Hewson/Sinclair (1999: 12f) argued that global governance “provided an innovative way of clearing one of the major blockages [i.e. its singular focus] within international regime theory of the 1980s”. The more comprehensive focus of global governance, however, also implied that the new approach was less precise and analytically sharp as it was the deliberate analytical strategy of regime theorists to focus on singular instances of governance provision that “contributed to the success of this stream of research” (Young 2005: 89).

More specifically to the emergence of global governance, the singular focus of regime theory contributed to the attractiveness of the new approach. In other words, it was the interest in ‘grander questions’ that set global governance apart from regime theory and made it more attractive to many IR scholars (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a: 20). In addition,
regime theory emerged at a time when the Cold War was still very present and rhetorically connected much more to established IR approaches (Krasner 1982). On the contrary, global governance appeared to be more daunting and optimistic as it assumed that “a growing collection of issue-specific regimes” in combination with the inclusion of non-state actors “can and will prove successful in supplying governance without government in international society” (Young 2005: 91). While regime theorists remained skeptical about the possibility of ‘adding up’ singular regimes and cautioned “not to jump to naive conclusions in this realm” (Young 2005: 91), the optimism induced by the real-world developments discussed above allowed global governance to fob regime theory off by pointing to provisions of order that occurred beyond singular regimes and the need to study these as well. Almost strategically, global governance listed international regimes as one piece of global governance among others yet argued for a broader and more comprehensive perspective to include other sources of governance, too (Karns/Mingst 2010: 11ff).

To conclude on the ontological peers and predecessors, global governance entailed some intellectual proximity to all three yet at the same time distinguished itself from them, too. While the study of transnational actors, the English school, and regime theory all shared central tenets with global governance, proponents of the new approach appeared to be reluctant to fully embrace any of them. Whereas there was enough overlap to connect to debates that have been led in IR for a long time, global governance appeared to be different enough to justify the establishment of a new approach in IR. It can thus be argued that much of the attractiveness that made global governance climb from the “ranks of the unknown to one of the central orienting themes in the practice and study of international affairs” (Barnett/Duvall 2005: 1ff) originated from finding a sweet spot between drawing on yet also differentiating from other existing approaches. It is safe to assume that this rhetorical strategy of simultaneous connecting to and distinguishing from other approaches and the perceived need to be more comprehensive contributed to the ambiguities and vagueness that haunt global governance today. By relating to other approaches in this particular fashion, global governance, deliberately or not, appeared “open and diffuse, if not a little noncommittal” as these characteristics were perceived as “attractive qualities in an era of ambiguity, uncertainty, and flux” (Latham 1999: 24).

12 In a different context but similar vein, Cutler (2002) discussed the emergence of private regimes and also argued for the extension of regime theory to include both state and non-state actors.
2.2.3. The (non-)normativity of mainstream IR in the 1990s

Almost all accounts on the emergence of global governance agree that a normative commitment to (improve) international order distinguished this new approach from mainstream IR (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 208f). Global governance in this sense has always been a “vision of how societies should address the most pressing global problems” (Dingwerth/Pattberg 2006: 193). This commitment proved to become an important way of demarcation as the normative commitment of IR in the 1990s was characterized by the attempt to be as analytical and normatively non-commitment as possible (Levine 2012: 5ff). While global governance was not shy to argue for a ‘better world’, mainstream IR had become very skeptical of voicing commitment to specific policy goals as it was still afraid of “the glide into policy science” (Hoffman 1977: 59). In its embrace of scientism and rigorous analytical theorizing, it was argued that IR should be as value-free as the role-model natural sciences it tried to emulate (Jackson 2011: 32ff). Just as its flagship publication *International Organizations* “increasingly drew back from matters of international policy and instead became a vehicle for the development of rigorous academic theorizing” (Sinclair 2012: 16), so did the discipline as a whole. Formal theories and the notion “to count what we could to make sense of the world” (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a: 22) became integral to the study of world politics and the (allegedly non-)normative background from which global governance could set itself apart.

While critical theory and reflective approaches reminded us a long time ago that any approach to world politics always carries and expresses normative values (Cox 1981: 128ff), global governance during its emergence found a discipline of IR that thought of its non-commitment as a virtue. For Rosenau (1992: 9ff) and others in contrast, the academic engagement with world order required both assessments and recommendations and involved a “move into the realm of norms”. In hindsight, global governance succeeded in turning its normative commitment into one of its defining characteristics which made it even more attractive precisely because IR mainstream was reluctant to discuss normative questions. Questions such as “what forms of organization and governance should prevail, how scarce resources should be allocated, and what kind if policy ought to be put in place” became questions that were raised, discussed, and answered exclusively within a global governance perspective (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a: 29). Just as global governance was able to distinguish itself from other peers and predecessors, contemporary disciplinary dynamics and their turn away from normative issues made this new approach attractive to everyone who was somehow dissatisfied with mainstream IR. However, as will be discussed
in the next section, the inclusion of both an analytical and a normative understanding of global governance also created confusion and left global governance in need of conceptual clarification (Dingwerth/Pattberg 2006: 196ff). The following section attempts to deliver this by offering a taxonomy of the different meanings of global governance.

3. A taxonomy of the different meanings of global governance

It was argued in the previous section that global governance departed “from conventional international relations thinking by conceiving [world politics] in a [more] holistic way” (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 7). This departure and its intellectual emphasis on broad questions of global change and world order came as a reaction to the limitations scholars perceived in mainstream IR in the 1990s and their explicit wish ‘to go beyond’ (Weiss 2000: 796ff). However, venturing into the conceptual and empirical unknown was risky, specifically so because global governance by its own standards had to deal with “the immense complexity and diversity of global life” (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 7). As Rosenau (1992: 12) put it, global governance faced the immensely “difficult task of delineating empirical orders at several levels, of comprehending the extraordinary complexity of human affairs and peeling off the layers of order that sustain it”. In the process of asking nothing less but “what makes the world hang together” (Ruggie 1998), it came as no surprise that different meanings of global governance were advanced and the concept became a floating signifier. This obviously affected the quality of debate in and of global governance. As Weiss/Wilkinson (2014b: 209) conclude, “potential analytical traction evaporated because global governance meant so many different things to so many different people”. In order to reestablish its traction, they argue that global governance as a conceptual device has to be elaborated and sharpened (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 211f).

While sharing their disappointment with the intellectual confusion surrounding global governance, the paper considers an alternative strategy in order to add to the discussion. Given that the open nature of a floating signifier invites to dialogue, constitutes identity, accounts for ongoing change, and thereby contributes to the relevance of a concept (Lévi-Strauss 1950: 61ff), the paper does not propose to sharpen the conceptual clarity of global governance by championing a specific meaning of the concept. Rather, the paper is concerned with the different usages of global governance and the meanings created

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13 The lack of precision has been commented on by so many that the argument of global governance being an overused and overextended concept has become a cliché and a truism. In fact, stating that everyone states confusion is so widespread that this itself has almost become a commonplace in the debate.
thereby. Obviously, given its hybrid nature and the attractiveness it exercises for both academics and practitioners, global governance in particular consists of different meanings. The fact that different meanings exist, however, is not problematic in and of itself as long as meanings are not mixed and confused in discussion. Instead of developing a lexical-like, singular definition of global governance, it is the different usages and understandings of global governance that this paper is interested in since their plurality constitutes the attractiveness of the idea. Any specific usage of global governance is understood as one among many “contingent narratives of meaning” (Somers/Gibson 1994: 72). Drawing on a pragmatist understanding of language and scientific concepts allows one to not only live with this plurality but relate different usages to one another (Rorty 1989).

In response to criticism advanced against the vague nature of global governance, I argue that there has been and always will be multiple answers to the question of what global governance is. More precisely, there can be no absolute answer to this question. Rather, it is the contingency of language in use that constitutes what global governance is (Rorty 1989: 9ff). In fact, from a Rortyan perspective, it seems more problematic to assume that a concept as broad and dynamic as global governance should be reduced to a single meaning since meaning is always relational, situational, and context-specific. Just as we can perceive political concepts (e.g. ‘the West’) without presupposing the existence of fixed and absolute understandings of them (Hellmann et al. 2014), we can think of global governance as a consequence of “communicative process[es] located in interpretative acts” (Rochberg-Halton 1986: 43). The task at hand is therefore not to propose a specific usage of the term but rather to map its different meanings. Taking stock of the different usages and understandings of global governance presented in the discourse reveals the lasting fault lines of confusion between them. In order to do so, I draw on previous proposals advanced by Dingwerth/Pattberg (2006) and Hoffmann/Ba (2005b) and add to their distinction the dimension of how much global governance one assumes. Summarizing four different ideal-types of how one can understand and use global governance, table 1 shows a matrix which differentiates between global governance thought of as (1) an analytical approach to and perspective on world politics among others, (2) a normative notion to be translated into political programs, (3) a new paradigm within IR to which other theories have to relate, and (4) a new field beyond IR, both in substance and in normative commitment. These different meanings as well as sub-distinctions within them will be spelled out in more detail in the two following sections.14

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14 Obviously, the proposed ideal-types mark extremes on the respective scales. In that sense, the dimension of normative commitment as well as the assumed degree of authority decentralization should be
Table 1: The different meanings of global governance and ideal-type examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of authority decentralization</th>
<th>Degree of normative commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(how much global governance do we assume?)</td>
<td>(how much global governance do we want?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>low</strong></td>
<td><strong>low</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global governance as an analytical perspective within IR</td>
<td>Global governance as a normative notion beyond IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sending/Neuman (2006))</td>
<td>(Khagram (2006))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>high</strong></td>
<td><strong>high</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global governance as a new phenomenon within IR</td>
<td>Global governance as a new field beyond IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Whitman (2005))</td>
<td>(Weiss/Wilkinson (2014a))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1. Between perspective and notion: How much global governance do we want?

In the broadest sense, we can think of global governance as an analytical perspective or as a normative notion. While the former promises analytical value by focusing attention to otherwise non-considered aspects of world politics, the latter reflects a more visionary component in global governance thinking. Put differently, global governance understood as a perspective does not consider the question of *how much global governance do we want* as it assumes a neutral stance here. Global governance advanced as a notion on the other hand implicates the normative commitment that more pluralization, more decentralization, and more diffusion of political authority would be beneficial. Stated as such, global governance as a notion recommends specific political measures and hence can be translated into a policy and political programs. Such a policy-oriented understanding of global governance reflects a certain disappointment with mainstream IR and its emphasis on rigorous analytical theorizing instead of committing to international policy with the intention of *improving* it (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b). Global governance as an analytical perspective on the other hand can be related to the ‘established approaches’ (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b). In fact, global governance as a perspective can be conceived of as emulating IR theories by stating exclusive and irreconcilable tenets vis-à-vis other approaches. As a perspective then, global governance can be thought of as (yet) another paradigmatic contender for theoretical supremacy within IR (Sil/Katzenstein 2010).

We find these two different usages of global governance already present in Rosenau’s writing (1992; 1995). Given his preoccupation with change, he argued that there would necessarily always be a “concern around the desirability of the emergent global arrangements vis-à-vis those they are replacing” (Rosenau 1992: 10). Murphy (2000: 789) also advanced this normative dimension by arguing that global governance is not only poorly *understood* in IR but more importantly poorly *done* as it “remain[s] inefficient, incapable of shifting resources from the world’s wealthy to the world’s poor”. Another example of this visionary application of global governance would be Khagram (2006) who, based on the disfunctionality of current institutions, discussed possible future architectures to thought of not as either/or distinctions but rather as being fluent in transition. Additionally, subsuming authors and their ideas into any matrix is always to some extent an arbitrary exercise which implies doing them injustice. However, for illustrative purposes, I think the four contributions listed in the table as well as they other discussed below might serve as illustrative examples.

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15 This application of global governance connects to the debate on *good governance* (Smouts 1998: 83).
16 Karns/Mingst (2010: 35ff) can be considered as a prime example of how global governance can be related to and ‘declined’ by the different IR theories as for them “IR theories are also theories of global governance” (Karns/Mingst 2010: 35).
connect “insufficient separate analysis and disjoint restructuring of specific organizations” (Khagram 2006: 113). These three examples all draw on certain values and argue that the world needs ‘more global governance’ and better implementation (i.e. more democracy, more transparency, and more stakeholder involvement in decision-making) to realize these values. Given the political character of such an understanding, normative commitments to global governance appear to be more likely found when practitioners discuss it (Dingwerth/Pattberg 2006: 193ff). At the same time, though, visionary thinking and applying global governance as a notion is by no means limited to the political realm. As Rosenau reminds us, while “there is a huge difference between empirically tracing the underlying arrangements and analyzing their potential consequences on the one hand and judging the pros and cons of the arrangements on the other”, the line dividing these two intellectually distinct practices “can be obscure and variable” (Rosenau 1992: 10).

In order to distinguish the two ideal types, global governance as an analytical perspective needs further discussion since we can differentiate between global governance as a heuristic device (i.e. a lens) versus global governance understood in a descriptive fashion to label what one can see. Global governance thus marks both the sum of self-conscious activities of actors engaged in world politics and the paradigmatic description thereof as well as the conceptual tools and the ontology to intellectually grasp these (Smouts 1998: 81f). Put differently, global governance constitutes a perspective on world politics which allows us to see world politics that increasingly can be defined by and best described as a system of global governance (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 3ff). As a descriptive account, global governance sometimes appears almost synonymous with how world politics are politically organized and done. Being less concerned with offering theoretical explanations, a description of ‘how the world hangs together’ must include any exercise of power and

17 For the sake of simplicity but also because they are not prominently featured in the discourse, normative assessments which not only criticize global governance for its lack of implementation but rather fundamentally reject the notion are not considered here. An example of such commitments would be the historical materialist perspective on global governance advanced by Overbeek (2005). A more common distinction in terms of normative commitments and their degree to how much global governance one wants can be made between those who argue for (more) multilateralism and those who envision a world government (Cox 1997).

18 The distinction between global governance as an analytical perspective and a normative notion concerned Rosenau to quite an extent. He argued that in order to maintain the distinction, one has to carefully distinguish between making empirical observations and normatively judging them. However, he was very much aware of the difficulties in doing just that as “[p]erhaps no degree of sensitivity can prevent some confusion along these lines as observation is in some respects a normative enterprise”. He concluded though “that confusion can be kept to a minimum if we relentlessly monitor our tendency to allow the wish to be the father of our thoughts or the empirical assertion to be the source of our judgments”.

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political authority in, between, and beyond states (Ruggie 1998). Such a description can refer to either a static, structural condition or can be thought of as the result of dynamic processes. Rather than explaining complexity, complexity is observed and stated as such a descriptive account cannot limit itself to singular institutions, elements, and pieces of global governance. Instead, one has to look into and empirically describe their interactions and relationships. These then become the primary unit of analysis and constitute the notion of complex provision of public goods and bads one is interested in when studying global governance (Finnemore 2014: 223).19

As a heuristic device, global governance is employed with other purposes in mind. Moving from ‘descriptive to analytical virtues’ and what some consider the “proper use of governance” (Smouts 1998), global governance no longer only describes what one can see but rather entails “a vantage point designed to foster a regard for the immense complexity and diversity of global life” (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 7). While global governance as such demarcates “a new thinking” which implies going beyond descriptive accounts, it does not offer precise theoretical explanations for what it assumes in world politics other than referring to global change and globalization (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 4ff). As Smouts (1998: 81) put it, global governance “betokens no major epistemological breakthrough”. Put differently, the heuristic usage insinuates certain explanations in and of global governance yet does not advance a full-fledged theoretical argument (yet) – while (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 3ff) discuss the emergence of global governance theory, they mainly list different “perspectives on global change” and each of these perspectives entails descriptive as well as explanatory components. The lack of a clear dividing line between these two applications constitutes global governance as something in-between a heuristic device and a descriptive account.20

Thus, although global governance is sometimes connected to and listed amongst IR theories, it fundamentally lacks systematically derived arguments on why change occurs or why a new global order emerges, at least in the sense other IR theories provide (however limited) foundational assumptions about the behavior of their actors and the systemic dynamics derived therefrom. While it does not offer a theory (yet), in its understanding

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19 In this sense, global governance promises to add an inter-organizational perspective to the more traditional and compartmentalized study of intergovernmental organizations focused on specific organizations. Whether this is analytical or descriptive remains to be determined in the respective research.

20 I believe it is this conceptual overlap between global governance as a description and global governance as a heuristic device and the tautology it entails that (Finkelstein 1995) criticized in his conclusion that global governance ‘is virtually everything’.
as a heuristic device global governance still advances certain theoretical assumptions about
the nature of world politics. Because of this ‘dual use’, global governance suffers from
conceptual conflation as theory and observation become enmeshed – it appears that one
cannot advance global governance as a heuristic device without relying on the descriptions
one can deliver when using such a device and vice versa. This is most likely the case
because of the inherent complexity of global governance which makes it difficult if not
impossible to device theoretical assumptions without descriptive components (Rosenau
1995: 13ff). If one does not limit the focus to a particular actor and that actor’s behavior
but rather includes a systemic perspective on the aggregated decisions and contributions
of all actors involved, it almost seems unavoidable to remain floating between providing
theoretical ideas and offering empirical descriptions. This hybrid state of the discourse,
however, can be considered as yet another source of the lasting confusion in the debate
as well as theoretical potential not yet fully realized (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 211).

Obviously, there is no easy way out of this conceptual conflation of global governance.
As with any ‘ontological wager’, there is the real danger of tautological inference as in
‘what we see empirically is what we assume theoretically’ (Jackson 2009a). Based on a
polyarchic, non-state ontology of world politics, we – to no big surprise – find and conclude
on a world that can best be described as polyarchic and which is characterized by the
involvement of non-state actors. Nevertheless, we have to rely on certain assumptions to
focus on particular aspects of the empirical ‘world out there’ to analytically “grasp the
complexities that pervade world politics” (Rosenau 1995: 13). Basically, as an analytical
perspective, global governance allows us to see things we would miss otherwise, even if as
an ontology it constitutes what we see and the descriptions we come up with. Breaking
global governance down into the governance of certain substantial issue areas such as
security, economy, environment, and health as for example done by Martin (2008), does
not solve this ‘dual use’ problem. In each of these areas, global governance serves as a
heuristic device and the denominator for what one sees. Other than being aware of the
mutually constitutive relation between one’s theoretical assumptions and one’s empirical
observations, there is little one can do when dealing with a complex issue such as global
governance as it remains impossible to determine where theoretical argumentation ends

21 Among other things, Weiss/Wilkinson (2014b: 211) argue that “[w]e should not only describe who
the actors are and how they connect to one another, but also how a particular outcome has resulted
and why and on what grounds authority is effectively or poorly exercised”. This obviously not only
requires the development of normative yardsticks to assess global governance but also more theoretical
maturity in the global governance discourse.
Despite the unavoidable and hence ongoing conflation between global governance as a heuristic device and global governance as a descriptive account, applying a global governance perspective recently saw a more historically informed application. Within this usages, it is argued that neither of the two dimension – the heuristic device and the description of what we see with it – is limited to our current experience of living in a globalized world after the end of the Cold War. While we can think of global governance as providing an analytical perspective to describe a specific, historically unique arrangement of world politics, we can also apply global governance to engage in comparative historical analysis and come up with multiple descriptions of different global governance arrangements (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a; Murphy 2014). Basically, the argument goes, different epochs in human history had different, unique sets of global governance – in the words of Ruggie (1998) ‘hung together’ differently – and by studying these differences, we can gain additional insights. Besides its static description of a certain historical condition which happened to come into existence in the last two decades, global governance thus also can be deployed to consider different historical modes of governance and thereby to distinguish between different ‘ages of governance’. “Governance in the twenty-first century” (Rosenau 1995) as the most contemporary manifestation might come closest to what we understand as global – as in global problems and a potential globality in political actorhood – but it is just as ‘analyzable’ as any other time and age. To put it more simply, both as a description as well as the device necessary to derive it, global governance is not new (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 210ff) and can be traced backward “over the long haul” (Murphy 2014). The European conquests of the fifteenth century, the Westphalian system as well as the established institutions of imperialism around 1900 for example can be considered as different expressions of different modes of global governance long before the idea has been introduced to IR (Murphy 2000: 789ff).

While not imposing to offer finite answers on any of these matters, the recent discussion on abduction as “reasoning at an intermediate level” (Friedrichs/Kratochwil 2009: 709) as well as the broader turn to pragmatist ideas (Bauer/Brighi 2009; Hellmann 2009; Sil/Katzenstein 2010) deals with such questions and discusses how theory and observation by definition are mutually constitutive. The author believes that the discourse on global governance would benefit from opening itself to such methodological and meta-theoretical controversies.

In line with this argument, Finkelstein’s question ‘what global governance is’ can be turned into a historical one and rephrased to ‘what type of global governance do we have at a specific point in time’. Weiss/Wilkinson (2014b: 211) argue that dealing more systematically with different epochs of global governance would allow the discourse to become more theoretical and answer why change occurs. Given that we are stuck with our system of global governance, it is tempting to think of global governance as a dynamic process of growing complexity which culminated into the arrangement of
Now that the different meanings of global governance as a perspective has been spelled out, we can turn our attention back to the overall distinction between global governance as an analytical perspective on the one hand and the normative commitments of global governance as a notion on the other hand and how different contributions to the discourse deal with this. Albeit Rosenau’s reservations that global governance is concerned with inherently normative questions since it discusses public goods and their provision and albeit the fact that the line between academics and practitioners remains porous and permeable as vocational orientations sometimes overlap (Jackson 2009b), we can see much of the global governance literature trying to maintain this distinction. Independent of the respective understanding that is advanced, we find most contributions in one way or another believing in the dualistic distinction between an analytical and a normative commitment. The most common rhetorical strategy to connect the perspective and the notion of global governance is to temporally sequentialize them. Thus, we oftentimes see an analytical understanding in the first step embracing a more normative notion of global governance in the second step. Lake (2010) is a good example for someone advancing both understandings of global governance sequentially as he argues that “[a] final step – and perhaps the most important – [would be] to consider the prospects and strategies for reform of the global architecture” (Lake 2010: 609).

The dualism of global governance as a perspective from global governance as a notion, though, in practice is not always as clear as suggested by the above discussion and its juxtaposition of ideal type answers to the question of how much global governance one wants. Just as Weiss/Wilkinson (2014b: 213) remind us, even in an analytical commitment and proposed as a heuristic device, for many “[v]ision is essential” to the global governance discourse. Put differently, in the debate of global change and order, one’s normative commitments are most likely more constitutive of one’s analytical devices and derived conclusions then the scientist in us would like to admit. Consider for example how Gordenker/Weiss (1996: 17) in an almost hopeful fashion defines global governance as efforts which “bring more orderly and reliable responses to social and political issues that go beyond capacities of states to address individually”. Contrast this definition with conclusion that global governance currently remains the “piecemeal [and] haphazard formation of global regulation” (Murphy 2000: 803). It remains to be seen how much the visionary world politics that we have today. Obviously, however, any historically sensitive analysis would emphasize continuity as well as change which is why it appears to be more reasonable to think of global governance as a process of waxing and waning complexity in how political authority is exercised. Note that the metaphor of architecture implies some sort of control over global governance and thus already indicates the hope to design it, independent of how difficult this might be in practice.

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components of global governance can be kept separated from the analytical perspective or whether the open inclusion of a policy-oriented understanding in the long run allows global governance to not only establish itself vis-à-vis but in fact come “to the rescue” of traditional IR (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a). For the time being, we can distinguish between a conceptual and a normative use of global governance and our scientistic ideals compel us to keep them separated. Even though we often fail in practice to realize this “methodological ‘organised hypocrisy’ of positivism” (Friedrichs/Kratochwil 2009: 710), the discourse of global governance can still ideal-typically be structured around this juxtaposition.

3.2. Between phenomenon and field: How much global governance do we assume?

In addition to the first distinction and its different manifestations, we find in the literature different answers to how much global governance we assume. Put differently, different applications of global governance entail different ideas about how much global governance we already have in place, independent of how much of these we would like to see in the future. The scale to this question obviously is not only gradual, it is also based on which dimensions one considers to be important for descriptive accounts and assessments of global governance. Thus, there is an overlap with the discussion above as the literature suggests different ‘measurements’ to assess the degree of global governance. Among others, some include the amount of different actor groups – state and non-state – becoming involved in governance (Avant et al. 2010), the strength and robustness of intergovernmental organizations of which the UN remains the most important one (Rittberger 2001), the size of “autonomous spheres of authority beyond the national/international dichotomy” resulting from the involvement of new actors (Dingwerth/Pattberg 2006: 197), the willingness of states to accept and engage in new governance arrangements (Karns/Mingst 2010: 255-285), the progress made along the lines of institutionalism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism (Sinclair 2012), the amount of cooperation in managing common affairs (Commission on Global Governance 1995), the number of gaps being successfully closed by that cooperation (Weiss 2013: 62-168), the degree of change among different layers of order (Rosenau 1992), or, in the most encompassing sense, the amount of progress made towards world government (Cabrera 2011).

The different ‘yardsticks’ of global governance just outlined all point to the fact that distinctions to be made here are relative as different applications of global governance assume different ‘degrees of global governance’. In other words, global governance comes in shades of more or less and the transition between understanding global governance as a
new paradigm and global governance thought of as a new field is rather fluid. In one way or
another, independent of where they precisely fall on this continuum, all global governance
contributions address the issues of decentralization, pluralization, and diffusion of political
authority. The dividing factor then becomes how advanced one imagines the diffusion and
dilution of state power and its respective dispersion among a much broader range of new
actors (Jentleson 2012: 134ff). Hence, respective answers to the question of how much
global governance one assumes become answers along the lines of how much complexity in
world politics one assumes and how much dispersion, disaggregation, and fragmentation
of political authority one sees (Rosenau 1995). Given that IR as a discipline for the most
part imagined the exercise of political authority on a global scale to be the exclusive
sphere of states – as the disciplinary name and focus suggests, world politics plays out
and therefore can be reduced to the interaction between states in international relations
– we can consider global governance not only as a critique of IR but also ‘measure’ it in
the sense of whether one wants to remain within IR or go beyond it:

“[S]ome authors feel that understanding global governance requires breaking new theoretical
ground, while others feel comfortable examining global governance with traditional, though
expanded, theoretical perspectives.”(Hoffmann/Ba 2005a: 257)

To offer a complete taxonomy of global governance, though, one has to start with those
(non-)applications of it. Thus, the most skeptical and radical understanding to be ad-
vanced is one which answers the question of how much global governance we assume in
a negative fashion. Since global governance assumptions and tenets to some extent clash
with those of the (neo-)realist tradition, it is no surprise that we find the notion being
most heavily contested by authors such as Gilpin (2002), Waltz (1999), and Mearsheimer
(1994). Rhetorically, these authors connect global governance to the idea of international
anarchy which in the end ‘outdoes’ any emerging new rule systems beyond the nation
state – whatever limited collective governance we find is the result of states granting these
pockets of collaboration. Assuming any more than this is to consider “imagined dragons
and genuine fire-breathers” (Sterling-Folker 2005: 26ff). Political authority in this under-
standing not only remains centralized within the state, the state, its sovereignty, and its
problem-solving capacities also remain for the most part unaffected since interdependence
remains limited (Krasner 1993). To assume anything else along the lines of ‘more’ global
governance or even yet develop “a ‘new’ analytical approach […] will fail miserably to
understand” international relations (Sterling-Folker 2005: 33).

In a more moderate understanding of global governance, the diffusion of political
authority exists yet still remains rather limited and therefore can be cast in the tradi-
tional terms of the discipline. International Relations, so the argument goes, has always dealt with governance and therefore is not only able but potentially best-equipped to integrate the new debate on global governance. Similar to what skeptics in the globalization discourse argue (Hirst/Thompson, 2002), global governance really is not something new and can be accommodated within the established parameters and mindsets of the discipline (Karns/Mingst 2010). Thus, the argument here is no longer the denial of the dispersion of political authority but the limited need for new perspectives. While diffusion is indeed happening, it can still be discussed by referring back to established theories. This might include the sharpening and refocusing of some of their conceptual terms by drawing on debates that took place within IR and compare it with insights from other disciplines (Barnett/Duvall 2005). Overall, though, global governance as a new empirical phenomenon rather than a new theoretical paradigm can best be studied within IR. Paradigms that are firmly established, so the meaning conveyed, suffice to account for the rather gradual and moderate changes that currently take place. The rather skeptical account of Sending/Neuman (2006) on the relation between NGOs and state actors can serve as an illustrative example here since they argue that political authority exercised in spheres not controlled by the state remains limited.\(^25\)

As an intermediate step assuming ‘more of it’, we can find global governance being understood and advanced as a new framework or paradigm. As such, global governance remains situated within IR yet fundamentally changes its theoretical landscape in the sense that it is considered to be on par with other IR approaches and theories. Assuming that the nature of world politics has changed and that it has done so rather radically, Rosenau (1999: 289ff) for example attests a paradigmatic shift in how the world empirically works. Because of these empirical developments and changes, IR needs a new framework to deal with this changed reality. In another instance of this understanding, Cerny (1995) emphasizes a “changing logic of collective action” as well as the necessity to develop a new framework to stay on top of the ever-changing reality of living and governance in a globalized world. His argument is grounded in the empirical assumption of “neofeudal rivalries and asymmetric cooperation among a range of interests and collective agents reflecting differentiated economic activities with diverse goods/assets structures” (Cerny 1995: 625). Similarly, Whitman (2005) assumes high degrees of dissemination

\(^{25}\) The renewed interest in state sovereignty as well as the notions that it has always been a social construction (Biersteker/Weber 1996) or organized hypocrisy (Krasner 1999) serve as another example since these can be seen as a reaction to the concerns and issues raised by global governance yet frame this new development to empirical questions to be discussed in the disciplinary approaches of constructivism and realism.
and exchange which command new thinking in and of global governance. What all these examples share is a commitment, even if it is a critical one, to the intellectual structures of IR. Within the taxonomy advanced here, their empirical arguments of change reflect the assumption of a high(er) degree of global governance. Since they lack an equally high normative commitment and assume it to be feasible to refine established perspectives, they all remain within the disciplinary boundaries set by IR and connect to previous ways of doing IR. Basically, understood as a new paradigm situated IR, global governance and IR mutually benefit from each other and it remains to be assessed how “traditional IR theory has responded to the ‘new’ dynamics of global governance as well as how the phenomenon of global governance has inspired theoretical innovations in IR theory” (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 2).

In a more radical sense and including an explicit commitment to normativity, some advance global governance as a new narrative which has the potential to transcend IR (Barnett/Sikkink 2008; Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a). Since the state centrism of IR has not only been a defining but rather the foundational feature of IR – a discipline that ever since its inauguration has been characterized and dominated by the “‘states-as-the-sole-actors’ approach” (Wolfers 1959: 83) – empirically assuming a comprehensive decentralization of authority for some is more than appending yet another new paradigm. It is rather a more fundamental shift that changes how we (should) think and make sense of world politics. Since it is “the language of ‘international relations’ [which] leads us to think only about states, which are not central to all interesting questions of world politics” (Keohane 2008: 708, Fn. 1), global governance as a new narrative offers the potential to change the very name and language of the discipline. The imperative of global governance thus is to be not only develop a new language game within established boundaries (i.e. advancing a new paradigm within IR) but rather altogether shed this language and develop a new narrative of world politics beyond IR. Global governance as a new narrative thus promises to provide the study of world politics with a new mindset of how to relate actors and events and thereby constitutes new causal emplotments (Somers/Gibson 1994: 58ff). Since these new emplotments entail fundamentally new assumptions and are based on empirical assumptions that for the most part conflict with those of traditional IR, global governance ultimately has to leave behind IR’s “sterile paradigm wars” and transcend the field in order to reinvent itself (Barnett/Sikkink 2008: 75ff).

In this radical understanding of global governance, it makes little sense to hold on to the disciplinary structure of IR. Put differently, the assumed empirical transition from international relations to global governance has to be echoed by a transition in the in-
tellectual structures that accommodate these topics. This is specifically the case because IR already “teeters on the abyss of irrelevance” as it became increasingly disparate and fragmented (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a). Thinking of global governance as a new field and discipline beyond IR thus reflects a certain disappointment as well as discomfort with both the terms of international relations but also with the disciplinary structures. In this understanding, global governance brings with it the necessity as well as the opportunity of embracing a more interdisciplinary perspective on governance, rules, and the exercise of authority. Just as Rosenau has always been interested in “a sociology of global life” (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 6), the issues discussed in global governance in this understanding would not be limited to either IR or political science. Rather, global governance, just like globalization (Scholte 2005), by its very nature is an interdisciplinary phenomenon. Therefore, the study of it should embrace diverse disciplines such as economics, history, and (international) law and recombine these traditions of thought in a new field. It is this radical understanding of global governance that is advanced as “a conscious effort to break with traditional approaches” (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 5).

Given the novelty of the empirical changes and developments that have fostered the disappointment with traditional IR and, at least for some, created the need for a new field, the identity and intellectual structures of this new field have yet to be specified and developed. While we can see initial separation reflected in disciplinary transformations such as the inauguration and establishment of new global governance centers, programs, journals, and conferences (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 5), much of the global governance debate still remains firmly within IR. Just as the hybrid nature of being used both as an analytical device as well as an description contributed to the confusion surrounding global governance, so do the different understandings of global governance based on respective answers to the question of how much global governance we assume. It is the task of the following conclusion to go beyond the cliché of stating ubiquitous confusion by summarizing the arguments made in the paper so far and by discussing the implications and challenges following from them for global governance.

26 (Finnemore 2014: 221, Fn. 5) assumes the same dynamics to be the underlying logic of the arguments advanced by Weiss/Wilkinson (2014b).
4. Conclusions and challenges ahead

Essentially we have found both agreement and debate in conceptions of global governance.

(Matthew J. Hoffmann and Alice D. Ba, Contending perspectives on Global Governance)

Shortly after Rosenau/Czempiel (1992) introduced ‘global governance’ to the discipline of International Relations and its study of world politics, Finkelstein (1995) asked what it is. Ever since then, global governance struggled for a clear definition while leaving enough space to accommodate the different understandings it entails. This has created “a cacophony of voices [and] the maze that is the global governance literature” today (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 2). In a first step, the paper outlined some of the potential sources of this confusion surrounding global governance today by looking into the context of its emergence. Among these contextual sources of confusion, one can list the enticement of and enthusiasm for change fired up by real-world developments during the 1990s. World politics were perceived to be in turmoil and in desperate need for new solutions as well as new ways to be studied. The radical nature of contemporary events, however, did not call for precise but rather for innovative thinking (Hewson/Sinclair 1999: 5ff). As an amplifier of this initial emphasis on novelty, global governance was situated within a disciplinary context with which many were not only disappointed but which also demanded and hence rewarded innovation. Once more, the need for novelty trumped the need for precision. Instead of explicitly connecting to and thereby elaborating existing approaches, global governance elegantly drew on them yet at the same time presented itself as something new (Hoffmann/Ba 2005a: 259ff).

In this sense, global governance became more of a label to signal departure from traditional approaches then a clear-cut, well-defined concept. In a nutshell, it can be argued that the perception of ground-breaking change in the real world as well as the specific state of the IR discipline with its paradigmatic structure, its scientific focus on rigorous analytical theorizing, its ‘neo-neo-debate’ and its self-made straightjackets of state-centrism, paradigm wars, and rationalism contributed to the emergence of global governance in the 1990s yet did not create incentives for precision or clarity and thus reinforced initial confusion. Put differently, the historical context in which global governance emerged proved to be a curse and a blessing: It allowed global governance to rise to prominence very quickly but only by committing to comprehensiveness and hence ambiguity rather than analytical precision and conceptual clarity. Taken together, the atmosphere of change,
hope, and fear triggered by real-world developments and incentive structures within IR created dynamics that made it more likely (as well as rewarding) to establish an elusive, floating idea rather than developing a sharp and precise concept (Latham 1999).

Besides the outlined context-specific sources of confusion, one should also consider the concept-specific ones. To be both compatible and innovative, global governance conceptually was stretched to include almost everything that has been of concern within IR. At the same time, though, it advanced an alternative conceptualization – “while governance is and always has been at the heart of the study of international relations, global governance is not merely a new moniker for the discipline” (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 3). More precisely, the taxonomy of meanings revealed that global governance floats between two dimensions. First, authors ascribe different meanings to global governance depending on how much of it they want. As such, global governance remains in a hybrid state between an analytical perspective and normative notion just as Dingwerth/Pattberg (2006) concluded. While normative commitments range from depicting global governance as the source or the solution to global issues, analytically global governance has been used to describe a certain condition and processes of governance while it has also been advanced as a heuristic device to make these things visible. While offering limited theoretical explanations, global governance as an ontology is clearly more than a mere description as it (has to) constitute(s) its own reality of complex governance in a globalized world. Second, depending on how much of it one assumes, global governance shifts back and forth between being simply a new phenomenon, a new paradigm or a new field (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 2ff). These different meanings entail different implications of how to study global governance and whether one can situate it within IR or has to create intellectual structures beyond the discipline. Basically, how one perceives global governance determines which meanings of it one advances which impacts ones perception of it. This inferential loop implicated by the conceptual hybridity of global governance lies at the heart of today’s often stated confusion in the global governance discourse.

To be more precise, however, the confusion does not directly originate from the existence of multiple meanings of global governance but rather (1) from the assumed need for a singular and clear definition and (2) from the fact that different meanings sometimes are advanced and thrown around rather carelessly. Put differently, the existence of multiple understandings and applications of global governance itself is not a problem. Rather, because of this plurality, global governance has become such a lively debated and successful idea within a matter of the last two decades and today provides a new “orienting
themes” in and beyond IR (Barnett/Duvall 2005: 1ff). Just as any floating signifier, global governance offers enough projection space to enable dialogue and constitute identities (Lévi-Strauss 1950: 61ff). The different meanings ascribed to it should thus not be considered as indicators of a not yet fully matured discourse but rather as an indicator of a discourse which has “captive audience[s] and [is] employed because what we do is associated with the big events of today” (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a: 33). While lacking clarity, this discourse needs to emancipate itself from the notion of having to define global governance in a singular and all-encompassing fashion. The fact that “[w]e still have no single answer to the question what global governance is” should neither worry us too much nor does it reflect failure (Hoffmann/Ba 2005a: 258). Rather, the diverse nature of the beast itself preempts such an exercise born out of the perceived need for foundational concepts. What remains is the intellectual challenge to accept the idea that concepts, themes, and even disciplines in the social sciences remain relational and permanently ‘in flux’ (Shalin 1986; Jackson/Nexon 1999).

Obviously, any discipline can only live and work with concepts in flux as long as their plural meanings do not interfere with dialogue. Put differently, if the multitudes of meanings become the “cacophony of voices” diagnosed above (Hoffmann/Ba 2005b: 2) and different applications of a concept become not only mutually exclusive but non-relatable, the arguments for conceptual pluralism have obviously been carried too far. However, for the discourse on and of global governance, it was argued that the different meanings and understandings originate in different answers to crucial questions. Basically, the confusion surrounding and haunting global governance stems from different assessments of and opinions on it. Rather than doing away with those, the taxonomy suggested in this paper might help to navigate and communicate between them. Rather than championing a specific meaning of global governance, it appears to be more fruitful to consider two conceptual challenges that follow from the plurality of meanings: (1) the structural bias of global governance and (2) the functionalist logic that underlies this emphasis on structure.

First, since it never positioned itself vis-à-vis other approaches but attempted to provide a new macro framework to encompass previous IR debates, global governance has always been committed to broad questions and general conclusions. As (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014b: 211) put it, global governance is “prob[ing] more deeply into how the world is truly organized”. While this macro perspective generated and continues to generate important insights, it misses details and nuances and overall appears much too broad for an analytical

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27 The paper did not explicitly engage with the application of global governance as an ‘orienting theme’ but would summarize this understanding in global governance advanced as a paradigm beyond IR.
perspective. Due to its macro bias, more often than not global governance is thought of in passive, structural terms and not so much as the result of process and deliberate choices of actors involved in these processes (Avant et al. 2010). While broad questions need to be engaged and general conclusions reached, there is obviously a balance to be struck between simplification and abstraction on the one hand and doing justice to complex realities and creative agents without losing oneself in idiosyncrasies on the other hand. It can be argued that global governance tipped that balance too much in favor of sweeping conclusions and large-scale generalizations. After 20 years of ‘proving its worth to the discipline’, I believe global governance would benefit from a more concise focus which considers the relational and open interaction between different actors instead of specifying discrete actors \textit{a priori} in order to discuss structural, long-term dynamics for the provision of governance (Jackson/Nexon 1999; Finnemore 2014).\textsuperscript{28}

Second, even if oftentimes suggested differently, the distinction between global governance as an analytical approach and global governance as a normative notion remains nothing but an ideal-type distinction. In practice, we often find global governance contributions steeped in a functionalist logic as they cast themselves in a managerial, technocratic frame (Sinclair 2012: 19ff). This functionalist logic is advanced in two ways. First, we assume that global problems are tractable and solutions feasible as actors will come and work together to solve them (Weiss 2013: 45ff). Second, the inclusion of more stakeholders will result in better, more efficient governance (Khagram 2006: 110ff). Integrating more actors into processes of governance, the functionalist and hence deeply normative argument goes, makes these processes more efficient and legitimate since diverse actors command diverse resources. Basically, drawing too heavily on this functionalist logic deprives global governance and the problems it is concerned with of their political character as conflict and contestation over the ‘right answers’ remain unconsidered. The difficult balancing act for global governance thus will be to commit to normative questions and political problems without reifying them. A self-reflective, conscious, and honest assessment of the different meanings and applications of global governance as well as more cautious usage of the different meanings might prove to be helpful in this context. In fact, it appears vital in order to keep “global governance fit for purpose in the twenty-first century” (Weiss/Wilkinson 2014a: 31). The novel thinking and ingenuity expressed by Rosenau/Czempiel (1992) and others deserves nothing less from us.

\textsuperscript{28} In addition to engaging more fruitfully with the question of actorhood, such a relational perspective would allow to consider and differentiate different activities that constitute to the rather broad and still ill-conceptualized term of governance in the first place.
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