

International Organisations and Development

Theories of the international organisation Lesson III

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Main questions

- Why do states decide to merge their sovereignty in various ways?
- Why do states merge in regimes/unions that are more than just the sum of their parts?
- Are those regimes/unions more intergovernmental or more supranational?
- Do international organisations acquire a dynamic of their own that justifies their designation as actors in their own right?

One or many theories?

- The context of international organisation is complex and goes beyond the comprehension of any single body of theory.
- Especially the various international organisations are the result of various processes that can be interpreted in various ways and through different theoretical lenses and that may require adaptation along time.
- In the following slides, I review the main grand theories of the international organisation.

Federalism

- It is a belief system, or a set of normative principles, whose ultimate goal is regional union.
- It is prescriptive/idealist more than explanatory/predictive of international cooperation.
- It seeks to identify ways to reconcile local demands and interests with the need for effective central government.

Functionalism and neo-functionalism

- These are two explanatory/predictive theories of regional integration.
- Functionalism: This theory argues that the process of collaboration in technical or functional areas naturally 'spills over' into other social and economic fields (including the more sensitive areas).
- Neo-functionalism: Emergence of transnational constituencies of advocates for integration in the course of functional collaboration, who identify their interests from the point of view of the international organisation they operate within.

Realism

- It is another explanatory/predictive theory of regional integration (also known as intergovernmentalism or neoliberal-institutionalism).
- It postulates that states are purposeful, self-interested, power-seeking, competitive, rational actors operating in a natural condition of international anarchy.
- It is state-centric: States accept to cooperate to reduce the level of anarchy and as long as this can guarantee that other states do not cheat in various cooperative arrangements.
- Cooperation is not a normative principle or a final goal, but only a strategy to reduce uncertainty, unpredictability, transaction costs and to compel state compliance with international regimes (through dispute settlement such as those created for the WTO).

Governance

- It is another explanatory/predictive theory of regional integration and international regimes.
- It postulates that, even in the absence of a formal government, enduring structures of rules, norms and institutions emerge in many areas of international life.
- It denies the primacy of the state and postulates that power is negotiated among different forces and agencies at many levels, from the local to the global.
- Regulatory networks emerge from interactions among states, intergovernmental and non governmental organisations constraining the national governments.