Coping with the sellout: Bureaucratic governance and the UNESCO budget crisis

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Abstract: Budget cuts constitute significant threats to international organizations. Although they rarely die, budget cuts erode international organizations from within, undermining their ability to pursue existing mandates and to venture into new policy fields. Given the recent literature's dominant tenor that international bureaucrats possess of significant powers and influence on global governance, this paper asks how they cope with existential crises, such as after significant budget cuts. Doing so, we study UNESCO's reactions to two budget crises, the first in the 1980s and a second in the 2010s. We find different reactions by the UNESCO secretariat and member states in both crises, in particular due to different starting conditions, but overall no significant policy or organizational change took place in both crises despite managerial reform efforts. Building on expert interviews, archival material and public documents, the article shows that the reluctance to change is the result of complex principal constellations with entrenched compromises between member states that even reform-oriented administrations or member-state driven prioritization exercises cannot break up. Conveyed to international organizations similar to UNESCO, these are downbeat findings for those hoping that crises serve as externally invoked catalyst for (urgently needed) policy or organizational change.

1. Introduction

A rich literature in economics (Ban and Gallagher 2015; Blyth 2013a, 2013b; Vail 2014; Mandelkern and Shalev 2010) and other policy fields such as public administration (Aberbach and Christensen 2001) has shown that crises are conductive to policy and institutional change as they serve as catalysts for windows of opportunity (Kingdon 1984) or critical junctures (Baumgartner and Jones 1991). "When systemic crises hit", as Cornel Ban and Kevin Gallagher (2015, 132) wrote in a recent special issue in *Governance*, "policy actors' economic ideas and interests are in flux". Similar examples are know from United Nations (UN) peacekeeping which was transformed significantly in substance after the UN's failure to prevent genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia in the 1990s (Benner, Mergenthaler, and Rotmann 2009; Hirschmann 2012). At the same time, recent contributions find that fundamental change in the wake of crisis is more exceptional than might be expected (van Hooren, Kaasch, and Starke 2014). It is before this background that this paper addresses the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an international organization (IO) and UN specialized agency that experienced two major financial crises since the 1980s.

Whereas UNESCO's crises were mainly the result of the United States' (U.S.) membership withdrawal (in the 1980s) or refusal to pay contributions (in the 2010s), resulting in 20-25 percent budget cuts each time, UNESCO has been – rightly or wrongly – accused by different sides of mission creep and dysfunctionality for decades:

> At its best, UNESCO is the heroic intellectual and moral force of the idealism encapsulated in its Preamble. […] At its worst, UNESCO, like many other UN agencies, is a functional tragedy of our own making, suffering from power politics, lack of resources, ineffectiveness, and managerial ineptitude (Singh 2011, 1)

Recent research found that "most countries and donors express dissatisfaction with what they deem an ineffective and overly fragmented organization" (Hanrieder 2015, 136), and the German magazine *Der Spiegel* wrote that UNESCO's organizational plan alone appears as complicated as one pictures a powerhouse circuit layout.[1] The organization is not only guardian of the world's cultural heritage, as many are aware of, it also deals with global migration flows, HIV prevention, research on El-Nino, the freedom of the press, tsunami prevention, African lyric, Arab drinking water, and the human genome. With this track record – being asked to be a force for global intellectual idealism while facing major organizational challenges and a multiplication of tasks – there is a strong expectation that UNESCO could have used its two organizational crises as a catalyst for substantive organizational reform. A budget cut of twenty percent and more should conventionally imply an equal reduction in activities or scrapping of

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[1] Der Spiegel (10.05.2008), Im Palast der Unsichtbaren, http://www.spiegel.de/ spiegel/print/d-56898815.html (accessed 01 July 2016).

full areas of work. Adjustments to the entrenched bureaucratic structure with five strong sectors (policy-divisions) and dozens of sub-divisions such as reductions of the large amount of program level activities should hence be observable consequences of each crisis. None of this has, however, occurred; neither in the 1980s nor after 2011, when the UNESCO core budget had already been overstretched as a result of the global economic and financial crisis.

What we seek to explain in this paper is the unexpected non-change of a severely criticized international organization in or after a crisis. We suggest that the unexpected lack of fundamental policy or organizational change in UNESCO, including both substantive policy and institutional design, can be explained when considering that the organization's member states form no coherent body. As other IOs, UNESCO has a complex principal (Lyne, Nielson, and Tierney 2006) consisting of sovereign states that vary with respect to the preference they associate with an IO: Extensive group politics occur in which regional or geopolitical interests form and individual states can use the threat to unilaterally withhold contributions. In UNESCO, states have over decades allowed each other to use the organization as a platform for their particular interests, creating a fragmented structure of "discrete spheres of influence and alliances with bureaucrats" (Hanrieder 2015, 131; referring to Hoggart 1987; Sewell 1975). Compartmentalized this way, UNESCO increasingly lacked overall strategic unity and coherence. When the financial crises hit, both times, the political costs of altering and renegotiating priorities and structure of the organization by allowing the UNESCO secretariat to prioritize independently would have been much higher for major groups of states than the costs associated to keeping the IO in limbo.

The case of UNESCO also demonstrates how member states can keep an IO alive for selective purposes while ignoring, or disagreeing with, large parts of the overall mission of the organization. The current trend towards more and more (earmarked) voluntary contributions in the financing of many IOs as opposed to assessed contributions to the core budget or flexible voluntary contributions (Graham 2015, 2016) indicates that there might be a broader pattern of fragmentation of IOs with state (and non-state) actors informally using them as platform for their particular interests—UNESCO being a typical case for this dynamic (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Under these conditions, crises may therefore not foster the search for common priorities but rather contribute to further compartmentalization as the simplest means of negative coordination that prevents the difficult and time consuming activity of search for (new) compromises instead of conserving the *status quo*.

2. Literature and theory

This article contributes to the comparative literature on international organizations, in particular by looking at the effects of crises on the governance of change and non-change in international public administrations. We refer to the collective of member states and the IO bureaucracy as

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change agents in IOs with different behavioral incentives and interests; and we conceptualize the "crisis" as externally invoked shock that renders policy or organizational change likely. Our explanation for change and non-change builds on concepts derived from neo-institutionalism and principal-agent theory, applied to studying international bureaucrats' (lack of) influence in IOs. This follows a steadily growing body of literature that has begun focusing on the actorness of IOs, most notably by attributing causal relevance to their secretariats (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson and Veggeland 2010; Bauer, Knill and Eckhard 2016). While there is generally a consensus that sovereign nation states are the defining actors for how IOs emerge, for how they change, and for how they produce policy-output (Koremenos, Lipson, Snidal 2001; Haas 1964; Cox 1969; Cox and Jacobsen 1973), this literature demonstrates that international administrations exert influence on IO policy-making to varying extent. Influence, in this context, refers to 'having an effect'. This follows counter-factual reasoning that if the administration had not been there (or had not acted the way it did), the result would have been different. Following Frank Biermann and Bernd Siebenhüner (2009, 40f.; cf. Liese & Weinlich 2006, 504), bureaucratic influence is "the sum of all effects observable for, and attributable to, an international bureaucracy". For national administrations, such bureaucratic influence was found highest over the selection and shape of policy instruments and lowest over the formulation of policy objectives (Lindvall 2009). This is also supported by research on IOs (Weinlich 2014; Cox and Jacobsen 1973; Elsig 2010; Bohne 2010; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Xu and Weller 2004, 2008). So far, however, the literature depicts bureaucratic influence as rather limited but overall is inconclusive as to the scope conditions that explain variance in bureaucratic influence within IOs (see Eckhard and Ege 2016 for an overview).

Crises have consistently been mentioned as exceptionally conductive to bureaucratic influence (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Moschella 2011; Broome 2010; Ban and Gallagher 2015; Chorev 2013). A growing number of case studies on individual organizations points out that IO bureaucrats have high policy-related influence during or after the occurrence of a crisis. Indeed, the relevance of crises as windows of opportunity for policy or organizational change has repeatedly been demonstrated in research on organizational decision-making (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972) and public policy in the domestic context (Kingdon 1984, Sabatier 1988). Kingdon's central concept is that of a 'policy window' (or window of opportunity) as a mostly externally invoked impulse that renders significant alterations of established political practice likely. Crises can relate to policies or organizational factors. What they have in common is that they constitute an external shock that breaks established patterns and routines of decision-making. A crisis has been defined as „a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which – under time pressures and highly uncertain circumstances – necessitates making critical decisions" (Rosenthal, Charles, and t' Hart 1989, 10). Its three defining elements – a threat, uncertainty, and the need for a response – create a

window of opportunity for bureaucratic influence even on IOs' high politics. In line with this, several studies on IOs such as the World Health Organization (Chorev 2013), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 73ff.), or the IMF (Moschella 2010; Broome 2010; Ban and Gallagher 2015) found evidence for significant bureaucratic influence on policy decisions during or pursuant to major crises. For Barnett and Finnemore (2004, 162), "creative agency [therefore] is most likely to occur at moments of rapid global change".

In relation to such opportunities, but also with respect to bureaucratic influence more generally, there is of course the question which incentives and interests drive bureaucratic behavior. While assuming that the IO bureaucracy forms a collective social actor, authors arguing from the perspective of public choice argue that bureaucrats are rational actors primarily interested in maintaining their jobs and maximizing their job-related influence, bureau and budget (Niskanen 1971; Dunleavy 1985; Vaubel, Dreher and Soylu 2007). Other studies yield a different perspective. Building on comparative empirical evidence, Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) depict international bureaucrats as "managers of global change" who are interested in the regulatory and implementing success of their organization and hence act accordingly. Mark Copelovitch (2010; see also Broome and Seabrooke 2014) finds bureaucratic influence on IMF lending to follow functional considerations related to the regulatory success of IMF policy. In the crisis context, both perspectives might be relevant. A crisis can be a threat when the bureaucracy is blamed for failing as crisis manager and individuals' jobs are challenged (Olmeda 2008). But crises also constitute opportunities. Successful crisis management allows the administration to gain a reputation as crisis manager and attract more resources (Boin, McConell and 't Hart 2009, 91; cf. Stark 2011).[2] Whether bureaucracies see crises as opportunity or threat is likely dependent on the particular context, both of the crisis and whether the administration is considered as a whole or at an individual level.

The puzzle for this paper is that UNESCO's crises were not used in the sense of windows of opportunity. Although the administration had a vested interest in reform, organizational change only occurred at the level of management instruments while the organization's portfolio of primary tasks, reflected in the overall sectoral structure of UNESCO, and core objectives remained unaltered. This fits the literature's general credo that the policy-making influence of IO secretariats is limited but contradicts those who reported on crises as catalysts for administrative policy influence. If substantive bureaucratic influence was absent, even in times of crises as most likely moments for such influence, then we need to understand the factors limiting bureaucratic influence.

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[2] There is however also a delegitimizing risk if crises cannot be managed, the WHO's repeated difficulties to manage major health crises being a case in point (Gronke 2015; Graham 2013).

The most important limiting factor is consent or dissent among member states, which define opportunities for the bureaucracy and its leadership to act through an IO (Haas 1964; Cox 1969; Cox and Jacobsen 1973). Bureaucratic influence is therefore restricted and highly dependent on the member state principal. IOs' principals are complex (Lyne, Nielson, and Tierney 2006), consisting of sovereign states that not only vary in terms of their national interests, but also come together in various regional groupings or geopolitical coalitions (such as G77), reflecting the complex web of international relations built on historic ties, shared interests or opposing economic and ideological world views. Recent literature found that bureaucratic influence was greatest in situations where member states' interests are less intense and more heterogeneous (Copelovitch 2010). In such situations, bureaucrats receive more autonomy because of the principals' constrained ability or willingness to use formal control instruments (Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, and Tierney 2006; Best 2012; Goetz 2014; Allen and Yuen 2014; Bauer and Ege 2016). In turn, bureaucratic influence should be lower when principals are (more) unified. Crises may be occasions when member states come indeed together, trying to solve common challenges at the international level, collectively pushing for organizational or policy reform. On the other hand, crises may either be caused by divisions within the membership of IOs, or they may result in divisions when there is no agreement on how to address a crisis. In those cases, an international bureaucracy may be able to use the crisis to exert independent influence or at least shape reform compromises that balance the various member state interests.

In summarizing the existing evidence and theory on international politics, we expect that international bureaucrats are collective entrepreneurs who will exploit organizational crises in the sense of a window of opportunity to influence IO policy. Their actions are likely driven by the desire to avoid being blamed for failure or poor performance which is why they are likely to seek to improve the conditions under which they can achieve program success, both in dealing with the crisis and in handling their responsibilities more generally. Whether IO bureaucrats are able to influence IO policy accordingly depends to large extent on their principal's policy-related interests and unity.

3. UNESCO: a case study of organizational pathologies and the effects of crises on international organizations

UNESCO has been established as a financially and organizationally autonomous body within the UN system short after World War II. With its mission of functioning as a dialogue space, UNESCO is best understood as a "forum for global intellectual cooperation" (Engel and Rutkowski 2012, 6). What probably captures its functions best is the role of cooperation facilitator and network supporter in the areas of culture, science, communication and education (see also UNESCO Medium Term Strategy 2014-21 [37 C/4]). UNESCO's main governance body is the General Conference that consists of 195 member state representatives and that meets

biannually to set the IO's general political direction, in particular by adopting the organization's Medium Term Strategy (C/4) and the Program and Budget (C/5). An Executive Board of 58 members assigned to and elected by six regional groups monitors program development and implementation between General Conference meetings.

Studies with a global governance focus examine UNESCO's role as a normative authority and policy entrepreneur, for example in science policy (Finnemore 1993). These studies reveal, amongst others, that UNESCO's role in the global education regime has been declining as it loses out again other players like the OECD or World Bank (Klees 2012). Other studies look at the impact and performance measurement of specific programs such as the Man and the Biosphere Program (e.g., Coetzer, Witkowski, and Erasmus 2014) and in single policy fields such as education (e.g., Mundy 2006; Burnett 2010). This focus of research on particular policy fields in which UNESCO is active mirrors the sectoral division of UNESCO and the multitude of activities it pursues; there are rarely comprehensive studies on UNSECO as an organization.

The few existing studies with a broader focus on UNESCO as an organization have concluded that "UNESCO rapidly became a plural system in which … 'Everyone has his own hobbyhorse.'" (Sewell 1975, 173). Inside the secretariat, there are "rivalries and competitiveness within its sectors … and short of transformative restructuring, these rivalries will continue" (Singh 2011, 133). These finding have been echoed in Hanrieder's (2015) recent comparative study on decentralization in UNESCO, WHO and ILO. Overall agenda-setting is seen as "broad and vague", allowing "sectors to propose myriad programs that suit their immediate interests, or those of the member states pushing for them." As a result, "competition for budgetary resources and allocation consumes a great deal of time and energy within sectors" (Singh 2011, 133).

UNESCO's organizational challenges and policy evolution are embedded in a history of sustained crisis that UNESCO has been facing. The recent budgetary crises resulted mainly from two events: The withdrawal of the U.S. from UNESCO membership at the end of 1984 and its refusal to pay assessed and voluntary contributions after the accession of Palestine in November 2011. On the 1980s crisis, Yahi (1991) concluded that UNESCO's inability to conduct in-depth reforms was a major obstacle to escape the crisis mode. At the origin of this first major crisis therefore was not just the exit of the U.S. but, in essence, the "cultural and ideological pluralism" of UNESCO (Flory 1985, 669; our translation). The second financial crisis of UNESCO followed less than a decade after the U.S. returned to the organization in 2003. The refusal to pay its contributions after Palestine was voted in as a member in 2011 has raised question over whether UNESCO can be saved at all (Hüfner 2016).

The next sections lay out the events that took place during both of the UNESCO's financial crises. The article builds on UNESCO archive material, public documents, and expert interviews conducted between February 2015 and April 2016 with secretariat and member state

officials in Paris and via telephone. Within the secretariat, individuals at various hierarchical levels and from several sectors (central administration, education, migration, and science) were addressed (see References below). By outlining decisions taken by member states and preparations made by the secretariat, the article demonstrates that during the first crisis, functional pressure for organizational change was less pronounced than during the second crises, which followed a phase of budget cuts since the mid-2000s. Lack of pressure can explain why bureaucratic attempts to streamline the organization's policy agenda during the first crisis remained unsuccessful. Instead of changing core policy objectives and cutting down existing streams of action, reforms affected only the level of policy instruments such as management modernization. Yet, given that since 2011 functional pressure for reforms grew tremendously, the repeated failure of the bureaucracy to gain acceptance for reforms during and after the second crisis is even more striking. Overall, we can but emphasize that member states are fully aware of the organization's limbo but maintain the current setup because of both, a historically grown compromise on the organization's activities that reflects diverse visions about the core added value of UNESCO and a lack of political willingness to invest time and resources in renegotiating its portfolio.

4. The 1980s budget crisis in UNESCO

The origins and impact of the 1980s crisis: politicization, mandate overburdening, and massive cuts

The 1980s crisis of UNESCO did not come unannounced, but the withdrawal of the U.S. from the organization by the end of 1984 resulted in a dramatic budget decrease from $374 million for the 1984-85 biennial budget (22 C/5) to $307 million for 1986-87 (23 C/5). The U.S. administration had already criticized UNESCO for what it called "politicization" since the late 1970s and early 1980s (Ghebali 1985; Coate 1988; Dutt 1995; Singh 2011), and had withheld contributions for a short period in the 1970s over a resolution criticizing Israel (Ghebali 1985). By 1983, the U.S. secretary of state had notified the UNESCO Director-General of the US' intention to withdraw from UNESCO by the end of 1984, citing as the reason the "trend in policy, ideological emphasis, budget and management of UNESCO" (119 EX/14; 23 C/INF. 21). U.S. secretary of state George Schultz claimed in 1983 that there were "trends in the management, policy and budget of UNESCO [that] were detracting from the organization's effectiveness" and lead "UNESCO away from the original principles of its constitution" (cited after Coate 1988, 9). A policy report published by the U.S. government in February of 1984 underlined this assessment (ibid., 10). By mid-1984, the U.S.' concerns were specified in three core demands from UNESCO (cf. Coate 1988, 23):

1. Require support for all UNESCO programs by all regional/political groups of member states;

2. Concentrate on UNESCO's original purposes;

3. Strengthening the General Conference and the Executive Board (and thereby the authority of member states vis-à vis the administration).

When also the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Singapore announced their withdrawal from UNESCO (119 EX/30) in April 1984, UNESCO suffered a combined 30 percent reduction in its budget (Singh 2011, 41).

The reactions to the 1980s crisis: delayed anticipation, slow reform, and lack of prioritization

As the withdrawing states communicated their withdrawal at an early stage, UNESCO started the restructuring of the organization by mid-1985 to make more effective use of diminished human and financial resources (DG/Note/85/18). By 31 December 1985, the withdrawal of the U.K. and Singapore took effect. In the aftermath of their departure, a massive decrease and re-allocation of staff affected the organization (Hüfner 2005, 281). In 1986, the Director-General M'Bow reported to the Executive Board that the maximum number of authorized posts in the regular budget for 1986-1987 had to be reduced from 2,744 in 1985 to 2,246 in 1986 (Documents 124 EX/39, 125 EX/27). However, it took 18 years, from 1985 to 2003, for the U.S. to return to UNESCO, turning the crisis into a new normal.

This delay in the U.S.' return to UNESCO indicates that the speed of reforms was only slow, despite the initial crisis reaction and cuts. Indeed, by 2000, the UN's Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) stated that while the "Secretariat of UNESCO [had] undergone a number of reform processes in the last two decades" (i.e., in the 1980s and 1990s), UNESCO's "General Conference and the Executive Board [had] expressed continued concern that *serious managerial problems persist* that hamper the effective implementation of the Organization's mandate" (JIU/REP/2000/4, p. 1, authors' emphasis). The (then) new Director-General Matsuura recognized that UNESCO's "structure [was] far too complex and fragmented and that it involves many overlapping lines of authority" and "cooperation and coordination between [the five] sectors often proved very poor" (ibid., 2).

One of the reasons why there was no fully-fledged reform process can be seen in the way the initial budget cuts could be absorbed. Many posts that were included in the budget were not actually filled in the early 1980s. This high vacancy rate simplified the administrative task of initial cutback management:

> The 80s' experience […] was very different. Because, in the 80s, […] the organization had a lot more reserve. And in particular they had a vacancy rate that was extraordinary. I think it was like 20 percent or something, so they were sitting on a pile of money, which really made it much easier for them […] to separate staff, and they could much more easily go into their reserve. (Interview UNESCO Official #1)

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The existence of financial buffers is certainly a relevant reason for why substantial policy or organizational change did not materialize. Additionally, however, evidence indicates that neither the executive leadership nor member states had much appetite to initiate a major reform process.

To understand this lack of reform, one can look back at the overall reform efforts inside UNESCO. It is telling that only *after* the announcement of the U.K. to withdraw in addition to the U.S., member states set up a "temporary committee" consisting of UNESCO's host country France and two representatives of each of the six regional groups of UNESCO to develop recommendations and concrete measures designed to improve the functioning of the organization. (119 EX/Decision 5.11). Three reports were presented in 1984 and 1985, but they did not prevent U.S. withdrawal in 1984, followed by the U.K. and Singapore in 1985. To address the severe budget cuts following from the three member states' departures, the UNESCO Executive Board waited until *after* the U.S. withdrawal, before it held its 4th Special Session from 12-14 February 1985 to review the new situation. In this special session, the Executive Board had to tackle a number of specific issues of the program and budget to address the situation (4 X/EX/2 and Corrigenda 1-4). The need for a reduction in staff was clearly pointed out, and a central question was whether and how to prioritize UNESCO's vast number of activities in view of reduced resources.

At this point, there seemed confusion over who was and should be responsible for a reprioritization. An initial draft resolution of the special session foresaw to invite "the Director-General to submit to the Board, at its 121st session, a report indicating for each subprogramme and programme action its degree of priority as high or low, taking into account the above criteria [defined in §7, the authors] and consider actions, so as to provide the Board and Member States with options for selecting activities deemed to have the highest priority" (4 X/EX/DR.2, §8). However, this request for a prioritization exercise led by the administration and its leadership was toned down in the final resolution (4 X/EX/2, VI) where the Director-General was merely welcomed to "present an Annex to the 23 C/5 [the draft 1986-87 budget, the authors] in which the problem of adjustments and priorities will be examined […] so as to enable the Executive Board to recommend to the General Conference appropriate adaptations to the Programme and Budget for 1986-1987". The Board highlighted in the same resolution (§2) that it had already decided on "programme concentration" and had provided guidance for priorities in its 120th meeting (120 EX/Decision 4.1) in November 1984. These were assumed to have already found their way into the preparation of the draft budget for 1986-87 through the Director-General's 1984 note on the draft budget preparation (DG/Note/84/16).

This confusion over who should lead the prioritization exercise and whether and how it had been achieved might relate to the lack of member state willingness. Additionally, there was distrust towards Director-General M'Bow who was made responsible for the situation (Hüfner

and Naumann 1986), and his success Federico Major also lacked interest in a fully-fledged reprioritization exercise (Patz and Goetz 2016). The change of mind of the U.S. to return in 2003 only after renewed reform efforts by the new Director-General Matsuura (see the JIU/REP2000/4) suggest that there was also a lack of interest inside the UNESCO administration to foster new priorities for a long time.

5. The 2011 budget crisis in UNESCO

The origins and impact of the 2011 crisis: Difficult finances, dysfunctionality, and Palestine's admission to UNESCO

In early 2011, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian National Authority submitted the formal request for Palestinian membership with UNESCO, with implications for future Palestinian membership in other UN agencies (Engel and Rutkowski 2012, 6; Johnson 2012). In October 2011, the Executive Board voted positively towards Palestine's request hence opening the way for official voting in the General Conference. The U.S. immediately started a large-scale lobbying campaign against the motion that resulted in a mixture of defiance, annoyance and possibly also change of position among member states (Interview UNESCO Expert). Still, on 31 October 2011, a two-thirds majority of member states welcomed Palestine as the 195th member country of UNESCO. Opposing countries included the US and Israel and several EU states such as Germany, Sweden, and the Netherland. France and Belgium, however, voted in favor of admission. Supportive countries included the BRICS, as well as a large number of Arab countries. In response, the U.S. and Israel announced the retention of their dues starting in the fiscal year of 2011. The U.S. as the traditional intercessor of an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, were bound by a domestic federal law (P.L. 101-246 Title IV 1990) interdicting the payment of dues to any organizations that accepts Palestine in the form of a full member country. It is important to note here that, U.S.-Israeli withdrawal in 2011 followed a certain political automatism (non-support for promoters of Palestinian statehood) and did not happen because of explicit discomfort with UNESCO's performance (Killion 2013). One national official (Interview Member State Official #1) suggested that the secretariat could have done nothing else to convince the US government that, in principle, was quite happy with the secretariat. This was confirmed by the fact that the U.S. by all means tries to remain a member of UNESCO and has even been voted into the Executive Board for the period of 2013-15 (Interviews UNESCO Expert and National UNESCO Commission member; UNESCO website).

However, despite a different reason for the U.S.-Israeli exit, it can be argued that the organization was in a similar situation as in the 80s given the remaining accusations of inefficiency and poor performance. Two independent evaluation, a Multilateral Aid Review by the U.K. development agency (DFID) and another one commissioned by the General

Conference in 2009 and conducted by a cross-regional team of independent experts. Both assessments found fault in UNESCOs weakly developed results-based management and evaluation system (DFID MAR 2011; IEE 2010, 4) and its insufficient disclosure of management information and low transparency (DFID MAR 2011). Overall, there was a growing awareness of an overburdened institution with a permissive mandate which allows to make relevance claims for almost any global problem or issue. Yet, since the 1980s, no prioritization has occurred, all external pressure and internal lip-service notwithstanding:

> There have been attempts to 'concentrate' work in larger programmes, promote 'intersectorality' or cross-sector platforms and prioritize 'objectives' in order to maximize synergies and impact. These efforts have been undermined by the continued autonomy of Sectors, weak incentives for collaboration, sectoral budget systems, too many priorities and cross-cutting objectives, and lack of consensus in governing bodies and in the Secretariat (IEE 2010, 2).

Overall, UNESCO was in a fragile situation even before the U.S. budget withdrawal. In reaction to the claims made in the two assessments, the UNESCO secretariat, now led by Director-General Irina Bokova, in unison with the Executive Board and the General Conference had developed a number of rather straight-forward reform ideas bundled in a 86-points action agenda that were implemented by the secretariat (194 EX/4.INF)[3].

However and very importantly, unlike in 1984, UNESCO was is a much less comfortable position at the time of the 2011 budget crisis, both financially and in terms of internal management (cf. 189 EX/15 Part I Add.). Calls for reforms had reached an unprecedented level of perspicuity while financially the organization had reached the verge of collapse. Through the above named reform efforts the secretariat had already tried to tighten overhead costs to a minimum, which closed the margin for possible further adjustments through more efficiency measures. Moreover, like many UN organizations the global financial crisis had imposed a considerable strain on member states' ability to contribute to UNESCO through voluntary funds in addition to a general call for zero nominal budget growth (see Draft 37 C/5, Add. II, .2; see also evolution of assessed contributions in Figure 1 below).

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[3] It is important to note here that these efforts began already before the U.S. financial cuts.
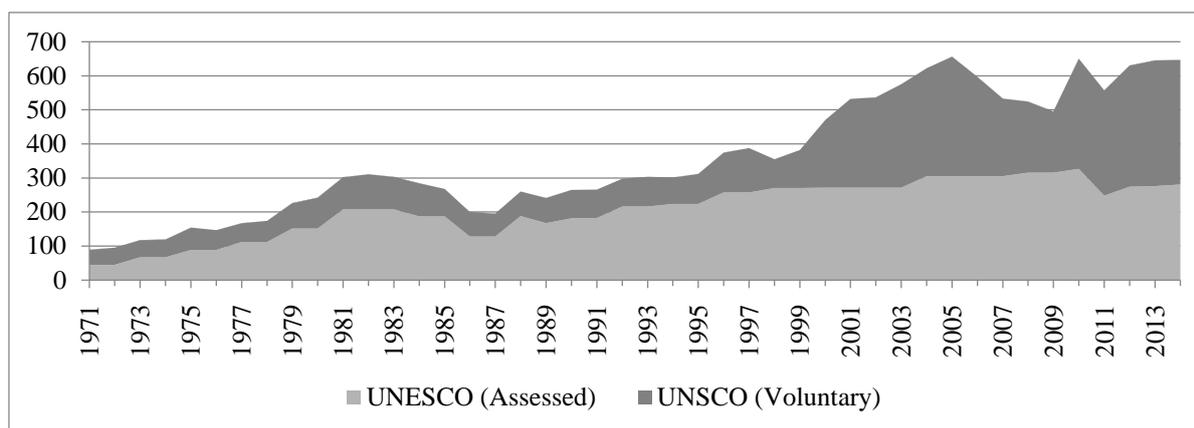
Figure 1: Evolution of UNESCO contributions (assessed and voluntary 1971-2014). Data by Global Policy Forum (until 2011) and UNESCO Financial Statements (2011-14).[4]

Hence, albeit suffering a similar percentage cut in budget, the blow was disproportionally more consequential:

> You only need to look at UNESCO's real budget in the 1980s and today. It was reduced to a possible minimum before 2011 already causing a massive loss of personnel. It tells you a lot about the organization's coping capacity and its ability to withstand shocks. You really cannot compare those two crises. We had decades of zero growth now, ongoing global crises and reductions where ever possible. You need to consider this development between 1984 and 2011 (National UNESCO Commission member).

The reaction to the 2011 crisis: severe cuts, and piecemeal prioritization

Immediately after the crisis, the secretariat set up an emergency fund to cover the unpaid U.S. dues for the fiscal year of 2011. This extra-budgetary fund was mainly financed by a number of states from the Arab region, Saudi-Arabia and Qatar most notably. It was used primarily to finance structural cuts like early retirement or "golden handshakes" and to cover expenses already made in 2011 (National UNESCO Commission member). Additionally, Director-General Bokova undertook a number of measures to lower the ongoing operational costs of the organization through cuts in staff and travels costs (UNESCO Expert; National UNESCO Commission member). Altogether, these emergency measures effectively prevented the organization to run into a financial deficit which effectively would have meant bankruptcy for UNESCO. Many interviewees took pride in the successful buffering of that part of the budget loss that was critical (UNESCO Officials #3, #4, #5, #6). However, against the backdrop of diminished personnel and funding, additional strain was put on the organization, including the ongoing management reforms. One interviewee testified that "due to the cut we could not so

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[4] The 2010 peak in voluntary contributions is related to Brazil's contribution to a trust-in-fund with contributions earmarked for Brazil itself.

far implement the reforms 100 percent" (UNESCO Official #3; similar: National UNESCO Commission member).

On the policy side of the organization's work, the majority of programs and projects could only be kept alive because of extra-budgetary contributions (UNESCO Officials #3, #4, #5). In the regular budget, some programs had to cope with an 80 percent cut of their funding, others 'only' suffered from 20 percent (National UNESCO Commission member; UNESCO Officials #2, #3; reflected for 2014-17 in the Addendum to the 37 C/5). The dramatically shrunk personnel body occasionally was compensated by national secondments, consultants or even interns (UNESCO Official #3), but overall constituted a horrendous situation for an "intellectual organization whose biggest treasure are brains of its personnel" (UNESCO Official #2). In light of this disastrous financial situation, many programs could only finance their staff and statutory activities through regular budget funds (such as the Man and the Biosphere Programme and its meetings of the Intergovernmental International Co-ordinating Council). "We ended up with many programs with no funds, so I have brochures but no activities" (UNESCO Official #5; similar UNESCO Official #8), as interviewees from another sectors confirmed.

Beyond the immediate crisis measures securing organizational integrity, awareness grew that a budget cut that radical could not be absorbed through voluntary funding and staff cuts alone (UNESCO Official #1). Instead, UNESCO officials from various hierarchical levels acknowledged that a deeper structural changes and a re-prioritization of UNESCO's activities were necessary.

> The DG [Director-General] in 2013, which was after the United States and Israeli contributions was withdrawn […] tried to make a reform […] she said, crisis is an opportunity to reform (Member State Official, Permanent Representation #2)

> I think a crisis like this gives you the opportunity to do broader structural restructuration. […] I think it was the occasion to do more far-reaching [things] […] when there is a crisis you can use that because everybody understands that you have to do something drastic (UNESCO Official #7).

A sequence of reactions followed in which the secretariat led by the Director-General and member states played different roles. By February 2012, Irina Bokova presented her roadmap on how to deal with the immediate crisis (189 EX/15 Part I. Addendum I), in which she made clear that "[t]he Organization [could] not maintain all existing programmes but [needed] to concentrate on areas of clear comparative advantage in the international system" (ibid., 17). It clearly showed that there was a sense of urgency and a realization that a political priority-setting recalibration of the thematic areas included in UNESCO's mandate was necessary.

The office of the Director-General and the Bureau of Strategic Planning, played a crucial role in facilitating the way ahead; it "encouraged the process as secretariat" (UNESCO Official #1). Two options were discussed internally. First, the Bureau made a cautious suggestion to merge

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two of UNESCO's sectors during the consultation process on the Mid-Term Strategy 2014-2021 (37 C/4) and the Programme of Work and Budget 2014-2021 with member states and national commissions for UNESCO of the Europe and North America Region in September 2012 (UNESCO 2012). Second, high-level staff narrated that they pushed member states to engage in a prioritization exercise. At the next Executive Board meeting in October 2012, member states thus invited "the Director-General to present an implementation plan for document 37 C/5 [the 2014-17 Programme and Budget; the authors] which [sets] out spending priorities for the Organization based on the expected cash flow situation for 2014-2015" (190/EX Decision 19, §8). Bokova forwarded this request inside the organization and asked at a meeting of the Senior Management Team on 12 February 2013 that the sectors were expected to present related information within a week "in descending order or priority", within the budget ceilings proposed by the Director-General for each sector at the same time (ADG/BSP note of 13 February 2013). This indicates a rather strong discretion assigned to the secretariat in managing the prioritization as these internally-formulated priorities found their way into an addendum to the draft programme and budget (37 C/5 Add. 2) that was discussed at the 191st Executive Board in April 2013 (see Annex 1).

However, while the member states took note "with appreciation" of "the list of programme spending priorities provided" by the Director-General (191 EX/Decisions, 33) they decided instead that it was necessary for "the Executive Board to provide guidance to the Director-General on programmatic priorities" (ibid., 33). As a result, member states established an "open-ended working group […] tasked to work with the Director-General in order to identify programmatic priorities" (ibid., 34). Each member state received a questionnaire in which they were asked to put scores on the different sectors and programs (UNESCO Official #6). Facilitated by one member state – the U.K. (Member State Official, Permanent Representation #2) – the working group then developed its own list of priorities in which each sectors' subprogram was put into categories A (0-20 percent cuts), B (20-60 percent cuts), C (60-100 percent cuts (5 X/EX/Decisions, 1). The list was adopted, against UNESCO tradition not by consensus but by a vote (5 X EX/SR, 11), by the 5th Special Session of the Executive Board in July 2013 (5 X/EX/Decisions, Annex), and translated into budget figures for the 37 C/5.

It is difficult to get behind the intentions of the Executive Board in rejecting the secretariat's prioritization. One interviewee said that "there has been criticism from member states about the 'business-like' approach [of] doing this, by ranking activities because … they say UNESCO is about values, about peace, about things that are very difficult to measure" (Member State Official, Permanent Representation #2). However, documents and other interviewees tell a different story. Given that some programs were already running on very low budget figures, the secretariat's prioritization implied that these activities effectively would effectively have been terminated. But this collided with member states' collective interest who "wanted their excepted results to be covered, to remain on board" (Member State Official, Permanent Representation

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#2) and thus had tasked the secretariat to prioritize in a way that "each major program [would] maintain its relative share of program resources" (5 X/EX/Decision 2, §6a). One interviewee confirms:

> The result [of the Secretariat's prioritization] would have meant … to close two sectors. When [member-states] realized that, they changed their mind and made a second round of prioritization which basically […] meant a continuation of what we already had (UNESCO Official #7).

The result of the so-called "prioritization exercise" are clearly ambiguous. Governmental and administrative actors see this as something that rarely to almost never happens in the UN-system and presents a clear chance for fundamental change at the level of the IO's basic political priorities (UNESCO Official #1; Member State Official, Permanent Representation #2). It appears the secretariat attempted to use it that way, but attempting to close sectors through the backdoor was a "failed exercise" (UNESCO Official #7) after member states had intervened. On the one hand, governments walked back the *de facto* closing of two sectors and prioritized within the existing sectoral framework. On the other hand, when member states changed a priority figure of one activity, in the majority of cases they raised the level (see Annex I). Overall, this meant that the subsequent budget basically reflected the former funding ratio: "what was a priority, mostly remained one" (UNESCO Official #2). This was also clearly reflected in the implementation plan adopted for the 2014-17 budget (see 37 C/5 Addendum, §9) and translating the prioritization exercise into reduced budget figures. It was highlighted in that plan that the part of the budget, which was dedicated to the five core sectors, would be distributed "according to their relative share" in the adopted budget. Before and after the 2011 budget crisis, the relative budget share of the five sectors therefore remained constant.

Sector	Programme and Budget 2012-13 (36 C/5)	Programme and Budget 2014-17 (37 C/5)
Education	40,27%	39,3%
Natural Science	20,14%	20,8%
Social and Human Sciences	10,19%	11,1%
Culture	18,22%	18,0%
Communication and Information	11,16%	10,9%

Table 1: UNESCO Programme and Budget pre- and post-2011 crisis.[5] Data based on 36 C/5, Addendum, own calculation (2012-13); 37 C/5, Addendum §9 (2014-17). Shares in the overall Programme and Budget and the crisis-related implementing plan are equal. Figures for 2012-13 add up to over 100% due to rounding.

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[5] The 2012-23 budget was decided at the 36th General Conference (Paris, 25th October – 10th November 2011), during which Palestine was granted membership, and is the last pre-crisis budget.

6. Comparison/ conclusion

The irony of history repeating itself in UNESCO is striking when examining the two budget crises. Other than in 1984, reasons for the U.S. (and Israeli) budget withdrawal in 2011 were not meant as critique to UNESCO's performance in any way. But the underlying problem had remained the same. Like in 1984, maybe even more severe this time, complaints behind the scenes but also publically continued to be raised against the organization, denouncing its structure, budgeting, programming, governance and management practices as cumbersome, little focused and not efficient enough. While the UNESCO budget in 1984 provided enough leverage (i.e., vacant positions that were not being filled despite being listed in the budget) to prevent immediate repercussions on operational activities and thus mitigated initial reform pressure, organizational failure was immanent in 2011. This is why the 2011 crisis sticks out as particularly consequential for UNESCO's operative activities.

UNESCO's bureaucracy in 2011 demonstrated its ability to effectively manage all direct repercussions triggered by the budget cut. An emergency fund was established and donors could be convinced to invest. The Senior Management Team led by Director-General Irena Bokova certainly was overstrained during the second half of 2011. But the cuts offered a chance to initiate larger reforms and (re-)establish the organization's strategic maneuverability beyond the lowest common denominator of all compartmentalized sectors or programs. The Senior Management Team compiled a list of drastic measures that effectively meant that entire programs could have been scrapped and two sectors merged. But member states walked these changes back in compiling their own prioritization list, one that allowed that on paper all core priorities and activities continued to exist, even if at a dysfunctionally low budget level. In operational terms this meant that an already overstretched organization was further eroded and many low-priority programs henceforth existed merely as empty hull unless they receive substantial voluntary contributions.

What from the outside appears a conundrum—UNESCO's lack of major policy or organizational change following each of its crises—has a simple explanation when considering the historical dynamics that molded UNESCO in its present form. For decades, individual member states forged UNESCO's compartmentalization by reducing the share of their regular assessed budget contributions whilst increasing earmarked, extrabudgetary funding for activities reflecting unilateral national interests. Weak performance never was an argument to discontinue such state-sponsored activities. This state of affairs was not even hidden from the public. Two public evaluations conducted in the 2000s frankly stated:

> Member States, while emphasizing the need for "greater focus", have themselves contributed to the current lack of coherence both by funding decisions (e.g. reducing regular budget contributions while increasing extrabudgetary resourcing) and by lobbying to sustain weak programmes or introduce incoherent activities… This dispersal of governance reflects the near-impossibility of unitary governance in a highly heterogeneous agency and is reinforced by high

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volumes of extrabudgetary resource over which the main governing bodies have limited control (IEE 2010, 2, 7).

It is likely that whatever prioritization the Senior Management Team had suggested, it would always have affected the interests of at least one (or several) states. These 'disadvantaged' states probably would then ask for compensation, which would have put the historically grown compromise on which UNESCO's current portfolio rests at risk. At the core of this inertia is UNESCO's consensus based voting mechanism that prevents coalitions of states to define strategic directions. Even the soft-washed prioritization exercise could only be adopted because member-states used majority voting—in striking deviation from established practice in the Executive Board. The most convincing explanation for UNESCO's non-change, even in times of crisis, is therefore that member states recoiled from renegotiating the organization's basic portfolio, a task that would have drawn significant resources under the condition of equal voting rights. Instead, they kept UNESCO in limbo, even more precariously than it has been before.

Theory and previous studies at least hold that the relevance of bureaucratic influence through leadership ends where member state interests begin (Cox 1969; Cox and Jacobsen 1973). If this reading is correct, our findings have significant implications for the performance of IOs at large. For decades, there has been an overall trend in the financing of a distinct type of IOs to increase the amount of voluntary contributions (Graham 2015, 2016). These are IOs where member states' assessed contributions and their voting rights do not match, unlike in IMF where member states' votes are weighted according to their financial contributions. In most organizations of the UN system, member states' votes count equal while for the poorest states the annual fee for UN membership amounts to only several hundred US Dollar. This increases the incentive for some member states to enhance the share of voluntary extrabudgetary contributions directed towards their own priorities while maintaining or even reducing the amount of assessed contributions—just as happened in UNESCO. UNESCO represents a typical case for these kinds of IOs (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Dynamics identified here therefore might be also of relevance for similar organizations. If this is the case, we should expect other consensus-based IOs in the UN system to also exhibit compartmentalization, become less effective over time (mission creep) and be resistant to change, irrespective of public criticism and not even following major crises.

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List of interviewees

UNESCO Official #1, April 2016 (interviewed by Ronny Patz)

UNESCO Official #2, April 2016 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt)

UNESCO Official #3, May 2016 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt)

UNESCO Official #4, February 2015 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt and Steffen Eckhard)

UNESCO Official #5, February 2015 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt)

UNESCO Official #6, April 2016 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt and Steffen Eckhard)

UNESCO Official #7, April 2016 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt)

UNESCO Official #8, February 2015 (interviewed by Lucia di Grandi and Steffen Eckhard)

Member State Official, Permanent Representation #1 (interviewed by Ronny Patz)

Member State Official, Permanent Representation #2 (interviewed by Ronny Patz)

National UNESCO Commission member, March 2016 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt)

UNESCO Expert, August 2015 (interviewed by Sylvia Schmidt).

8. Annex 1: Prioritization of UNESCO expected results by UNESCO Secretariat

Education

Expected Result (N°)	Priorities assigned to Expected Results by 5 X Exececutive Board	Change from IPA priorities	Budget effect
1	High	↗	80-100%
2	High	↗	80-100%
3	High	↗	80-100%
4	Medium		40-80%
5	High	↗	80-100%
6	Low		0-40%
7	Medium	↗	40-80%
8	Medium		40-80%
9	Medium	↗	40-80%
10	Low	↘	0-40%
11	Low	↘	0-40%
12	Low		0-40%
13	Medium	↘	40-80%

Natural Sciences

Expected Result (N°)	Priorities assigned to Expected Results by 5 X Exececutive Board	Change from IPA priorities	Budget effect
1	Medium	↘	40-80%
2	Medium	↘	40-80%
3	Low	↓	0-40%
4	Low		0-40%
5	Low	↘	0-40%
6	High	↗	80-100%
7	High	↗	80-100%
8	Medium	↘	40-80%
9	Low	↘	0-40%
10	Medium	↘	40-80%
11	Medium	*	40-80%
12	High		80-100%
13	High	N/A	80-100%

Social and Human Sciences

Expected Result (N°)	Priorities assigned to Expected Results by 5 X Exececutive Board	Change from IPA priorities	Budget effect
1	High		80-100%
2	Medium	↘	40-80%
3	High		80-100%
4	High	↗	80-100%
5	Low		0-40%
6	Medium		80-100%
7	Medium		80-100%
8	Low		0-40%

Culture

Expected Result (N°)	Priorities assigned to Expected Results by 5 X Exececutive Board	Change from IPA priorities	Budget effect
1	Medium-High		40-100%
2	Medium-High		40-100%
3	Medium-High	↗	40-100%
4	Medium-High	*	40-100%
5	Low	↓	0-40%
6	Medium-High		40-100%
7	Medium-High	↗	40-100%
8	Low		0-40%

Communiction and Information

Expected Result (N°)	Priorities assigned to Expected Results by 5 X Exececutive Board	Change from IPA priorities	Budget effect
1	Medium	↘	40-80%
2	Medium		40-80%
3	Low	↘	0-40%
4	High		80-100%
5	High	↑	80-100%
6	Low		0-40%

Prioritization of UNESCO expected results by UNESCO Secretariat (Spring 2013) as documented in document 5 X EX/Decisions vs. Member States (as agreed at the 5th Special Session of the Executive Board, July 2013) as documented in the draft 37 C/5 Add. II (accessed via the archives of UNESCO).

Orange coloring reflects disagreement between administration and member states in their prioritization, the arrows show the level and direction of disagreement. Upward arrows mean member states gave a higher priority to the Expected Result than the administration. Due to differences in the formulation of Expected Results between the two exercises, some comparisons are indicative; cells with * represent merged results with differences up and down. The budget effect of the prioritization meant that high (A) priority Expected Results would be funded by 80-100% of the officially adopted budget under the implementation plan, medium (b) priorities 40-80% and low (C) priorities by 0-40%.