

Research Project

Are mediators norm entrepreneurs?

Third-party funded project

Project title Are mediators norm entrepreneurs?

Principal Investigator(s) [Goetschel, Laurent](#) ;

Project Members [Hellmüller, Sara Anna](#) ;

Organisation / Research unit

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Politikwissenschaft (Goetschel)

Europainstitut / Europäische Politik (Goetschel)

swisspeace foundation / Peace Research (Goetschel)

Department

Project start 01.09.2015

Probable end 31.08.2019

Status Completed

Norms play an increasingly important role in mediation processes. Mediators are no longer supposed to only bring a conflict to an end, they are also asked to integrate certain norms into mediation processes. However, although the role and diffusion of norms have been widely researched in international relations and peacebuilding literature, the same does not count for the field of mediation. While the conditions under which mediation leads to a sustainable agreement have been assessed, the role of mediators in norm diffusion has only been treated in a largely prescriptive way in policy debates. This is surprising given the fact that mediation is at the core of a wider peacebuilding process. This project seeks to shed light on the role of mediators in norm diffusion by asking to what extent mediators are norm entrepreneurs defined by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 895) as actors who “attempt to convince a critical mass of [actors] to embrace new norms”. More specifically, it addresses the questions of what norms belong to the normative framework for mediation processes; whether mediators promote and imitate norms and how; and which norms have been internalized in mediation processes. Thereby, the project responds to three biases in current research on norm diffusion. First, it also allows insights into those norms that have not diffused in contrast to earlier research which has largely neglected instances of non-diffusion. Second, norm diffusion will neither be seen as a priori positive or negative compared to current analyses which often portray it as inherently positive. Third, the project allows for agency of actors while earlier research mainly focused on the influence of the structure on agents. Methodologically, the project is based on a combination of case study and process-tracing. Three cases of mediators are chosen which are mandated by the most typical actors in the mediation field: an inter-governmental organization (the United Nations (UN)), a regional organization (the African Union (AU)) and a state (Switzerland). On the basis of these three cases, a two-level analysis is conducted. First, and most importantly, the project assesses causal processes at the within-case level focusing on the agency of mediators. It does this through process-tracing because it allows for an in-depth description of a trajectory of change, namely the process of norm diffusion, and analyzes closely the sequences of independent, dependent, and intervening variables. Second, it conducts a comparison at the cross-case level examining how the role of mediators as norm entrepreneurs varies between the three cases. Data is collected through content analysis, interviews, focus group discussions as well as participant observation.

The main contribution of the proposed research project is twofold. First, it addresses three important gaps in academic literature on norm diffusion and second, it adds

empirical evidence to an often merely policy-based prescriptive debate on the role of mediators in norm diffusion. As such, this project makes a coherent and highly important contribution to scientific debates.

Financed by

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Add publication

Published results

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