Call for papers

Global Public Goods, Global Commons and Democracy: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

International Conference, 22-23 February 2016, Leuven

Concept and objectives

The immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War sparked a new cosmopolitan enthusiasm for global public goods, such as the environment, public health or knowledge, to be commonly governed. On the one hand, with the support of UNDP, a group of renowned scholars coined the term “global public goods” to express and frame the challenges urgently faced by the international community. Drawing a comparison with the literature on public goods at the level of the nation state, it was suggested that supreme international coordination was required to overcome the structural deprivation of certain public goods on a global level. The term has since then enjoyed a spectacular success and permeated much of the international policy discourse. Around the same time, many social activists across the world united around the idea that “the world was not for sale”, i.e. that not all goods were meant to be commodified, and that some areas of social life should remain governed as commons. The reference to a governance of the “(global) commons” as an alternative to both the state and the market has subsequently become central in many transnational social movements.

As a consequence, two different theoretical concepts relying on distinct analytical frameworks have materialized. The concepts of global public goods and global commons sketch how transnational goods could, or should, be governed collectively. Although the two approaches overlap partly, they also hint at a different kind of literature and carry a different set of political, economic and legal implications. Furthermore, they put forward contrasting views on several key points, such as the role of the State, multilateral organizations (in particular the United Nations) or international law in providing global public goods and preserving global commons. As a consequence of globalization and the perceived democratic deficit in the functioning of international organizations and global governance, an additional development soon emerged: a political discourse in support of global democracy and/or democratizing global governance. This
led to a debate on the shortcomings of global governance mechanisms and how they can be addressed.

This international conference will explore the economic, legal and political underpinnings, premises and implications of global public goods and global commons for global governance institutions and international organizations, especially in relationship with the debate on their (non)-democratic nature. The conference aims to assess, from an interdisciplinary perspective, how the respective discourses surrounding global public goods and global commons diverge in their relation to global democracy, and, in particular, to the advancement of democracy in global governance and international organizations. Do they imply different preferences in terms of collective organization? Are these differences reflected in the decision-making processes by international actors and institutions that deal with the subject-matter at hand? Are some global governance institutions which deal with global commons and global public goods more democratic than others, are some of them more attuned to the idea of a global democracy than others, and if so what are the main differences? How can non-democratic global governance institutions dealing with global public goods and global commons be made more democratic? Do international organizations dealing with the governance of global public goods and global commons (such as UNESCO, WHO, World Bank, UNDP, etc.) pay special attention to issues of democracy in their decision-making processes and operations?

The research on global public goods and global commons grew in a very multidisciplinary research environment. This international conference would like to respect this spirit and invite scholars from a variety of disciplines such as political science, sociology, philosophy, political economy, and legal scholarship (the list is not exhaustive) to attend the event. We will welcome contributions from all scholars with an interest in the governance of global commons and global public goods and its relation to global democracy.

Inge Kaul and Pierre Dardot will each deliver a keynote speech at the conference. Inge Kaul (Hertie School of Governance, Berlin) was the lead editor of Global Public Goods. International Cooperation in the 21st Century (Oxford University Press, New York, 1999) and Providing Global Public Goods. Managing Globalization (Oxford University Press, New York, 2003). The books not only coined the term ‘global public good’, but were also instrumental in putting global public goods on top of the international political agenda. Her research now focuses, amongst other topics, on the provision of contested global public goods. Pierre Dardot (Université Paris-Ouest La Défense) has long been working on the political theory underlying the shift from government to governance. Recently, he has co-written with Christian Laval a thought-provoking book on the political underpinnings of the governance of commons (Commun, La Découverte, 2014) that originally underscores its relation to democracy.

Possible topics for papers

- The democratic qualities and shortcomings of decision-making process in international organizations concerned with the governance of global public goods/commons (UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, WTO, IMF, etc.)
• Epistemic networks behind the promotion of the concepts of global public goods and global commons in policy discourse
• The definition of global commons, global public goods and global democracy in international law
• The role of international law in fostering a democratic governance of global commons and global public goods
• Political economy of global public goods and global commons, with an emphasis on their (re)distributive function
• Comparative study of the legal and political underpinnings of the policy discourses relating to global public goods and global commons
• An application to specific global commons and global public goods is very much encouraged. Examples of commons and global public goods (for case studies) include inter alia natural resources commons (oceans, forests, biodiversity), knowledge commons, creative commons, public health, economic and financial security and stability, peace, protection of human rights, stable climate, food security and an international fair trading system.

Submission of proposals

Proposals for papers (abstracts) should not exceed 500 words (excluding affiliation and contact details).

Proposals should be sent as an email attachment to: martin.deleixhe@ggs.kuleuven.be and axel.marx@ggs.kuleuven.be.

• Deadline for proposal submissions (abstract): 8th October 2015.
• Selection of papers will be completed by 25th October 2015.
• Full papers are to be delivered by 4th February 2016.

Publication

Selected papers will be invited for a contribution to an edited volume by a leading publisher or a special issue of a journal. Please indicate, when submitting abstracts, if your paper will be available for publication.

Academic Organizers

• Prof. Dr. Jan Wouters, Professor of International Law and Director Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, University of Leuven
• Dr. Amandine Orsini, Professor at Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles
• Dr. Gert Verschraegen, Professor at Universiteit Antwerpen
• Dr. Dries Lesage, Professor at Universiteit Gent
• Dr. Axel Marx, Deputy Director Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, University of Leuven
• Dr. Martin Deleixhe, Coordinator for the research programme ‘Global governance and democracy’, Centre for Global Governance Studies, University of Leuven

Contact

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The LEUVEN CENTRE FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE STUDIES is an interdisciplinary research centre of the Humanities and Social Sciences at KU Leuven. It was set up to promote, support and carry out high-quality international, innovative and interdisciplinary research on global governance. In addition to its fundamental research activities, the Centre carries out independent applied research and offers innovative policy advice and solutions to policy-makers on multilateral governance and global public policy issues. As from November 2010 the Centre hosts a seven-year research programme (2010-2017) on Global Governance and Democratic Government. This programme, conducted jointly with the Centre for Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, is aimed at the construction of a new paradigm for democratic global governance.

More information on the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies can be found here.

More information on the research programme on Global Governance and Democratic Government can be found here.