

It's Complicated: a Conceptual Framework for Studying Relations and Interactions between International Norms

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It's Complicated: A Conceptual Framework for Studying Relations and Interactions between International Norms

Caroline Fehl and Elvira Rosert

September 2020

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ABSTRACT

The paper outlines a framework for studying norm complexity in international politics. We argue that – due to the increasing density and plurality of the global order – relations and interactions between international norms are gaining relevance as factors influencing norm evolution. While IR scholars have long acknowledged that international norms are embedded in wider normative contexts, this insight has been slow to translate into focused explorations of norm complexity. To advance this line of research, we classify different forms of *norm relations* that capture norms' structural positions vis-à-vis each other, identify different types of *norm interactions* enabled by, but also generating norm relations, and propose a research agenda that exploits our framework to inquire into potential *effects* of norm complexity: Does it help or harm the emergence, spread, and robustness of individual norms? Does it enable or constrain norm promoters and addressees? Does it empower strong or weak actors?

1 INTRODUCTION

International norms can hardly be understood without analysing their relations and interactions with other international norms. Inter-norm relations may be harmonious or conflictual, hierarchical or horizontal, clustered or separated. Labour standards align well with human rights, but less so with free trade. The prohibition of the use of force is at the top of the global norm hierarchy, but so are human rights, which may need to be protected through the use of force. “Children in armed conflict” is a complex of various norms, some of which, like the protection of children born from wartime rape, overlap with other norm complexes like “women’s rights” and “sexual violence in war”. In this paper, we discuss how international norms in examples like these relate to one another – and how they affect one another through both positive and negative interaction effects.

As many observers have noted, the network of norms spanning the globe today is getting more and more dense, with states continuously adopting new legal instruments, additional protocols and amendments of existing conventions (Goldstein et al. 2007: 44, Hurrell/Macdonald 2013: 58, Weiner 1998: 434, Pratt 2018: 564, Zürn et al. 2018). These efforts have resulted in more than 500 multilateral treaties¹ and, broadly defined, ten thousands of international organizations (IOs),² supplemented by less formal arrangements, regulations produced by IOs themselves, as well as corresponding frameworks that translate international into regional, national, and local norms. The increasing density and plurality of the global order enhance the relevance of inter-norm relationships as factors influencing various aspects of norm evolution such as their emergence, application, or robustness.

IR scholars of international norms have always acknowledged, but only selectively researched normative complexity – the umbrella term we use to capture norm relations and norm interactions. On the one hand, they have emphasized throughout that norms are embedded in interconnected normative systems (Florini 1996: 376, Finnemore/Sikkink 1998: 897, Grillot 2011:

1 <https://treaties.un.org>.

2 <https://uia.org/yearbook>.

534, Percy 2019: 126); on the other hand, concrete analytical perspectives have long focused on single norms, addressing inter-norm relationships only as side themes (for example, grafting, Price 1998). One notable exception, prominent in norms research almost since its beginnings, is the question of “fit” between emerging and older norms (or lack thereof) (Checkel 1999, Acharya 2004, Zimmermann 2017, Girard 2019, Cortell/Davis 2005, Capie 2008, Farrell 2001, Subotic 2015), and between the broader normative structure and adjacent norms (Florini 1996: 376-377, Kim/Sharman 2014, Carpenter 2005, Rhoads/Welsh 2019, Großklaus 2017, Thomas 2000).

Much more recently, norms scholars have drawn attention to other forms of inter-norm connections, particularly conflicts and norm complexes. Conflicts have been drawing interest as factors driving normative evolution (Zimmermann et al. 2013). Norm clusters have been highlighted as factors affecting the resiliency of norms (Lantis/Wunderlich 2018) and the diffusion of norm-compliant behaviour (Winston 2018) – whereas conflicts *within* norm clusters are shown to induce policy stalemates (Harris/Symons 2013). Related questions include the clustering of certain norms in different communities of actors (Búzás/Terman 2019), the hybridization of different norms into new normative complexes (Fehl 2019, Moore 2012), as well as the deliberate discursive separation of different normative fields despite their potential fit (Wallbott/Schapper 2017).

Theoretically, a systematic engagement with *norm* complexity appears overdue if we look to related strands of theorizing in International Relations and International Law. International lawyers’ discussions of “regime collisions” (e.g. Blome et al. 2016, Fischer-Lescano/Teubner 2004) and IR analyses of “regime interactions” and “regime complexity” (Alter/Meunier 2009, Benvenisti/Downs 2007, Biermann et al. 2009, Drezner 2007, Gehring/Faude 2013, Gehring/Oberthür 2009) have not been followed by a parallel move on the part of norms scholars to collect and synthesize insights about norm complexity. Yet, norm research, with its constructivist, critical, interpretive, and/or post-positivist theoretical leanings, promises different insights on inter-norm relations and interactions than an international law approach – which focuses on the normative question of how regime collisions should be dealt with – or a rationalist “regime” perspective.

Tying in and advancing this emerging line of research, and following the calls to deliberately explore how norms hang together and affect one another (Krook/True 2012: 123, Großklaus 2017: 262, Rhoads/Welsh 2019: 615), we develop a conceptual framework for the study of norm complexity in international politics. Our framework consists of three analytical building blocks – norm relations, norm interactions, and their effects – each of which entails distinct sets of research questions. As norm relations, we define the (objective or socially constructed) positions of norms in relation to each other – by studying them, we capture the structure of the complex normative order in a static snapshot view. The forms of relations we distinguish are compatibilities, contradictions, coevals, hierarchies, and complexes. As norm interactions, we define the processes and dynamics occurring between norms that are enabled and generated by norm relations– by studying them, we describe and explain how norms are connected by political actors and come to influence one another. The forms of interactions we distinguish are clinging, conflicts, cascades, and competitions. As effects of norm relations and norm interactions, we define their impact on individual norms and on the normative structure, but also on the identity of the actors and on the relationships between them.

Inspired by the general question of how increasing complexity affects the evolution of new and existing norms, the framework makes it possible to pursue a number of more specific questions: How can positions of norms in the (global) normative systems be described and which parameters can researchers use to arrive at assessments of positionality? Does normative complexity facilitate or impede the emergence, diffusion, and application of norms? Does it contribute to the cohesion of the normative order or to its drifting apart? Does it constrain or expand the freedom of choice

of different actors like norm entrepreneurs and norm addressees? How does it change power relations between actors? And under which conditions may we expect which effects?

By putting inter-relations between norms into focus, we have several connected objectives. Our main goal is to draw attention to the – increasing – descriptive and causal relevance of normative complexity. Hence, the presented framework can be used for diagnostic purposes, such as detecting and depicting normative structures and their creation, tracking their change, and comparing them across regions and policy fields. It can also be used for explanatory purposes, such as linking norm relations (as the independent variable) to policy outcomes, or showing how political processes and power relations affect norm relations (as the dependent variable). In short, we hope to facilitate the study of norm complexity by equipping ourselves and other researchers with a framework apposite to analytically disentangle at least some intertwined elements of the global normative order, which, in turn, would improve our understanding of its evolution and its dynamics.

Second, by adopting a meta-perspective on various types of norm relations and norm interactions, we provide an overview of the state of the art that we organize under the new conceptual umbrella of normative complexity. Under this umbrella, we argue, seemingly different phenomena can be grouped and understood as different instances of the same phenomenon. Accordingly, we integrate relevant aspects from existing studies of different manifestations of norm complexity into the two classification schemes mentioned above (one on norm relations, and one on norm interactions), standardizing the terminology and further developing the conceptualizations of different forms and types. Hence, we build theory and generate new research questions by incorporating, reassembling, and advancing elements from existing research. Third, in addition to creating this analytical lens, we sketch out its potential applications, the new questions it raises as well as more general avenues furthering our research programme. The paper is organized according to these goals. We proceed with the conceptual framework systematizing relations and interactions between norms, and end with suggestions for further research.

2 MAPPING NORM RELATIONS

2.1 *Types of Norm Relations*

In constructing a typology of norm relations, we draw inspiration from the literature on regime complexity that discusses different types of regime relations, including regime collisions, regime complexes, and hierarchical (nested) regimes. We suggest that norm relations analysed in recent norms scholarship can be grouped into analogous types, while also highlighting how norm relations and regime relations differ and how they can hang together. Our typology, thus, is constructed inductively by comparing and classifying phenomena widely discussed in the existing literature. The different types of norm relations we distinguish are therefore not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, we argue that they can all be defined in terms of three features – similarity, overlap, and social weight – that individually and jointly describe a specific way in which two (or more) norms are positioned vis-à-vis each other.

The first aspect of norm relations is the similarity of different norms in terms of their content. Drawing on Carla Winston’s analysis of the “tripartite structure” of norms, we understand norm content to be defined by a set of constitutive elements, including the *problems* a norm is supposed to solve, the *values* that motivate the recognition of and the desire to address these problems, and the *behaviour* that is prescribed or proscribed to solve them (Winston 2018: 640-641). With regard to behaviour we distinguish two questions: What behaviour is addressed by a norm, and what prescriptions or proscriptions does it make with regard to this behaviour?

The second aspect concerns the *overlap* between different norms in terms of their temporal scope, social scope and issue scope. Regime theorists understand “institutional overlap” as a situation in

which states, via their formal membership in different international institutions, “stand at the intersection of independent jurisdictions” that claim authority over the same types of issues (Alter/Meunier 2006: 363). Our understanding of overlapping norms is similar to, but broader than overlapping institutions: Norm overlap can, but need not involve an overlap of jurisdictions, since norms can be informal or only partly formalized. Norms have temporal overlap when they evolve simultaneously; they have social overlap when they concern the same group of actors or communities, and they have issue overlap when they relate to the same policy field (Carpenter 2005: 312).

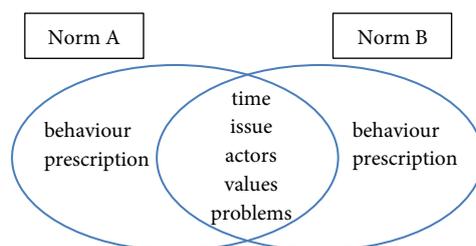
The third aspect concerns the *social weight* of a norm in relation to other norms and the question of which norm is accorded priority in law or social practice. Norm hierarchies, expressing those priorities, can be formal or informal, negotiated or implicit. They can be influenced by a range of factors including the norms’ level of generality, their salience with the public or relevant actors, as well as (power) hierarchies among the actors promoting or opposing them.

In studying how norms are positioned vis-à-vis each other, we adopt an analytical stance that describes norm relations as social structures. This stance implies neither an ontological assumption of norm stability nor an epistemological assumption that we as researchers can fully determine the content, overlap, and relative weight of norms in an objective way. While certain norm features can be beyond dispute, we argue that each of the three aspects of norm relations is always *also* subject to and (re)shaped by interpretation and political agency, and that it is precisely this scope for agency which enables processes of norm interaction. What we do in describing norm relations, thus, is to take an analytical snapshot view of the (temporarily stable) result of this interpretive work.

2.1.1 Compatibilities

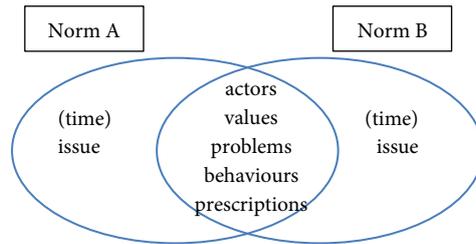
Compatibilities between norms can pertain to the three constitutive elements of norm content just mentioned, i.e., values, problems, and behavioural provisions. Referring variously to “fit”, “congruence,” “synergy” or “alignment” between norms (Florini 1996: 376-378, Checkel 1999: 84, Thomas 2000: 115, Fehl 2018), analyses of norm emergence, diffusion, and evolution have focused on compatibilities of values and problems between overlapping norms making different behavioural prescriptions. For instance, the protection of women in armed conflict is addressed both by norms against gender-based violence and by norms demanding the participation of women in peace negotiations, a relationship that can be characterized as complementarity.

Figure 1: Complementary Norms



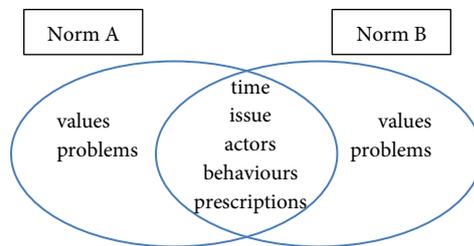
Whereas the norms in this example have time and issue overlap, a different form of compatibility exists between analogous norms that share values and problem descriptions but apply similar behavioural rules to different issues, as in the case of the norm prohibiting anti-personnel landmines and the norm prohibiting cluster munitions. An analogy can also be seen between norms existing in different temporal contexts, for instance between the norm banning chemical weapons and older social norms against the use of poison (Price 1995).

Figure 2: Analogous Norms



Yet another form of compatibility, which has received less attention in the literature, is synergy: a relationship in which two overlapping norms comprising different values and problem descriptions generate identical behavioural provisions. For example, the prosecution of mass atrocity crimes through international criminal tribunals is often claimed to serve not only the international norm against impunity but also to constitute a key strategy for implementing the “Responsibility to protect” or peacebuilding norms (Fehl 2018: 4). To international lawyers, such a norm synergy is also known as “norm parallelism” or “norm equivalence” (Broude/Shany 2011).

Figure 3: Norm Synergy



2.1.2 Contradictions

Norm contradictions present the mirror image of norm synergies: They exist between two or more overlapping norms that make *divergent* prescriptions with regard to the same behaviour – in other words, prescriptions that cannot be simultaneously fulfilled.

For example, regional and global arms export norms such as the EU Code of Conduct (Erickson 2013) and the Arms Trade Treaty (Garcia 2014) require member states to refrain from exporting arms to states and regions where massive human rights violations take place, whereas alliance norms governing states’ security relationships can oblige them to continue such problematic exports in the same situation. As the example illustrates, norm contradictions at the level of prescriptions are generally based on dissimilar problem descriptions (human rights violations are described as key problem in arms export norms, but not in alliance norms) and *can* even reflect different underlying values (human rights vs security). However, as we will argue in the next section, contradictions can also arise between norms sharing underlying values, so a contradiction of values is not a necessary element of a norm contradiction.

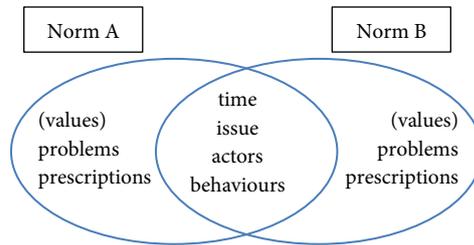
In either case, if two norms contain divergent prescriptions with regard to the same behaviour, a norm contradiction can arise for actors who subscribe to both norms at the same historical point in time.³ In contrast, it would not arise for states rejecting export control norms or states that do not entertain an alliance with a human rights violating state, that is, if there is no social and temporal overlap between norms.

Norm contradictions can arise horizontally between different global norms, as in the above example, or between different regional norms (Kobayashi 2019), but also vertically between local

³ In addition to issue overlap, which is always given for a norm contradiction.

or regional and global norms – a factor that has often been cited as blocking the diffusion and implementation of global norms. For instance, David Capie argues that ASEAN’s normative consensus on non-interference obstructed the diffusion of global small arms norms in the region (Capie 2008).

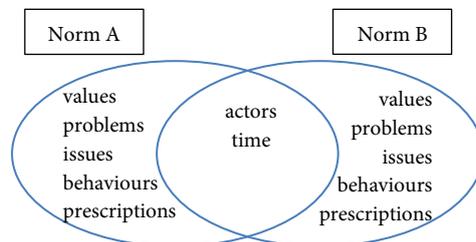
Figure 4: Norm Contradiction



2.1.3 Coeval Norms

A third type of norm relationship we identify as potentially relevant for norm interactions exists between what we call *coeval* norms. Coeval norms in our understanding, do not share any elements that are constitutive of norm content, but are related *only* through their overlap in terms of the social and temporal space in which they emerge and evolve.⁴ At first sight, of course, all international norms that political actors subscribe to at a given point in time can be said to coexist as contemporaries. Yet, the notion of coeval norms assumes that two norms, even if unconnected at the level of content, may exert effects upon one another if they are promoted, adopted, implemented or contested by the same actors at the same point in time and/or within the same public spaces or institutional fora. Thus, coeval norms are connected through actors as well as a spatial and temporal overlap.

Figure 5: Coeval Norms



2.1.4 Hierarchies

Norm hierarchies are a fourth type of norm relation, which is defined by the relative social weight accorded to two (compatible, contradictory, or coeval) norms: A norm hierarchy exists when one norm carries greater social weight than another norm and therefore takes precedence over the other norm in its application. Normative hierarchies have been discussed extensively by international law scholars (e.g. De Wet/Vidmar 2012, Koskenniemi 1997, Reiter-Korkmaz 2008, Shelton 2006), but only rarely and in passing by IR norms scholars (Acharya 2004: 258-9, Dolan 2013: 39, Farrell 2001: 81, Gholiagha et al. 2020: 308, Krook/True 2012: 106, Peltner 2017: 748).

As the strong legal perspective suggests, norm hierarchies can be formalized in international law. For instance, certain norms, such as the prohibition of genocide, are understood as *jus cogens*

⁴ While IR norms scholars do not, to our knowledge, explicitly discuss coeval norms, they sometimes employ similar labels that emphasize temporal overlap alongside other aspects of a norm relationship. For instance, Kim and Sharman refer to “parallel” norms of accountability that, apart from sharing elements of norm content, have “evolved along parallel tracks” (Kim/Sharman 2014: 418).

norms, implying that – according to Art. 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties – treaty provisions colliding with them are invalid (Koji 2001: 928). Similarly, international humanitarian law has traditionally been defined as *lex specialis* that takes precedence over more general human rights norms in judging the rightfulness of the use of force in situations of armed conflict (Abresch 2005).

Yet, a norm hierarchy can also be informal, that is, it can be based on a political (but not legally binding), written or oral agreement among the members of an institution or society that one norm ought to take precedence over another norm. Anne Peltner, for instance, characterizes a norm “hierarchy” as a situation in which one norm is “ranked above” another norm by speakers in a political discourse (Peltner 2017: 748). In the loosest sense, an implicit norm hierarchy can be inferred from the observation that a society values a certain norm more than other norms. It is in this sense that Amitav Acharya, for instance, refers to a “norm hierarchy” within ASEAN in which “non-interference” is positioned “at the top” (Acharya 2004: 258-9), or that Theo Farrell argues that transnational norms can be “graft[ed] [...] on to existing local norm hierarchies” (Farrell 2001: 81).

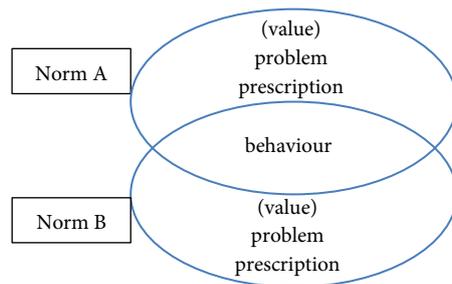
Norm hierarchies can also vary with respect to the criteria on which they are established, or the norm features which lead to their emergence. One important aspect concerns the level of generality of two norms. In the IR literatures on norms and regimes, many authors refer to hierarchies in which more specific norms are subordinate to, or “nested” within, more abstract and general norms. Harald Müller, for instance, argues that “normative systems are [...] integrated within hierarchies of increasing abstraction and comprehensiveness” (Müller 2013: 5). Similarly, others distinguish between ordinary norms and “metanorms” or “metaprinciples” (Großklaus 2017, Nave 2019, Sandholtz/Stiles 2009: 17), which are superordinate in the sense of being “capable of solving disputes between conflicting norms” (Nave 2019: 304). However, the above-cited “*lex specialis*” principle that is used widely in international law suggests that it is not necessarily the more general norm which always takes precedence; the reverse argument can also be constructed.

In addition to *lex specialis*, other classical criteria for norm hierarchy in international law include *lex posterior*, the criterion of the “date of promulgation”, and *lex superior*, “the competence of the promulgating authority” (Alchourrón/Bulygin 1981: 115). As the latter principle suggests, norm hierarchies can result from hierarchical authority relations among political actors, organizations, or judiciaries (e.g. between the European Court of Justice and national courts), as they are also described in the legal and IR literature on “regime collisions”. However, norm hierarchies need not be based on competence hierarchies, but can be negotiated in a decentralized way among equal actors.

Besides these typical arguments for legalized hierarchies, other criteria for norm hierarchy that can be derived from the literature include salience and geographical level. With regard to salience, a norm can take precedence over another norm because it is better known to relevant political actors or because the latter accord greater importance to it. In the latter sense, Jeffrey Lantis and Carmen Wunderlich (2018: 582) refer to the contested “hierarchy” between the three “pillars” of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Norm hierarchies based on geographical levels may give precedence to the norms of larger geographical entities, as in the case of national and EU law, but may also be reversed. *Norm subsidiarity*, defined by Acharya as “a process whereby local actors create rules with a view to preserve their autonomy from dominance, neglect, violation, or abuse by more powerful central actors” (Acharya 2011: 97), assigns greater social weight to a regional norm than to a global norm governing the same issue-area.

As the examples illustrate, norm hierarchies are often created to resolve norm contradictions (Krook/True 2012: 106, Zimmermann et al. 2013: 51), and thus constitute alternatives to the selection of one of two contradictory norms and to the creation of compromise arrangements (see below). Conversely, the lack of a clear norm hierarchy in a policy field can be understood as a condition enabling norm collisions (Gholiagha et al. 2020: 308).

Figure 6: Norm Hierarchy



2.1.5 Complexes

Whereas complementarities, contradictions, coeval norms and hierarchies typically describe relationships between two norms, norms scholars have recently paid increasing attention to larger configurations of multiple norms that are (positively) associated with one another. Echoing studies of “regime complexes” (e.g. Betts 2010, Raustiala/Victor 2004), contributions studying such relationships employ various terms including norm clusters (Lantis/Wunderlich 2018, Winston 2018), norm bundles (Betts/Orchard 2014, Bloomfield 2016: 3) norm sets (Capie 2008, Kelley 2008: 225, Zimmermann 2016: 100), norm complexes (Moore 2012: 33), complex norms (Welsh 2013) or adjacent norms (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998: 908, Wiener 2018: 60), with some terms being applied to quite different phenomena. For our typology, we use the most general term, *norm complex*, as an umbrella term that covers different sub-types of positive associations between norms: *norm families*, *norm packages*, and *norm agglomerations*.⁵

The idea that many individual norms belong to larger *families* of norms is perhaps the oldest and most established one in IR one norms research (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998: 908). A few illustrations show the popularity and longevity of the family metaphor in IR norms research. Anne Florini, in 1996, compared the evolution of norms to a process of “genetic coevolution” in which “[a]ny new norm must fit coherently with other existing norms – that is, with the rest of the “genotype” (Florini 1996: 376). Richard Price, in 1998, introduced into IR a term originally referring to plant breeding, “grafting”, to describe how norm promoters link emerging norms to older norms through a “mix of genealogical heritage and conscious manipulation”, thus contributing to “normative rooting and branching” (Price 1998: 628). In 2019, Emily Paddon Rhoads and Jennifer Welsh discussed the *Responsibility to Protect* and the *Protection of Civilians* norms as “close cousins in protection” (Rhoads/Welsh 2019).

As with human families, the idea of kinship – that the members of a family share certain traits which they have acquired as part of a biological or cultural heritage – covers diverse patterns of relations and evolutionary pathways. In our understanding, norm families typically share both values and problem descriptions, and comprise a several different (compatible) norms that link these values (e.g. individual rights) and problems (e.g. the suffering of civilians in warfare) to a range of behavioural prescriptions. Often, albeit not always, they are organized hierarchically around one general principle (or meta-norm, see above), such as the principle of distinction in warfare, and comprise a range of more specific norms that make detailed prescriptions to put the general norm in practice, for instance through a prohibition of various types of “inhuman” weapons.

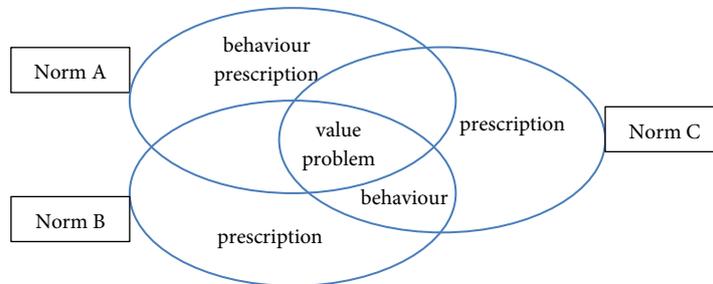
Norm families can be very different in terms of their formalization and genesis. For example, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) with its different protocols regulating different types of weapons provides a formal, authoritative definition of what sub-norms count as

⁵ We propose these alternative terms, rather than redefining more established labels, to capture empirical distinct phenomena that are sometimes referred to by the same label.

members of the family of humanitarian arms control norms. As this example illustrates, many international “regimes” can be characterized as constituting norm families, yet norm families can also exist outside formal regimes.⁶ Kinship was more contested, for example, and established in a decentralized discursive process, for the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines. Negotiated outside the CCW, it was “grafted” by mine ban advocates onto the older chemical weapons taboo by claiming that both types of weapons are inhumane “weapons of mass destruction” (Price 1998: 629).

Yet another pathway of family formation is highlighted in Carla Winston’s analysis of the transitional justice “norm cluster” (Winston 2018). According to her analysis, the family of “TJ norms” grew when individual states developed their own practices of dealing with past mass atrocity crimes – e.g. through trials, truth commissions or archival work – while framing them as being in line with the overarching notion that mass atrocities must be addressed through some kind of transitional justice process. In this instance, norm generation and specification was thus not a collective international process, but a decentralized process that led to a menu of alternative TJ choices, rather than a group of complementary norms as exemplified by the CCW’s different protocols. In the family analogy, one could speak of “mutations” of the TJ norm.

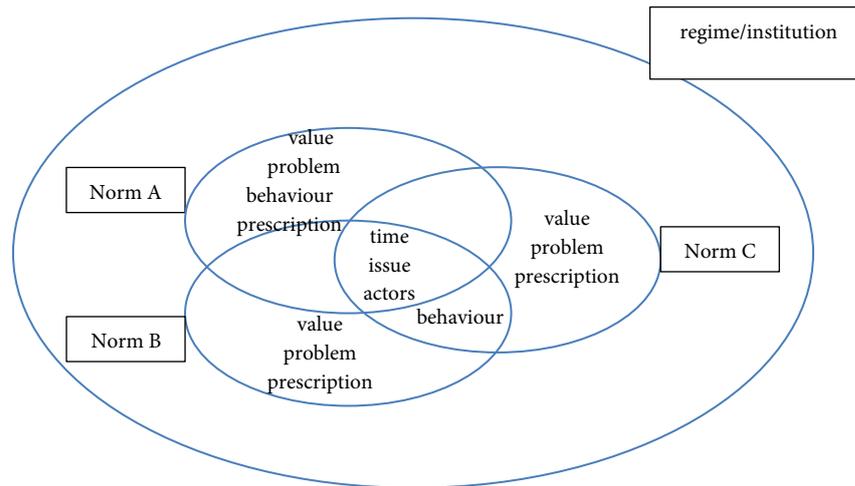
Figure 7: Norm Family



Other than norm families, *norm packages* are groups of norms that were joined together through a political negotiation process *without* sharing a common heritage in terms of values and problem descriptions. A prime example of such a norm package is the “norm cluster” that Jeffrey Lantis and Carmen Wunderlich (2018) identify in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In what is often described as a three-pillar “bargain”, the NPT prohibits Non-Nuclear Weapon States from acquiring nuclear weapons (the non-proliferation pillar), while at the same time guaranteeing them access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and committing recognized Nuclear Weapon States to pursuing disarmament. Although all of these norms somehow concern uses of nuclear energy (and thus have issue overlap), they are members not of the same, but of different families in the sense that they express the specifications not of the same, but of different overarching values and principles: the security logic underlying the disarmament and nonproliferation pillars is clearly distinct from the commercial and developmental logic underlying the peaceful use pillar. The norms reflecting these different underlying values were consciously tied together through issue-linkage (Lantis/Wunderlich 2018: 584) in a package deal that made the renunciation of nuclear weapons more acceptable to nuclear “have-nots”. Norm packages of this type are thus not connected through the norms’ shared content, but through the negotiating context, which can be described as a combination of temporal, social and issue overlap. As the NPT example illustrates, and unlike norm families, norm packages are *always* found in the context of (negotiated) regimes.

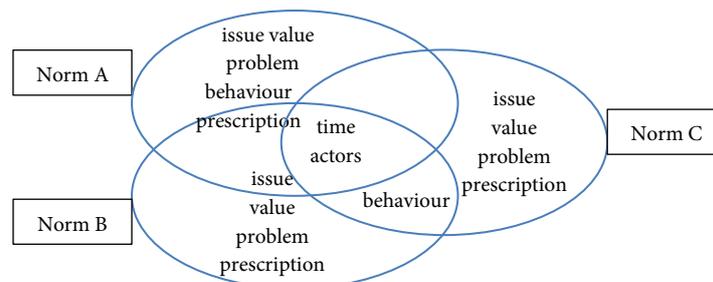
⁶ Similarly, Finnemore and Sikkink distinguish single norms from institutions, which “emphasize the way in which behavioral rules are structured together and interrelate (a ‘collection of practices and rules’)” (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998: 891). In contrast, a “regime complex” is constituted of at least two different norm complexes.

Figure 8: Norm Package



Overlapping actors, time, and policy fields are also the central connection points for a third type of norm complex which we call *norm agglomerations*. Norm agglomerations are norms shared by the same actors, but without necessarily belonging to the same family of being tied to one another in a negotiated package. Obvious empirical examples of such associations are hard to identify, as research on these kinds of associations between norms is only beginning. Zoltán Búzás and Rochelle Terman have pioneered this line of research with their study of “normative clusters” in the human rights field, in which they explore which actors publicly endorse different human rights standards in the UN Periodic Review (Búzás/Terman 2019). Although they define normative clusters as groups of *actors* sharing similar norms, rather than groups of norms, they also highlight that each of the normative clusters they identify (e.g. “civil libertarians” or “developmentalists”) subscribes to a characteristic mix of human rights norms. Similarly, Kazushige Kobayashi (2019) analyses regional configurations of statist and liberal norms that are expressed in different institutional initiatives in post-Soviet Eurasia. Drawing on these analyses, we propose to characterize a set of norms shared by a group of actors as norm agglomeration.

Figure 9: Norm Agglomerations



Norm complexes, whether they are families, packages, or agglomerations, all share the characteristic that the diverse norms comprised in them are in some way positively associated with one another. Nevertheless, contradictions too may arise within a norm complex, for instance between different strategies of transitional justice, between non-proliferation and access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, or between different norms within the UN climate regime (Harris/Symons 2013). At the same time, both norm contradictions and norm synergies can also arise at the *intersection* between different norm complexes (Gholiagha et al. 2020: 295). For instance, state sovereignty and human rights, although sometimes described as conflicting norms, are in fact at the centre of intersecting norm complexes that contain both contradictory and identical behavioural provisions. They diverge, for example, with regard to the question of whether

or not human rights abusers should be sanctioned, but converge with regard to the question of whether or not targeted killings are prohibited (Großklaus 2017).

2.2 *Studying Norm Relations: Pathways for Future Research*

As argued above, studying norm relations implies an analytical stance that takes a snapshot view of a moving and malleable normative structure. Taking such a snapshot is an important analytical step because it enables us to address a range of research questions. First, it allows us to compare norm relations that structure international political interactions across countries, regions, and policy fields: Are these different areas of world politics marked (to a stronger or lesser degree) by the presence of multiple contradictory norms, by clearly institutionalized or disputed norm hierarchies, or by strongly integrated norm families?⁷

Second, mapping norm relations enables us to track change in the normative structures of these areas. For instance, has the normative structure of a given policy field become more or less hierarchical over time? Has it become integrated into an overarching norm complex or fragmented into several intersecting norm families? Has a geopolitical region become more or less normatively integrated in terms of the strength of norm agglomerations we observe in the region?

Third, similar to material configurations of capabilities and interests discussed by realist or neoliberal IR scholars, norm configurations that vary across space, functional areas or time, constitute structures that can potentially explain variations in political outcomes (e.g. degrees of legalization, compliance, institutional efficiency, or political integration).⁸ Accordingly, a third set of research questions would seek to investigate the impact of different norm relations on such outcome variables.

Fourth, variation and change of norm relations is itself a variable in need of explanation: For instance, why are some areas of world politics marked by stronger norm hierarchies than others? Why are some marred by more norm conflicts than others? Why and under what conditions do actors succeed or fail in packaging different norms pertaining to a policy-area? Relevant explanatory factors could include the density of norms in an issue-area, legalization, or path dependencies.

Finally, capturing norm relations at a given point in time is an analytical prerequisite for analysing processes of norm *interaction*, that is, processes in which political actors exploit and manipulate relationships between norms. As we elaborate in section 3, interactions are enabled by certain forms of norm relations while also generating and (re)constructing these relations. Interactions, thus, can be studied as both causes and consequences of norm relations: For instance, why do political actors construct compatibilities between norms and under what conditions do they succeed or fail? When do norm contradictions translate into open conflicts? It is this set of questions that past research on normative complexity has been primarily interested in. In particular, scholars have focused on the role of compatibilities, whereas complexes and contradictions have received less attention, and norm hierarchies and coeval norms have hardly been addressed as enablers and outcomes of norm interaction.

7 Winston addresses part of this agenda by comparing norm clusters across policy fields (Winston 2018).

8 Similarly, Búzás and Terman (2019) compare their analysis of “normative polarity” to realist analysis of the polarity of the international system understood as power relations.

3 CLASSIFYING NORM INTERACTIONS

3.1 *Types of Norm Interactions*

Capturing norm relations at a given point in time is both an end in itself and a prerequisite for analysing processes of norm interaction. If norm relations are snapshots of the normative *structure* taken at a certain point in time, norm interactions, in our understanding, are *processes* and dynamics *enabled by*, but also *generating* and *changing* norm relations. They occur between different norms or norm complexes that exert some kind of influence on each other.

In the following, we suggest a typology of norm interactions that, in our view, best reflects and structures the state of the art. It includes two dimensions on which interactions can differ: One dimension distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative interactions; the other dimension distinguishes between adverse and beneficial interactions. As qualitative, we understand interactions between norms involving their *content*, as defined above. As quantitative, we understand interactions involving the *number* of norms (such as the amount of relevant precedents) and the *resources* related to them (such as attention or policy capacities). As adverse, we understand interactions damaging the norms, such as narrowing their scope, undermining their application, or questioning their validity. Accordingly, as beneficial, we understand interactions promoting the norms, such as widening their scope, fostering their application, or affirming their validity.

Combinations of these properties result in four different types of norm interactions (Figure 10): clinging, conflicts, cascades, and competitions. The following sections describe each type of interaction in more detail, in particular their general essence and the causal mechanisms, the scope conditions under which they are likely, and subtypes. The latter mostly cover variations of the main types emerging from their occurrence in different phases of norm evolution – a term that we use broadly to refer to different phases in the biography of a norm such as its emergence, diffusion, or erosion (Rosert 2019a: 1105). Since “normative structures [...] cannot stand still” (Sandholtz 2008: 101) and normative change is never concluded, but happening steadily (Hirsch 2014: 813), at very different points of a norm biography, the necessity may emerge to defend, modify, challenge, reinterpret or rebuild a norm (Sandholtz 2019: 139). Hence, while certain subtypes of interactions may be typical for a certain phase of norm evolution, they are not exclusive to that phase.

We assume relations and interactions between norms to be always partially objective and partially socially constructed by actors. Interactions are discursive acts requiring agency, but what form they will take varies with structural factors such as the type of norm relations as well as with individual qualities of norms in question such as elasticity and precision – these aspects define the opportunity structure for the actors involved in interaction processes. In other words, norm features are discursively malleable, but within certain limits and at different costs (Acharya 2004: 251-252, Kim/Sharman 2014: 432, Sandholtz 2008: 102).

Figure 10: Typology of Norm Interactions

| | | Impact on Norms | |
|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | | beneficial | adverse |
| Character of Interaction | qualitative | clinging | conflicts |
| | quantitative | cascades | competitions |

3.1.1 Clinging

Norm clinging – qualitative, beneficial interactions evolving in norm complexes – probably is the type of interaction reflected in the norms literature most frequently. To make norms more persuasive to the members of the international, transnational, national, or local target community, actors (strategically) display, construct, and exploit the *compatibility* of different norms (Sandholtz 2008: 107, Acharya 2004: 243, 250, Carpenter 2005: 311). For the evolution of norms, clinging is a crucial element as it makes support for certain norms more likely (Laffey/Weldes 1997: 203).

How do interactions of the clinging type unfold? In the first step, norm advocates broadly scan the normative pool – the various norms, principles and norm complexes that they consider or aspire the norm to belong to – for suitable “docking stations”, i.e. norms they deem to have a high potential to be constructed as compatible with the norm in question (Krook/True 2012: 110-111). While clinging to some norms in this pool is optional (i.e. they may or may not be selected by the norm advocates),⁹ clinging to other norms is mandatory: If the new issue overlaps with other issues, these framings must be aligned to secure the support of the respective advocacy network.¹⁰ In other cases, clinging may be deliberately avoided if the norms are feared to contradict each other.¹¹ The selection process might take place in the opposite direction too, with the target norms selected from the pool of issues depending on their potential to be compatible with the existing normative material (Acharya 2004: 245-246).

In the second step, the actual clinging occurs: Norm advocates discursively exploit and construct compatibilities between norms to advance claims of the necessity, incrementality, and feasibility of target norms by capitalizing on the compatibilities of problems, values, and behaviours. To demonstrate the necessity of the norms and to increase the pressure to act, the actors’ desire for consistency is addressed through the construction of similarities between the problems motivating the target norms. To demonstrate the incrementality of the target norms and to counter claims of radicality (that make norm acceptance more difficult, Elgström 2000: 458, Farrell 2001: 81), attitudinal and behavioural changes it requires are presented as *gradual* or *logical extensions* of changes already happening in the norm complex or as derivatives from hierarchically superior

⁹ For example, when resisting pregnancy screenings in factories, advocates could choose between different frames such as labour rights, economic rights or women’s rights (Krook/True 2012: 110).

¹⁰ For example, advocates of civilian protection decided to focus on women as victims of armed conflict to get the women’s rights advocates on board (Carpenter 2005: 320-321).

¹¹ For example, linkages to human rights norms have been missing from the climate discourse for a long time (Wallbott/Schapper 2017: 219-222). This has been changing recently with big human rights NGOs increasing their presence at climate negotiations (Schapper 2018: 49-50).

principles. To demonstrate the feasibility of the new norms, existing norms referred to as *precedents* serve as compelling examples that behavioural changes and analogous problem solutions are possible while also providing the direction of those changes and even design templates (Price 1998, Kim/Sharman 2014: 431, Sandholtz 2008: 102).

In the third step, the effects of successful clinging materialize. The clinging field dwindles down to the most effective combinations of source and target norms. Also, the argumentative complexity decreases: Once the respective norms cling on each other, specifying why they are compatible becomes obsolete, and simply mentioning them together becomes sufficient. While this discursive simplifying and narrowing (“funneling”, Holzscheiter 2010) means that the number of different compatibility claims decreases, the frequency of the remaining claims increases as does the number of actors routinely bringing them forward. But the reduction, the catchiness and the diffusion of compatibility claims alone are not enough to indicate the effectiveness of clinging – ultimately, they should increase the support for the target norm as well.

Clinging is relevant in different phases of norm evolution as the content of norms is not precisely and irreversibly fixed in one particular phase, but remains dynamic (Krook/True 2012: 109, Hirsch 2014: 815). The central role of clinging for the emergence of new norms has been pointed out often. For the norm’s horizontal diffusion, clinging to other international norms helps win the support of further governments; for the norm’s vertical diffusion, clinging to national and local norms helps win the support of the sub-governmental levels (Checkel 1999: 87, Acharya 2004: 240). Between synergistic norms, clinging creates compliance pull, if compliance with some norms contributes to or even enables compliance with other norms.¹² Lastly, clinging increases the robustness of norms against contestation (Deitelhoff/Zimmermann 2019: 10, 13, Percy 2019: 128-129), in particular, if contesting them can be shown to challenge norms that are higher in the hierarchy or even to challenge the normative system as a whole, which should result in firm buttressing of the contested norms (Price 2019: 42).¹³

3.1.2 Conflicts

Norm conflicts – qualitative, adverse interactions – are less frequently examined in the norms literature than clinging, but the attention to them has been increasing recently. They denote processes of dealing with and constructing *contradictions* between different norms.

Interactions of the conflict type unfold in three steps. In the first step, the actors become aware of the contradiction between different behavioural provisions – which may have been latent for some time, but are activated in a specific situation when a social and temporal overlap between the norms involved occurs.¹⁴ The actors, thus, have to decide which of the norms requiring contradicting courses of action should guide behaviour in the given situation or how to deal with trade-offs that compliance with one norm may have for other norms (Fehl 2018: 4, Gholiagha et al. 2020: 295).¹⁵

12 For example, training peacekeepers to implement the norm of civilian protection should also contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes under R2P (Rhoads/Welsh 2019: 614-615).

13 Clinging, however, may have the opposite effect too: Norms may weaken because the norms that they are strongly associated with weaken (Snow et al. 1986: 477, Percy 2019: 126). One example is the assassination norm whose rise and decline are viewed as corollaries of the rise and decline of the institution of state sovereignty (Thomas 2000: 127-130, Großklaus 2017: 268.)

14 One example is the conflict between sovereignty and global health security that was activated by the first SARS pandemic in 2002 and 2003 (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019: 551).

15 For example, the provision of development assistance to ensure that basic needs of populations are met vs. withdrawing or reducing that assistance to sanction countries that violate LGBT rights whose protection is a normative obligation too (Saltnes 2020).

In the second step, the actors socially construct the conflict by articulating the contradiction and carrying it into international fora such as deliberations, negotiations and dispute settlement bodies. Even if in some cases, actors may choose not to articulate the conflicts openly, but instead express their preferences through behaviour, the underlying conflicts too will be articulated at some point (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019: 537). Different, not necessarily exclusive, motives can drive the activating move. Some actors might bring the conflicts to the attention of the international community to achieve their recognition, and/or to enable collective action if the conflict is resolved and the norms are harmonized (Pratt 2018). Others, on the contrary, might seek to thwart collective action and/or to evade a norm that is costly for them through the instrumentalization, hardening, or even escalating the conflict (Gómez-Mera 2016: 572-573, Fehl 2018: 6, Sanders 2018: 272).

The resulting conflictual norm interactions can be carried out in the different discursive modes that IR research has detected in (international) communicative processes (Risse 2000, Schimmelfennig 2001, Payne 2001). Bargaining is a transactional communicative mode that does not presuppose changes in preferences and convictions but where agreement is possible through the exchange of threats and promises. By contrast, arguing is a transformational communicative mode which presupposes sincere truth-seeking and changes in preferences and convictions, and where agreement is possible through the exchange of arguments.

In the third step, different effects of the conflicts on norm relations may occur, with outcomes contingent on the paths taken in the second step. Successful bargaining – reaching an agreement – will not resolve the contradiction between norms, but may resolve the conflict by sequencing their fulfilment, i.e. removing the temporal overlap (Weiner 1998: 448-449). Conflict resolution may become easier by declaring the agreement to be ad-hoc and to have no implications for the future (Zimmermann et al. 2013: 49-50). Unsuccessful bargaining will neither resolve the contradiction nor the conflict. Successful arguing may resolve the conflict through changing the content of the norms or their relations. In the former case, the contradiction is removed or mitigated, when the actors can agree on a common problem description, align their values, or accept trade-offs on the norms through weakening their behavioural provisions or reducing their scope or strictness. These moves may allow interpreting the norms involved as compatible, to hybridize them or to give rise to new norms (Bettiza/Dionigi 2015: 628, Moore 2012, Peltner 2017: 749, Fehl 2019).¹⁶ In the latter case, the contradiction persists, but the relationship between the norms changes if one norm is hierarchically subordinated, or assigned a lower priority than the other (Alchourrón/Bulygin 1981: 114, Bettiza/Dionigi 2015: 628; Elgström 2000: 461).¹⁷

Conflictual norm interactions can occur at all stages of norm evolution. During the norm emergence phase, three main types of conflicts arise: Conflicts between different norms discussed as solutions to the same problem, conflicts between norms belonging to different issue areas, and conflicts between existing norms and emerging norms. In the norm diffusion phase, conflicts between national and local norms on the one hand and international norms on the other are most likely (Farrell 2001, Checkel 1999: 86-87, Cortell/Davis 2005: 6, Capie 2008: 650).¹⁸ Regarding application and compliance, conflicts between different norms that apply to a given situation, but implying different behavioural prescriptions may occur.¹⁹ Regarding the enforcement of certain

16 For example, democratization has been perceived as potentially undermining security due to its destabilizing effects, but has been redefined as promoting it after the end of the Cold War (Kelley 2008: 229).

17 For example, the sovereignty norm is being increasingly assigned lower priority than other norms like global health security (Kreuder-Sonnen 2019: 547) or human rights protection (Peltner 2017).

18 For example, protection of family-oriented values and the rights of parents vs. the rights of individual family members like children that might require limiting parental rights (Zimmermann 2016).

19 For example, ending the conflict through negotiating with war criminals may be prioritized over putting them to trial (Weiner 1998: 440).

norms, a conflict may occur if enforcement instruments could infringe upon other norms.²⁰ Lastly, norms that are in conflict with the normative environment (either because it is progressing, i.e. the norms lag behind, or because the environment lags behind, i.e. the norms are too progressive) will be less robust against contestation.²¹

Even though conflicts are “commonplace” (Sandholtz 2008: 106) and “inherent in all normative systems” (Sandholtz/Stiles 2009: 3), certain scope conditions will make their manifestation as well as certain outcomes more likely. While contradicting norms can “peacefully co-exist” in parallel normative systems, conflicts can be expected to become manifest when those systems intersect (Alchourrón/Bulygin 1981: 107), e.g. because a state accesses a treaty, in turn of which contradictions between national and international norms included in the treaty become apparent, or because certain norms become so-called *erga omnes* norms considered valid in all normative systems. Conflicts may also be activated due to changing interpretation and increasing precision of certain norms whose vagueness previously obscured the contradictions (Gholiagha et al. 2020: 296-297). And of course, as many have observed, emerging new norms may put existing norms under stress.²² In compromises achieved through bargaining, the new norm relations will reflect the priorities of the more powerful actors. In agreements achieved through arguing the new norm relations will reflect the persuasiveness of the actors advocating them.

3.1.3 Cascades

Norm cascades – quantitative, beneficial interactions – are a new type of interactions between norms that we propose. The term as such has already secured a prominent place in IR norms research, referring to processes of norm diffusion in which the *number of norm supporters* increases faster than before after reaching a tipping point, that is, a *critical mass of norm supporters* (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998: 902, Kelley 2008: 229, Drezner 2019: 12). Here, we introduce a different type of cascades, in which it is the *number of norms* that increases exponentially after reaching the tipping point, which, in this case, is a *critical mass of norms*. Three mechanisms initiate the cascade. First, norm-building becomes a meta-norm when the constantly on-going expansion and tightening of the normative web advances to a standard of appropriate behaviour. Second, norm evolution becomes faster and easier because the dense normative network increases the likelihood of clinging through the abundance of normative resources. Third, the normative structure induces a certain inertia that not only establishes a “broader pattern”, in which “norm developments [...] move in generally the same direction” (Sandholtz/Stiles 2009: 20, see also Kim/Sharman 2014: 431-432), but also serves as a tailwind accelerating them.

Interactions of the cascade type unfold in three steps. In the first step, the normative fundament is built (or reconstructed): new organizations are founded (or refounded), and general principles as well as first more specific norms are adopted (or reaffirmed). Such pervasive transformations are likely after major changes or even shocks of the respective normative order – power shifts, new actors, major wars, new technologies, pandemics, or environmental changes – that expose discrepancies between the current and the desired state and motivate actions to reduce them (Kim/Sharman 2014: 430, Farrell 2001: 78, Lantis 2015: 430). The initial processes of normative ordering are concentrated

20 For example, economically sanctioning states for violations of international norms like the prohibition of nuclear testing or the prohibition of the use of force or human rights norms might harm their populations, increase poverty and create black markets (Saltnes 2017, Andreas 2010).

21 An example of a norm lagging behind the environment would be Interpol’s initial refusal to get involved into the fight against terrorism following Interpol’s norm of apolitical prosecution (Barnett/Coleman 2005: 614). An example of the latter would be the norm to protect migrant workers that, even though the respective convention has entered into force, never took off (Van Ginneken 2013).

22 For example, emerging norms of individual accountability have increasingly eroded the norms of impunity of state leaders (Kim/Sharman 2014: 418).

on the most important pillars of the new framework and are therefore necessarily tentative, iterative, and fragmented, both in terms of geographical and substantial scope. Gradually, though, the framework is being fleshed out more fully through vertical enhancement, i.e. adding specificity to existing principles and norms, and horizontal enhancement, i.e. extending the normative coverage to further areas. Moreover, the norms' geographical reach expands and procedural as well as organizational routines take hold.

In the second step, the cascade sets in: When a normative framework has reached a certain density, its further evolution gains pace – individual norms are adopted and implemented faster, and the overall number of norms added to the system or complied with increases more swiftly, as “debates surrounding one set of norms may give rise to new norms” (Krook/True 2012: 109). In addition, norm evolution requires fewer resources due to reduced transaction costs and economies of scale. At the same time, since many of the new norms emerge within existing norm complexes, they are explicatory rather than elementary, they modify rather than radically change existing standards or extend their scope of application to other actors, and they refer to the system's margin areas rather than to its core pillars. Thus, cascades facilitate the fine-tuning of normative systems.

In the third step, normative saturation is reached: The normative network has become highly dense and encompassing, with only few missing pieces. Accordingly, new norms emerge much less frequently, but existing norms are still revised, modified, and their implications spelled out. Yet, in reaction to new major shocks normative evolution may gain pace again, and new cycles of normative change begin (Sandholtz 2008: 103, Sandholtz/Stiles 2009: 11).

Norm cascades may sound like a norm interaction most characteristic to the norm emergence phase, but they are not limited to this phase, at least not conceptually. In the norm diffusion stages, cascades occur because norms diffuse in agglomerations – adherence to one norm increases the propensity of adherence to other norms (e.g. because a state transitions to a democracy). Cascades in norm application and compliance are driven through the establishment of compliance with international norms as the appropriate meta-practice (Von Staden 2018: 7, 28-30). Finally, the robustness of norms increases through protection cascades – which, too, occur if norm protection through norm enforcement becomes the appropriate meta-practice while not reacting to norm violations becomes increasingly repudiated. In a nutshell, the cascade mechanism posits that norm emergence, diffusion, compliance, and protection leads to more norm emergence, diffusion, compliance, and protection.

In contrast to clinging and conflict, cascades are rare interactions that are most likely in norm relations with a higher internal coherence, that is, in norm complexes. The tipping points setting off the cascades will be more easily reached in norm families and agglomerations where the qualitative process of clinging that is necessary to activate the quantitative process of a cascade requires less efforts. Also, due to the requirement of a critical mass of norms, cascades are more likely in larger complexes with many issues than in smaller complexes with few issues (e.g. human rights vs. inhumane weapons).

3.1.4 *Competitions*

Norm competitions – quantitative, adverse interactions – are being taken into account by the literature only recently. They denote processes arising from a combination of social and institutional overlap with the fact that institutional production of norms requires many resources (Pratt 2018: 565-566) that are, however, scarce. Accordingly, the actors such as norm entrepreneurs, gatekeepers, but also norm addressees may be required to choose between coeval norms and prioritize them. Agendas – “set[s] of issues that are viewed at a point in time as ranked in a hierarchy of importance” (Rogers et al. 1991: 6) – express those priorities. The agenda rank determines how (attentional, cognitive, financial, institutional, personnel, and spatial) resources

are distributed between the norms, with priority norms receiving more, and second-tier issues receiving less.

Norm competitions evolve in three steps. In the first step, several coeval (but not necessarily contradictory) norms enter a limited agenda space and compete for attention (Elgström 2000: 458). This initial competition may pertain to different agendas: of individuals, of norm entrepreneurs and the gatekeepers among them, of international institutions, of governments, or of sub-governmental actors. Confronted with a high amount of (prospective) norms potentially deserving their attention, the actors (consciously or unconsciously) prioritise some norms over others, and ignore some completely. In these selection and prioritisation processes, comparisons of different norms by different criteria like urgency, severity, salience, and prospects for success, but also the relations to other norms on the actor's agenda play a role.

In the second step, the effects of the uneven distribution accumulate, and the resource gap, which may have been small initially, between the norms widens. Another type of cascades is at work here: attention and neglect cascades (Rosert 2019b: 82-83). Norms into which many resources have been invested are more likely to reach a certain attention threshold – after that, a rapid increase in attention is likely because attention itself becomes a factor attracting further attention. Accordingly, norms into which no or fewer resources have invested are unlikely to reach the threshold, so attention to them will not increase and may even decrease because neglect will lead to more neglect. Thus, this step is driven by self-perpetuating dynamics and by the mechanism of increasing returns in a path-dependent process (Pierson 2000).

In the third step, the effects of the competition materialize. Since attention translates into other factors like public pressure, peer pressure, and mobilization (which then again translate into attention), norms winning the competition over these elements evolve more easily and are supported more strongly (Rosert 2019b: 81-82). Conversely, the evolution of and support for the norms that have lost the competition will lag behind. In most extreme cases, this might mean that they will not be adopted, implemented, or defended against contestation.

Norm competitions may occur at all stages of norm evolution, but the resources that the norms compete for, will vary across those stages. In the norm emergence phase when achieving a substantial increase in issue awareness is crucial, attention is the most relevant resource. In the norm diffusion phase, the need for attention decreases as norm diffusion is driven by (voluntary) imitation instead of pressure from below (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998: 902). Yet, for diffusion processes that stumble due to resistance, attention and other resources will be required to simulate the process and re-induce the pressure, which in turn may again result in norm competition. Norm competition may occur with regard to compliance, too. As all governments face multiple international obligations which have to be implemented with limited resources, they need to set priorities – implementation of some norms may result in the inability to implement others. If in some situations (e.g. violent conflicts) many norms are violated at the same time and at a large scale, norm competition occurs with regard to the question of which norms should be enforced through sanctions (Tannenwald 2007: 47).

Norms competing for positions on international, transnational, and national agendas are a regular feature of the global normative system. But under which conditions is competition more likely? As competition is a function of the ratio of demand to the available resources, it is the more likely the more unequal this ratio is. Following five conditions influence this ratio either through the demand or the availability side. First, with regard to the availability side, the basic condition for norm competition is the scarcity of resources – the higher the scarcity, the higher the likelihood for competition. Second, with regard to the demand side, competition is likely if several problems occur *simultaneously* because the evolution of norms hinges on the concentration of resources in a given period. Sequential occurrence, on the contrary, reduces the likelihood for competition, as it

stretches the demand over time, so resources can become available again. Third, while competition is possible at different levels and will also occur between issue areas (e.g. between education and security), at the level of individual problems, it is more likely for problems that belong into the same issue area which has its own institutional and budgetary limitations. Fourth, competition is more likely for contentious norms because overcoming resistance is resource intensive. Fifth, competition is more likely between norms with a higher discrepancy in features conducive to generate attention: since the norm with more conducive features has better prospects for success, it might be perceived as more efficient to invest the resources into it.

4 STUDYING NORM INTERACTIONS: PATHWAYS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The paper set out to propose a new framework for studying norm complexity by analytically separating three components of complexity – norm relations, norm interactions, and their effects – and conceptualizing the first two components through two typologies. Using similarity, overlap, and social weight as coordinates, our typology of norm relations distinguishes between compatibilities, contradictions, coeval norms, hierarchies, and complexes. Using beneficial, adverse, qualitative, and quantitative as characterizing dimensions, our typology of norm interaction distinguishes between clinging, conflicts, cascades, and competitions. While our concept of relations captures the *positioning* of norms in relation to each other at a given point in time, our concept of interactions captures the *processes* between norms that are enabled by and producing those relations.

By suggesting how norm relations and norm interactions can be conceptualized, we have begun to work through the research agenda proposed in the introduction – that, however, not only addresses different forms of inter-norm relationships, but also their effects. We have touched upon some of these effects in this paper, in particular those on the individual norms that may be weakened or strengthened, and hindered or promoted, and those on norm relations whose hierarchical structure or family constellations may change. Other effects, however, require further theorization, in particular those on the normative system and on the identity and freedom of choice of the actors, as well as on their power relationships. Also, if different, even opposite outcomes of norm interactions are conceptually conceivable and empirically possible, under what conditions are we to expect which effects? Some conditions – such as the increasing precision of norms that may activate latent contradictions, scarcity of resources that may create competition, institutional shifts that may result in new normative complexes, or external shocks that may stimulate normative change – have been identified in the literature already. Yet, further research on potential conditions (and configurations of conditions) is needed, to systematically test them to find out which conditions matter more than others.

Finally, since this paper is a theoretical and conceptual endeavour, in addition to further theorization, it also invites empirical validations going beyond the brief examples that we gave to illustrate our arguments. Empirical studies may have the aim of exploring different norm relations based on our conceptualizations, of addressing the question of why specific relations emerged between different norms, or of inquiring whether certain outcomes (such as the insufficient implementation of some norms) result from adverse norm interactions. Such case studies will not only contribute to the inductive refinement of our framework, but also open up a discussion that exceeded the scope of this paper, namely methodological questions related to the study of norm complexity.

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