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Health Policy in a Globalizing World

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, major infectious diseases like AIDS, SARS or the Avian Flu critically revealed the need for international cooperation in the field of health. In academia, this need has been reflected by notions of ‘global public health’ and ‘global health policy’, acknowledging the massively growing number of global and international actors active in the field. Their influence in health policy is assumed to have increased at the cost of national sovereignty. Yet, public health scholars have paid little attention to the actual past and present *policy ideas* and *health care approaches* floating around within and between international organizations and their respective *resources*, *strategies* and *technical capacities*. This paper attempts to bridge this gap. By reviewing the recent relevant literature, the first section shall analyze how and to what extent the global health policy discourse has changed over time. The subsequent section shall explore which health policy ideas and health care approaches have emanated from the international governmental organizations and how these ideas and approaches interrelate. Finally, we compare the respective resources, strategies and organizational features of the WHO, UNICEF, WTO and the World Bank in order to demonstrate how the shift in policy ideas and approaches has been reflected by the organizational capacities of the IGOs over time. One tentative conclusion is that the global health debate today is to a great extent focussing on single ‘priority diseases’ and (to a smaller extent) on specific singular aspects of health systems (e.g. user fees) in contrast to former times, i.e. the debate has become more and more ‘technical’ again. Furthermore, the ‘ideational influence’ has shifted away from the WHO as the predominant *actor* towards other IGOs. At the same time new, strong actors have entered the field, such as e.g. powerful foundations (like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or the Rockefeller Foundation), leading to a further fragmentation of the field in general.