Guardian of Democratic Values vs. Representative of World Regions:
The G8 and the G20 in Quest for Legitimacy

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Abstract: Given our pluralistic world today, the G8 is an anachronism. How did the more than three-decades-old club of Western nations manage to prevail? In the light of the rise of the G20 after the financial crash in 2008, this question is even more relevant: the G8 was faced with a severe legitimacy crisis, while the G20 had to establish itself as a new governance platform. By making use of the concept of self-legitimation, this paper seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how both clubs ended up in a setting of coexistence rather than replacement of the G8 by the G20. It asks for the practices employed by the clubs to each claim for a politically relevant and legitimate position within the network of international actors. Given their relative similarity in terms of informality, exclusiveness, and flexibility, the main argument is that both needed (and need) to carefully position themselves as distinct in order to make it more likely to prevail and to become perceived as worthy to adhere to. By focusing on two informal clubs rather than on formalized IOs, the analysis complements ongoing research on the self-legitimation of international institutions. Three modes of public self-legitimation will be traced: legitimation policies, legitimation talk and nonverbal self-presentations. Based on document and evaluation analysis and a reconstruction of ideal type photographs (1975-2013), the paper shows how both institutions present themselves as inclusive and accountable managers for the benefit of all. Despite these similarities, the study reveals considerable differences between the self-legitimation that enable the G8 and the G20 to appear as distinct and individually justified. A normative as well as de facto division of labour makes it more likely for the G7/8 to prevail, even in – or even because of – today’s more pluralistic world.

1. Introduction

The “Group of Eight” (G8) is one of the most challenged institutions of the Western hemisphere, basically being perceived as a “club for the rich”. In 2008 at the latest, decades of protest, alternative events such as the “people’s summits”, and reform debates culminated in a fundamental crisis of the G8’s legitimacy: While the international community was searching for a political response to the financial meltdown, even G8-members such as Barack Obama (White House 2009) began to publicly question whether the G8 was still a suitable formula to manage global affairs as “systemically important” countries were not included in the institution. Former British Trade Minister Peter Mandelson (see Nagpal 2009) claimed: “The era of

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the G8 is over”. In the aftermath of the financial crash, the G8 seemed to have been replaced by the more inclusive “Group of Twenty” (G20) which in 2009 enacted itself as “our premium forum for international economic governance” (G20 2009:§19). The G20 became equipped with greater political authority as heads of states decided to meet personally on a regularly base in order to task international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and the Financial Stability Board with a joint and coordinated reaction to the financial turmoil. After this upgrade, the G20 has likewise become a target of protests and critique from non-member states, other institutions and citizens. Overall, for both institutions the financial meltdown became an existential moment in time: In the words of the head of the British G8 Sherpa team interviewed in 2013, the G8 was in need to show that it could “add value” to international politics and, thus, would be worthy to adhere to despite its lack of representativeness and capability, while the upgraded G20 had to establish itself as a valuable player.

Today, seven years after the financial meltdown, the G8 still exists – even though as G7 after the exclusion of the Russian government – and the G20 seems to have managed to become an “orchestrator” of IFIs (Viola 2015 (forthcoming)). Starting from this observation, the paper asks about some of the conditions which enabled the G8 and – with lesser urgency – the G20 to (re)define their positions within the network of international institutions and organizations. By making use of the concept of self-legitimation (Biegoń and Gronau 2012; Gronau 2015 (forthcoming); Gronau and Schmidtke 2015), meaning a top-down approach focussing on legitimacy claims of international institutions themselves rather than on legitimacy perceptions of social constituencies, I will offer a perspective which helps to retrace how both institutions today seem to have end up in a setting of coexistence rather than replacement of the G8 by the G20. I propose that an account of their respective self-legitimations might help to understand better how the G8 managed to convince even hesitant member states to follow the more exclusive club, while the G20 has established itself as an economic coordination platform.

More precisely, the paper will be guided by the two following research questions: Firstly and more conceptually: How do international institutions carry out self-legitimation, i.e. what kind of means do they employ? Secondly and from a comparative perspective: Do the G8 and the G20 each manage to present normatively appropriate “selling points” which enable them to position themselves distinct from each other? First, and with regard to a conceptual contri-

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2 In spring 2014, the Russian government under Vladimir Putin was suspended from the G8 by its remaining member states in reaction to the “Crimean Crisis” and the possible involvement of Russian military forces. The now G7 argued that Russia was violating the Ukrainian sovereignty (G7 2014a:$4,5, 2014b:$2). Since my analysis is mainly focused on the time span of the G8’s existence, I will mostly use the term G8.
bution to IR research on legitimation I plea for an integration of both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, i.e. written and spoken language as well as visual and artefact language, into empirical analysis. While recent publications, which could be subsumed under the heading of self-legitimation, most often rely on international institutions’ documents in order to identify legitimation talk and/or legitimation policies such as accountability mechanisms (for instance, Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito, and Jönsson 2013; Zaum 2013b), this article assumes that prudently planned nonverbal artefacts such as official summit photography do enter public legitimation processes and therefore need to be taken into account for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of publicly expressed legitimacy beliefs on the one side and legitimacy claims on the other. Consequently, in the empirical section of the paper, three modi of self-legitimation in practice will be traced: legitimation policies, legitimation talk, and visual self-presentations.

Second, with an empirical comparison of the G8 and the G20 I will add a comparison of two informal institutions to the portfolio of case studies engaged in legitimizing activities of international institutions so far. Despite their lack of formally binding decisions and a genuine secretariat, both institutions have the capacities to effectively act as “orchestrators” of various international actors (for an in-depth analysis of the G20 see Viola 2015). Moreover, and as stated above, both clubs have become targets of legitimacy debate and protests – although even and purposefully not equipped with binding authority. However, IR research prefers to look at the more formal IOs rather than on the G8 and the G20 (and other informal governance-arrangements that are generally growing in numbers (Daase 2009; Schneckener 2009:6)). I will show that both a focus on verbal communication and on formal IOs is too narrow if we want to capture the abundance of legitimation activities in the international sphere.

The comparison of the G8’s (1975-2013) and the G20’s (1999-2013) self-legitimations reveals that both institutions share a core of legitimation policies and normative “anchors” presented in legitimation talk which makes them both appear as valuable managers of the global common good. Despite these shared features, both manage to highlight individual “selling points”. A mutually supportive combination of legitimation talk and visual self-presentation allows the G8 to put itself into a normative “pole position”. However, especially by its design of group photography, the G20 is likewise highlighting a normative feature which cannot easily be provided by the smaller G8.

I will proceed in four steps: Firstly, basic information on the origins and elements of the concept of self-legitimation with a focus on the three modi of self-legitimation will be given
(2.). Secondly, I will briefly describe the research design and methods (3.). Next, I will discuss how central characteristics of the G8 and the G20 might influence the design of their self-legitimation. The presentation of central results will begin with legitimation policies, then move on to legitimation talk, and in the end explore how authorized summit photos relate to the former two modi of self-legitimation (4.). In the end, I will summarize and discuss my results (5.).

2. The Concept of Self-legitimation
There is little doubt that international institutions invest resources to communicate themselves as positively as possible, thereby trying to enhance their legitimacy. And while many international institutions improve their public communication, open up to various stakeholders, and develop accountability mechanisms, IR researchers similarly started to address both theoretically (for instance Barker 2001; Clark 2005; Reus-Smit 2007) and empirically (Seabrooke 2007; Halliday, Block-Lieb, and Carruthers 2010; for instance, Guastaferro and Moschella 2012; Tallberg et al. 2013; Zaum 2013b) the activities of international institutions to appear as legitimate and to avoid or adopt to legitimation crisis. This paper aims at contributing to this recently adopted perspective on international institutions (diverging) need and quest for legitimacy by making use of a concept I call self-legitimation of international institutions. The idea of such a concept is inspired by Max Weber who alluded to two sides of empirically observable legitimation processes, legitimacy beliefs of subjects on the one hand and the cultivation of these beliefs by rulers on the other:

Experience shows that in no instance does domination voluntarily limit itself to the appeal to material or affectual or ideal interests as a basis for its continuance. In addition, every such system attempts to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy (Weber 1978:213, emphasis added).

Legitimacy claims are ‘the lifeblood of politics of legitimation, and such politics is essential to the cultivation and maintenance of an actor’s or institutions legitimacy’ (Reus-Smit 2007:159). The notion of at least two sides of legitimation processes leads into an interactive understanding of legitimation processes (Beetham 1991:100–114; Barker 2001:108, 2007:20; Clark 2005:25–60; Reus-Smit 2007:159; Zaum 2013a:10): Due to a lack of direct experience, we depend on international institutions communication to make legitimacy assessments; whereas international institutions themselves might try to influence our perceptions by claiming to be legitimate (for certain reasons).

Subsequent to the “renaissance of international legitimation talk” (Clark 2005:12), the perspective on legitimacy beliefs of the subordinated has already gained great scientific attention.
In most cases, authors begin by investigating the attitudes, (protest) behaviour, and evaluations of nation-states and – more recently – of citizens towards international institutions (Clark 2007; Steffek 2007:189; Scholte 2014), focusing on a bottom-up approach (O’Brien, Goetz, Scholte, and Williams 2000; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Zürn, Binder, Ecker-Ehrhardt, and Radtke 2007; Nullmeier, Biegoń, Gronau, Nonhoff, Schneider, and Schmidtke 2010). By contrast, researchers have only just begun to transfer the theoretically discussed perspective on international institutions’ activities in need and quest for legitimacy into empirical analysis. Within this context, the concept of international institutions’ self-legitimation aims at identifying legitimizing activities which should be differentiated from other, related concepts such as public-relations or the cultivation of specific support by giving financial incentives. It includes the following components: a definition of self-legitimation, of producers, and addresses, which I will sketch very briefly, therefore summarizing previous work on the concept (for more details see Biegoń and Gronau 2012: 175–181; Gronau 2015: chapter 3.2 (forthcoming); Gronau and Schmidtke 2015). Moreover, the concept encompasses three modi of self-legitimation, which will take centre stage in this article.

Definition of self-legitimation: self-legitimation is defined as a goal-oriented activity employed to establish and maintain a reliable basis of diffuse, i.e. normatively fixed support of an international institution as a whole by its social constituencies. This specification of international institutions’ legitimizing activities is related to two aspects of David Easton’s system theory: First, gaining diffuse support means to have cultivated a ‘reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effect of which they see as damaging to their wants’ (Easton 1965:273). Neither coercion nor bribery is needed to produce obedience to authority if diffuse support has been generated (Hurd 1999:387). By contrast, material incentives and other activities in order to generate specific, i.e. normatively not fixed support, have to be excluded from an empirical analysis of self-legitimation. Second, self-legitimation is related to diffuse support of an international institution as a whole – Easton’s “regime” category–, whereas support of single policies and political authorities will not be taken into account. While policies and authorities are much more easily to replace or adapt than an institution as such, diffuse support of an international institution as a whole is assumed to be of vital significance for a political order to be legitimate and, thus, to survive in the long term (Booth and Seligson 2009; Norris 2011).

Producers of self-legitimation: Producers of self-legitimation are those authorities officially presenting an international institution and/or being the last resort for the authorization of self-legitimation. The annually rotating chairs of the G8 and the G20, the Secretary General of
the UN, and the presidency of the European Commission are an example for their institutions producers of self-legitimations.

Addresses of self-legitimation: At least three main groups of addresses can be differentiated: International institutions’ member states, their bureaucratic staff, and the wider public, encompassing citizens of member and non-member states, NGOs, and other institutions. For a long time, in IR research member states were assumed to be the only constituency that had to grant legitimacy to an international institution as the member states were considered to be both the principals and the main targets of an international institution’s policies. The rationale to include staff members of an institution (or, as in the case of the G8 and the G20, which do not have a proper secretariat, temporarily “borrowed” staff from their member states) is based on Barker (2001:31,42,45) following Max Weber’s discussion of the need of a supportive staff in order for a (political) entity to function properly. Staff’s compliance with an institution’s orders is more likely, if it has developed the belief in the institution’s legitimacy. Hence, international institutions might try to positively influence its staff members’ normative assessments in order to create the necessary “reservoir of favourable attitudes or good will”. Staff members as addresses of self-legitimation should not be overlooked as they are the ones that do the “work on the ground”. Additionally, a more recent debate in favour for a more direct legitimation relationship between citizens and international institutions (O’Brian et al. 2000; Clark 2005; Mulligan 2006; Reus-Smit 2007; Steffek 2007) proposes to take into account international institutions’ legitimizing efforts towards citizens and the wider public as protests and public legitimacy debates suggest that citizens obviously do perceive authority (also formal authority might not exist). Moreover, many international institutions and organisations are obviously trying to build a relationship with the public by opening up to NGOs, by inviting the international press to their conferences and so forth.

In accordance to these three ideal type groups of addresses, intergovernmental, bureaucratic, and public self-legitimation can be distinguished. However, in the empirical section I will focus on public self-legitimation in order to probe the plausibility of my plea for an integration of nonverbal means of self-legitimation. Although each of the three groups might have its own normative demands for an international institution to be legitimate and each of the three types of self-legitimation should generally not conflict with the others to make self-legitimation become successful (Gronau and Schmidtke 2015 following; Seabrooke 2007), I consider public legitimation to be the most encompassing as they can be accessed by all of the three groups of addresses.
**Modi of self-legitimation**: How do international institutions feed their legitimacy claims into the interactive process of legitimation? This question is related to the first of my two research objects in this article. Generally, international institutions’ resources of communication can be differentiated along the line of verbal communication on the one hand and nonverbal communication on the other. By contrast to an understanding of nonverbal communication as body language in linguistics (Remland 2009; e.g. Knapp and Hall 2010), the line of differentiation between verbal and nonverbal is following Charteris-Black’s (2007:22–40) “theory of leadership communication”: Verbal communication relates to written and spoken language, whereas nonverbal communication will be used to capture communication via visuals and artefacts. So far, verbal communication has been dominating research on legitimation. By contrast, I propose a multimodal understanding of self-legitimation integrating both forms of communication.

The existing body of research on legitimation suggests to differentiate between *legitimation policies* (Meyer 1999; Woods and Narlikar 2001; Kahler 2004; e.g. Cini 2008; Steffek and Nanz 2008; Gutner and Thompson 2010) one the one hand and *legitimation talk* (e.g. Halliday et al. 2010; Saward 2010; Peters 2013; Heupel and Binder 2014) on the other. Legitimation policies are accompanied by a substantial shift in the architecture or decision-making procedure of an international institution. For example, an international institution’s commitment to account for its activities needs to be accompanied by the establishment of structures and persons being responsible for the development and monitoring of the accountability process and the publication of a report in order to count as legitimation policy. By contrast, legitimation talk for the moment broadly covers purely a verbal form of legitimation, e.g. the verbal claiming for one’s right to act on behalf of the people or a given constituency. Legitimation talk aims at guiding a social constituencies’ attention to certain values and norms an international institution proclaims to represent (thereby and at the same time leaving other normative properties behind) and might, thus, structure possible corridors of interpretation and normative assessment. Overall, legitimation talk serves

- to confirm the differentiation between dominant and subordinate which justifies their respective positions;
- to structure the common interest so that it can only be met through satisfying the purposes of the powerful;
- to help shape the desires of the subordinates in directions that the system is capable of meeting;
- to limit the choices available so that consent to a position of subordination, although constrained, is also at the same time voluntary (Beetham 1991:108).

What the two broadly sketched modi, legitimation policy and legitimation talk, share, is their concomitant focus of analysis on documents such as annual reports of international institu-
tions and the speeches of their representatives, i.e. on verbal communication. However, legit-
imation assessments might also be based on visuals and artefacts presented by international
institutions. For example, the very widespread perception in mass media of the G8 merely
being a “circus for the rich”, a “lobster and caviar summit” (in more detail Gronau, Nonhoff,
Nullmeier, and Schneider 2009) cannot be explained by looking at G8 communiqués or the
public speeches of its chairs’. Instead, critic on the G8’s lack of seriousness and, thus, its lack
of credibility has much more likely arisen because of its official summit photography showing
G8 leaders in front of the Louvre, visiting Rodeo events and musicals, and drinking Kölsch (a
beer brewed in Cologne) in a pub. The plea for an integration of the nonverbal is likewise
supported by an evaluation of the G8’s summit homepage in 2009. As presented by the organ-
izers of the online presentation under Italian presidency, the over half a million users counted
were, in the first place, interested in the official photo galleries (Government of Italy 2009).

Consequently, I propose a third modi of self-legitimation – nonverbal self-presentation –
whose meaning for legitimation processes has been alluded to by some authors (for instance
Barker 2001; Hurd 2002), but which did not yet enter empirical IR research on legitimation.

The focus on verbal communication is very much plausible, because only written and spo-
ken language can be said to enable international institutions’ to give explicit and unambiguous
reasons for the legitimacy claimed or the normative benchmarks fulfilled. Thus, verbal com-
unication allows what in the modern age is understood as legitimation by way of delibera-
tion or justification (Steffek 2003:260–265). Against the background of such an understand-
ing, a positive relationship between an international institution and its addresses of self-
legitimation is given if the latter have concluded to support the institution as a whole because
they have become convinced by the power of reasoned argument. Likewise, an institution will
not be able to generate diffuse support if it dismisses or violates the normative expectations
given in a social constituency. From this perspective, legitimation talk can be interpreted as
verbal claim-making for deliberation, which then becomes substantially supported by legiti-
mation policies – and vice versa.

Following Yanow (2005:42), I assume that such a focus on written and spoken language
omits a great part of the universe of signs used by international institutions to make sense of
their existence and to claim for their legitimacy. Today, many international institutions are
professionals of multimodal communication, therefore using digital technologies to spread
their graphs, logos, videos clips, and photo galleries. They do so in order to “give an account
of who they are, in writing, in images, in more or less ceremonial actions and practices“
(Barker 2001:35). But if nonverbal artefacts such as photos do not have the power to give
explicit reason for the legitimacy claimed, how then can nonverbal communication potentially contribute to processes of legitimation? International institutions do not only follow the example of new technologies. By contrast, they are spending time and money to present themselves in a certain way. Hence, it is not the nonverbal artefact as such, but a potentially specific note conveyed by the nonverbal artefact. This note should not be excluded from analysis only because it is communicated differently from spoken or written language and cannot be identified as a verbal claim for deliberation because of its greater interpretative openness. Instead, studies on the role of collective identities within the context of EU integration and legitimacy (for instance, Bruter 2004; Kantner 2006; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009) and the context of Security Studies (for instance, Herschinger 2011) as well as research on the meaning of emotion in politics (Mercer 2006; Richards 2007; for instance, Bleiker and Hutchison 2008) do point to a way of receiving legitimacy claims not being motivated by verbal acts of deliberation but rather by way of nonverbal communication.

I will call this potentially second way nonverbal claim-making for identification. Positive, i.e. affirmative identification with an international institution is based on the positive evaluation of the institution in question. Both mechanisms, verbal claim-making for deliberation and nonverbal claim-making for identification, are thought of as ideal types as the identification by the addresses of self-legitimation might also take place on the base of written or spoken legitimacy claims. Correspondingly, nonverbal claims for identification – embedded in its verbal context – might come into effect as multimodal reasoning (as, for example, shown by Mersch 2006:95–96).

In fact, the cognitive mechanisms at work in legitimation processes are hardly explored. But from a more general perspective, communication research has shown that positive identification depends on positive emotions such as closeness, anticipation, and trust – and that such positive emotions are especially triggered by nonverbal communication (Schuster and Woschek 1989:14; Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz 2004). Moreover, some authors do highlight the need for identification in today’s processes of legitimation. Broadening, for example, Steffek’s observation about the EU to international institutions in general, verbal claim-making for deliberation might not be appropriate anymore for an international institution to generate diffuse support:

[T]he sober power of reason and good arguments alone might not be sufficient any more to legitimate a supranational institution [...]. Once supranational organizations become a centre of political decision-making the rational-legal strategy of discursive legitimation reaches its limits (Steffek 2003:217).
In conclusion, verbal forms of self-legitimation would then need to be supported by nonverbal forms. The potential power (and pitfalls) of nonverbal communication in international institutions’ quest for legitimacy is, of course, dependent on the wider context. As discussed by Hansen (2011:53) for the case of Mohammed caricature in Denmark, the “visual does not enter the political without being subject of debate or engaging with the discourses already in place”. As a consequence, and in line with multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; O’Halloran 2004; Maasen, Mayerhausen, and Renggli 2006; Rose 2012:189–226), it is not a summit photo as such, but photos in its intertextual and intervisual contexts that need to be considered. Together, verbal and nonverbal forms built the multimodal self-legitimation of international institutions which can be studied by taking a look at the proposed three modi of self-legitimation, i.e. legitimation policies, legitimation talk, and nonverbal self-presentation, and there interconnection in use.3

3. Research Design and Methods
The analysis of the G8’s and the G20’s self-legitimation has two objectives: Firstly, it should serve as a plausibility probe for the suggested integration of nonverbal forms, therefore studying all three modi of self-legitimation. In order to give this first objective enough space, I suggested to focus on the G8’s and the G20’s public self-legitimation as this dimension is the most encompassing one; leaving intergovernmental and bureaucratic self-legitimation almost aside. Secondly, the empirical analysis should help answer the question of whether the G8 and the G20 each manage to present normatively appropriate “selling points” which enable them to position themselves distinct from each other. In order to identify such individual characteristics, the comparison between the two institutions is based on the idea of structured focused comparison (George and Bennett 2005:67–124). The comparison is focused in so far as it concentrates on selected parameters within each of the three modi of self-legitimation; the comparison is structured because it is guided by a set of research questions related to each of the parameters. Due to their different periods of existence, for the G8 (1975-2014) 39 summit years, and for the G20 (1999-2014)4 15 summit years will be studied.

Analyzing two institutions’ self-legitimation in three modi over time needs a pluralistic toolkit. As I interpret self-legitimation as an artefact of the institution in question, as its “self-interpretation” which than can become studied, i.e. interpreted by the researcher, this toolkit is

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3 The third modi is not named self-legitimation but rather self-presentation in order to point to the missing potential of nonverbal communication to give explicit reason for an international institution’s legitimacy.

4 The time period includes the G20 finance ministers’ meeting which began in 1999 in order to identify a shift in self-legitimation due to the upgrade if the G20 into a leader-led process in 2008.
based on interpretative premises (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006; Moses and Knutsen 2007; Dunn 2008). Hence, I consider the product of my analysis to be a “second degree construction” (Kleemann, Krähnke, and Matuschek 2009:19). In order to indicate the interplay between analytical “decoding” on the one hand and the G8’s and the G20’s past sense-making on the other hand, I will use the term “re-construction”. Table 1 gives an overview of the method, the research unit, and the data used for the re-construction of each of the three modi in practice.

Table 1: Method, research unit and data for the re-construction of public self-legitimation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modi of legitimation</th>
<th>Method; research unit</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. legitimation policies</td>
<td>Document Analysis; legitimation policy identified by a set of questions</td>
<td>communiqués, homepages, publications linked to the policies (e.g. G8 accountability reports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. legitimation talk</td>
<td>Extended Evaluation Analysis; legitimation statements</td>
<td>annual summit communiqués</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. nonverbal self-presentation</td>
<td>Longitudinal Photo Analysis; different types of photos signifying photographic conventions over time</td>
<td>authorized summit photography collected on the base of three international databases (afp, ap, getty images)</td>
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1. Public legitimation policies were identified by way of document analysis (Prior 2001; Bowen 2009); guided by the following set of questions: What are the presented normative objectives (e.g. more transparency)? Which reasons are given for the introduction of the legitimation policy? What are the institutional arrangements and institutional changes related to the policy (e.g. the formation of a “G8 accountability working group”)? The sets of legitimation policies introduced by each of the two institutions over time were used as parameter of comparison.

2. The term Public legitimation talk will be used to focus on a certain part of international institutions’ verbal communication: the evaluative speech about itself (as a whole) as well as about other objects of legitimation such as other institutions, (groups of) nation states, business, and civil society. Here, I follow the rationale of Evaluation Analysis (Schneider, Hurrelmann, Krell-Laluhová, Nullmeier, and Wiesner 2010; Schmidtke and Nullmeier 2011), a research perspective and method development for the empirical analysis of legitimation discourse in mass media. Evaluation analysis proposes to accesses verbal legitimation debates by identifying single legitimation statements. Transferred to the concept of self-legitimation,

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3 For a discussion of the methodical choice for Evaluation Analysis see Gronau (forthcoming, 2015: chapter 4.3).
legitimation statements are evaluative statements about oneself – and others – that are based on normative criteria such as transparency. By making evaluative statements about themselves and others, international institutions relate themselves both to normative criteria and to their environment. They claim to be representative, demand other institutions to become more transparent and might, thus, appear as “sponsors” of more transparent institutions, and so forth. Legitimation statements were identified by a stylized grammar including 1. the object of legitimation, 2. the type of statement, 3. the affirmative or negative assessment, 4. the normative criteria on which the evaluation is based on. Three types of legitimation statements were taken into account: 1. general legitimation claims such as “We are great”, 2. legitimation claims based on normative criteria such as “We are transparent”, and 3. legitimation demands such as “The IMF needs to become more transparent”. Different from existing evaluation analysis, legitimation demands were included, because in diplomatic affairs it is much more common to point to a perceived lack e.g. of transparency by way of demanding the increase of transparency rather than directly stating the lack. For the comparison of legitimation talk, two parameters from the produced dataset were chosen: Firstly, which are the normative criteria the G8 or rather the G20 are claiming to fulfil most constantly over time? I will call these normative criteria anchors of self-legitimation. Second, what or who are the objects of legitimation addressed by the G8 and the G20?

3. Public nonverbal self-presentation was re-constructed by focusing on visual self-presentation through authorized summit photography. Authorized summit photographs were collected from three international databases in order to allow for a comparison non-biased by national archives in favour of the head of state of the member state in question. In order to identify structures and changes over time, a method called Longitudinal Photo Analysis was developed. While photo analysis in Political Science and more general is most often used for an in-depth analysis of single photos or a small collection of photos (within the context of Security Studies Campbell 2007; for the EU see Bernhardt, Hadj-Abdou, Liebhart, and Pribersky 2009; Hansen 2011; Van Veeren 2011), Longitudinal Photo Analysis aims at identifying structures within a large corpus over time. Thus, it is not single subjects and their relationships or other components of a single photo that are at the centre of analysis but rather different types of photographs. A type of photograph depicts a certain spatial and temporal unit of a G8 or rather G20 summit, ranging from the leaders’ arrival, the official welcome, the working

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6 Only accredited journalists have access to summit photo opportunities carefully planned by the G8 host team. Therefore, summit photographs taken by journalists organized in the three databases can be considered to be authorized. A pre-test based on material from the national archives of two G8 members clearly revealed a bias in favour of the head of member state in question.
sessions, the making of the so called family photo, and periods of portrayed “leisure activities,” to the leaders’ departure. A type of photograph produced over time constitutes a visual convention. Three types of visual conventions can be distinguished: 1. long-term conventions, 2. temporarily or totally abandoned conventions and 3. new conventions. The visual conventions identified for the G8 and the G20 were used as parameter of comparison.

In addition, the re-construction is supported by information gathered from nine interviews with high level bureaucrats of the German and British G8/G20 Sperpa teams (including Head of the Sherpa team, Head of Communication, and Head of Accountability), as well as archive material and secondary analysis. These additional sources help to qualify my results in order to prevent over-interpretation.

4. Empirical Findings: Same, same but different
Before presenting central results, I will discuss both institutions’ characteristics and how these might possibly influence the way the G8 and the G20 each design their self-legitimation. In doing so, I do not wish to suggest a somewhat linear relationship between institutional characteristics and a respective design of self-legitimation. Rather, I wish to sketch what we could possibly expect in order to become attentive to rather unexpected notions of self-legitimation.

On the one hand and compared to more formalized IOs with greater membership, both institutions seem relatively similar. Their informality and their restricted membership based on an invitation to the club by existing members suggest a somewhat similar self-legitimation. This is especially true because the newer G20 might be willing to learn from the older G8 on how to respond to growing legitimacy demands put on the table by transnational protest campaigns, NGOs, media, and academia alike (Nonhoff, Gronau, Nullmeier, and Schneider 2009; Ecker-Ehrhardt and Wessels 2013). This is even more likely, because G8-members do also take part in the G20-process. Hence, an overlapping “staff”, i.e. an overlapping personnel within the two institutions’ so called Sherpa teams, might further encourage the G20 to imitate the G8’s practices of self-legitimation.

On the other hand, the G20 is not only the more recent institution, but as well the more heterogeneous. By contrast to the G8, it is assembling nation states of differing political self-understanding and from more regions of the world (also, on a regular basis, the African continent is only represented by South Africa). Accordingly, the G20 is the more inclusive club, but not tied together by the kind of political “like-mindedness” (G8 2006: International Security) of the G8, i.e. a Western-democratic set of values and norms. Their coming into existence already points to divergent settings (although their founding contexts do not necessarily
pre-structure their today’s self-legitimation): While the G8 can be understood as a “cold war child”, deeply rooted within a system of Western-connoted values opposing to a “communist threat” arisen from the “East”, the G20 was founded by G7 finance ministers in 1999 in order to integrate “systemically important” countries into finding a joint and effective solution to the Asian financial crisis. Despite their similarities, these different founding contexts suggest a difference within the G8’s and the G20’s self-legitimation: It would be very surprising if the G20 presented itself as a promoter of Western-democratic values, whilst the G8 would stick to its understanding of being composed of “most industrialized” democracies, thereby ignoring the emerging influence of countries such as China and India.

Overall, both institutions can assumed to have been trying to present specific normative profiles in order to make their further existence become likely. On the contrary, the bigger the overlapping of the two institutions would have been, the less political relevance each of them might have gained (and will gain), possibly leading to a decline of at least one of the two. Moreover, if both based their claim for a distinct position within the international sphere on normative standards discussed in the public such as participation, transparency, accountability, and contribution to the public good, they would enable themselves to become perceived as normatively-valuable and, thus, legitimate institutions.

In the following, I will consider the shared informality and restricted membership of the G8 and the G20 as joint starting point for their self-legitimation in practice. Apart from this, their differing constellation of membership and their differing range of agenda topics should provide insight into the possibly specific of each of their self-legitimation. Firstly, the bigger and more heterogeneous constellation of membership of the G20 should lead to a greater plurality of interests and values. If presented cleverly, the G20 could potentially benefit from its greater membership. Corresponding to its membership of “systemically important countries”, the G20 (2011a:§91–93) proclaimed to be in favour of a more economical focus; thereby ending a debate on whether to expand its agenda to more political topics or to first await whether the G20 will establish itself as an effective manager of economic and fiscal cooperation. By contrast, the G8’s greater unity in terms of democratic values and its almost all-encompassing agenda ranging from climate change and food security to maternity are much more likely to lead to a design of self-legitimation highly tied to democratic values.

Furthermore, external shocks and developments such as the financial meltdown or the rise of emerging countries are supposed to also leave their traces on the respective design of self-legitimation by putting the G8 and the G20 under pressure to demonstrate its capability and worthiness.
Having introduced the characteristics which might facilitate the distinct self-legitimation needed for the G8 and the G20 to show its further relevancy, I now turn to central results summarized in table 2. For each of the three modi I will first present main similarities and then discuss their differences.

Table 2: Similarities and differences of the G8’s and the G20’s self-legitimation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modi of legitimation</th>
<th>similarities</th>
<th>differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. legitimation policies</td>
<td>focus on performance is more recently complemented by input-related legitimation policies towards greater transparency, participation/inclusion, and accountability</td>
<td>G8: contribution to external democratization of (groups of) states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. legitimation talk</td>
<td>Self-portrayal as responsible managers of the global common good working to the benefit of all and promoting more legitimate international finance institutions such as IMF and World Bank</td>
<td>G8: living and promoting democratic values; hence with its legitimacy demands (groups of) nation states become addressed G20: unique representativeness; no legitimation talk about (groups of) nation states at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. nonverbal self-presentation</td>
<td>focus on the core of summit business; after financial meltdown in 2008 introduction of photos depicting a modern way of “holding court” in order to attract media attention</td>
<td>G8: readiness/activity and “family” G20: whole world behind it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1. Legitimation policies: Two informal clubs responding to democratic standards

Over time, both institutions introduce two rather similar sets of legitimation policies which can be subsumed under the heading “focus on performance” on the one hand and “input legitimation” on the other:

*Focus on performance:* Both institutions begin their self-legitimizing activity by introducing a follow-up-mechanism, i.e. a complex reporting system which should allow monitoring the conclusions reached and the tasks implemented by tasked sub-bodies such as G8 and G20 ministerial meetings and working groups as well as IOs such as the OECD. The value of this mechanism is highlighted in legitimation talk. Over the course, the follow-up-mechanism is complemented by the defining of deadlines for reporting which are expressed by phrases such as “report to our next summit” (G8 2009a:§109). Correspondingly, reports actually submitted to the G8 or the G20 by tasked sub-bodies and IOs become mentioned in the following summit declaration in order to document the seriousness and compliance of the institution itself as well as of tasked bodies:
We welcome the Report on Poverty Reduction by Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which we requested in Cologne, and we look forward to receiving an annual poverty report as we review progress each year in reducing poverty across the globe. (G8 2000a:§13)

In the case of the G20, this later form of “formal tasking” (G8 assistant of the Foreign Affairs sous Sherpa interviewed in 2012) is introduced parallel to the G20’s upgrade in Pittsburgh 2009. Different from the G8, the reports submitted can “even” be found online on the G20’s annually changing homepage (see for instance the online section “Reports from International Organizations for the G20”, Russia’s G20 Presidency 2011).

Additionally, both institutions from the beginning onwards develop a moderate information policy by publishing annual communiqués and summit photographs and by inviting (accredited) world press to the summits and informing journalists at press conferences before and after working sessions.

Input legitimation: Over time, the focus on performance becomes enriched by a normative triad composed of participation/inclusion, transparency, and accountability. The G8’s input-related policies began in the mid 1990’s and the G20 started to invest in greater input-legitimacy after its upgrade in 2009. Both institutions have opened up to chosen stakeholder-groups such as NGOs and the business world and non-member states by supporting and engaging with mini-summits (for instance, G8 and G20 Business Summits, Civil 8 and Civil 20 Summits).

However, compared to the consultation procedures of more formalized IOs (as, for instance, analysed by Tallberg et al. 2013; Wolff 2013), the G8’s and the G20’s outreach activities are rather selective and lack continuity as annually rotating chairs follow their own preferences. In addition to their outreach activities, both the G8 and the G20 aim at enhancing their transparency, thereby today using social media, video clips and info graphs provided by their annually changing homepages. For example, the personal representative of the Canadian G8 presidency in 2008 introduced “the Sherpa’s blog” by stating:

Welcome to the Sherpa’s G-8 blogs in this international year for Canada. The purpose of this unprecedented series is to shed light on the G-8 process from an insider’s perspective. The aim is to take you, the reader, inside the action by offering details that illuminate the setting and messages that flow from our consultations. (Government of Canada 2010)

Moreover, the G8 and the G20 both have developed an accountability mechanism (the G8 beginning in 2006; the G20 after 2008), therefore established an accountability working group, and do regularly publish an accountability report based on substantial input from the OECD and other institutions.
Given the fact that both institutions are not equipped with formal binding authority, it is somewhat surprising that the G8 and the G20 obviously spend time and money to appear as institutions that aim at fulfilling democratic standards. Within the literature on the politicization of international institutions (Ecker-Ehrhardt and Zürn 2007; Zürn 2012), it is generally considered that an institution’s demand for legitimacy is depending on its status as formally binding authority. Following this notion, a higher demand for legitimacy should very much likely end in a very active self-legitimation; whereas a lesser demand will very much likely lead to an uninspired self-legitimation, if at all. Taking the criteria of formally binding authority and, hence, a formal understanding of rule, the informal G8 and G20 are in lesser need for legitimacy than, for example, the EU – but are, by contrast, very actively working on a more “democratic” countenance. Hence, the G8 and the G20 do obviously perceive a need to justify themselves on the basis of normative criteria. By investing in legitimation policies, they respond to legitimacy demands raised by civil society, media, and non-member states.

Of course, the legitimation policies briefly outlined here are not particular to the G8 or the G20. If at all, a greater sample of institutions might reveal that their civil and business outreach in the form of “mini-summits”, including a “family photo” and a summit declaration handed over to the G8 or the G20 presidency, might count as specific characteristics of the two clubs. Rather, the G8 and the G20 respond to a normative triad that might become a standard for more legitimate international institutions and IOs. If so, we would then observe a change from the more classical output-orientation on performance, efficiency and effectiveness towards a more input-orientated assessment of global governance (Zürn 2006:242).

A first difference can be found with regards governance reforms. Both have been implementing reforms that changed their architecture and working procedures. However, the objectives of these institutional moves are quite divergent:

**Bringing the G8 back to its informal roots twice:** In Birmingham 1998, the G8 combined its reaction to a threatening decline of member state support with its repair of its public image as a “lobster and caviar summit”. Given an ever growing agenda, a grown group of delegates and lengthy communiqués, its members criticized that the G8 had stepped out of its original idea of an informal fireside-chat taking place distanced from the political protocol. Accordingly, the G8 replaced its lengthy communiqués by a shorter and more comprehensible “Chair’s Summary”, reduced its agenda to a limited set of issues and introduced the principle of “heads only”. The latter decoupled the heads of state and government from their entourage, thus allowing them to confer in a more personal atmosphere. At the same time, the reduction of summit pomp and the more concentrated agenda on issues such as development and child
care was used to convince the public constituency about the G8’s value in terms of global of common goods.

In 2012 with the “back-to-basics, action-oriented approach” (U.S. Department of State 2012a:2), the then G8 chair Barak Obama brought the club yet another time back to its informal roots. As part of this reform, once more the agenda became more focused and the delegation was minimized. Furthermore, summit memorabilia such as bags, T-shirts or even Coca-Cola bottles with G8 logo for political and media delegates disappeared almost completely and a rather informal dress code was introduced to support the envisaged atmosphere: “It’s about rolling the sleeves up and getting to grips with some real global issues that can make a difference” (Head of Communication of the British G8 Sherpa team interviewed in 2013).

The G20 Troika and the inclusion of regional organizations: Different from the G8, the G20 with its first reform in Cannes 2001 did not aim at reviving an informal conference scenery. Quite the contrary, its objective was a more formal working structure guided by principles. Therefore, the G20 employed the so called Troika-structure “made of past, present and future Presidencies to steer the work of the G20 in consultation with its members“ (G20 2011b:§92) and developed a principle of how to appoint its chair’s. With regards to the latter, a rotation between regional groups of states was decided on. The rotation between world regions was a suitable strategy to address the concerns of not included states. Moreover, the reform was introduced to the wider public in a way to make it appear normatively acceptable: “We agree that, in order to strengthen its ability to build and sustain the political consensus needed to respond to challenges, the G20 must remain efficient, transparent and accountable” (G20 2011: §92).

The G8’s promotion of external democratization: An even more striking difference between the legitimation policies of the G8 and the G20 reveals from the G8’s transformation of its reactions to greater transformation processes, such as in the end of the Cold War, the “end of apartheid” and the so called “Arab Spring”, into genuine legitimation policies: The G8 introduced its formal inclusion of Russia as a response to the aspirations of the former East to become a democratic market economy, therefore ‘holding out its hands to its former ideological enemy’. Likewise, its informal outreach programme with founding states of the “New Partnership for African Development Initiative” (NePAD) beginning in 2000 and the “Deauville Partnership with Arab Countries in Transition” started in 2011 are framed by the G8 as a reaction to “the aspirations of the people”, as exemplified for the latter case:

The changes under way in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are historic and have the potential to open the door to the kind of transformation that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall [...] §2. We, members of the G8, strongly support
the aspirations of the ‘Arab spring’ as well as those of the Iranian people. We hear the voice of the citizens, support their determination for equality and stand by their legitimate call for democratic, open societies and inclusive economic modernization [...]. (G8 2011:§1–2)

In sum, with the integration of Russia and with its outreach activities with chosen countries, the G8 repeatedly attempts to make use of an opportune moment for political influence on the baseline of Western democracy combined with market economy. These activities qualify as genuine legitimation policies, because they are accompanied by institutional arrangements and because they are presented as the G8’s promotion of external democratization in reaction to the call of “partners” in need for support. Obviously, the G8’s self-portrayal as the “guardian of democratic values”, which is consistently put forward in its legitimation talk (as will be shown next) together with its “like-mindedness” enable or even “systemically force” the G8 club of Western democracies to interfere into greater processes of transition. By contrast, such activities and a corresponding presentation cannot be found in the context of the G20. The G20’s greater plurality and its proclaimed focus on economic issues do possibly hinder a political interference into national and regional transformations and, hence, the G20 does not (have to) transform such activities into genuine legitimation policies.

4.2. Legitimation talk: promoter of democracy vs. unique representativeness

What normative anchors, i.e. normative criteria they consistently decorate themselves with, are put forward by the G8 and the G20 in legitimation talk and which or who are the objects of their legitimation talk other than themselves?

*Two responsible managers of the global common good:* Following the identified normative anchors, both institutions position themselves as responsible managers of the global common good. Quite excessively, they both claim to promote cooperation – not only between member countries, but also internationally (for instance G7 1993: §1; G20 2013b: 2,3). Additionally, a kind of solidarity with the poor, i.e. developing countries and citizens left behind by globalization (G8 2000b: §2,3) and those hit hardest by the financial crisis beginning in 2008 (G20 2010: §5), is regularly highlighted; thereby pointing towards taking on the global responsibility systemically placed on the G8 rather the G20 as a group of leading industrialized countries (G7 1984: §5; G20 2013a). Correspondingly, they pose as having the capability to exercise the leadership needed in global politics. This is for instance shown by the labelling of the G20 as premier forum (for the G8’s claim of global leadership see G8 2010:§3).

The claimed capability is supported by the presentation of previous successes. For instance, the G8 suggests that it would (still) have “the capacity to design credible approaches
to meet the challenges of our times”. Its contribution to “Africa’s quest for [...] development” would be measurable and it would have changed “the lives of hundreds of millions of people” (G8 2012a:§16). The G20 declares that with its help a global economic recession could have become avoided. Consequently, a future right to exist is derived from previous successes: “Going forward, the G20 will build on this success and will continue to play a critical role in the global economy” (G20 2013a).

IOs, particularly IFIs, are the legitimation objects addressed by both institutions (G8 1999a: II., 7a, 9, 2009b: §33; G20 2008: §9, 2013a: 2). By way of calling upon IOs to become more legitimate and to discuss the need for a more transparent and inclusive international finance rather international trade regime (G8 2009b: §27; G20 2011b: §40, 67), they both position themselves as mentors of a more legitimate international sphere. In particular, in the 1990’s the G8 publicly tried to put pressure on IFIs to become more transparent: “Given the WTO’s vital role, we agree on the importance of improving its transparency to make it more responsive to civil society while preserving its government-to-government nature“ (G8 1999b:§II.9), while it acknowledged its own lack of transparency only recently as suggested by an intensified information policy and the introduction of heads of communications.

In sum, both prevent to appear as institutions only representing particular interests of their member states. By contrast, they establish themselves as managers guiding IOs and member states and catalysing international cooperation; thereby working “to the benefit of the whole world“ (G7 1980:§34) and “the citizens of all countries“ (G20 2010:§1).

Again, claiming to facilitate international cooperation and to serve the global common good is somewhat trivial and cannot be considered to be a specific characteristic of the G8’s and the G20’s self-legitimation. Nation states once realized that they could manage transnational problems and conflicts more efficiently and less costly by fostering cooperation through international institutions. Accordingly, international institutions communicate their mandate and goals. Moreover and as shown by Steffek (2012: 52), even the foundation of IO’s in the aftermath of World War I. was conceptually based on the ideal of a contribution to the common good. However, the persistent and excessive claiming of the G8 and the G20 to serve the common good might be the result of their exclusiveness and the corresponding image of two clubs being at work to the benefit of its member states only.

While with regard to legitimation policies, the G8 and the G20 can be assumed to do what many international institutions’ do in their quest for legitimacy, the fact that they are addressing other institutions and IOs as legitimation objects within their legitimation talk, i.e. demanding the IMF and the World Bank to become more transparent, might be somewhat par-
ticular and possibly enables the G8 and the G20 to position themselves as managers standing more or less above the IFIs. By claiming to orchestrate the IFIs, both clubs suggest to fill a coordination gap in global politics; thereby even taking care of the IFI’s legitimacy. In doing so, both are in a better position to convince its public constituencies about their relevancy. Moreover, this positioning does make their informality appear as an enviable resource to enable them to acts as the managers needed.

The G8 as promoter of democracy: As for differences between the G8’s and the G20’s legitimation talk, the G8 clearly has established itself as the normatively more pronounced institution. It is regularly stating its sense of mission to make the world become more democratic, as already described within the context of its external democratization. Different from the G20 the G8 is highlighting its “like-mindedness”, a normative anchor, which is transformed into the right and the responsibility to act as “guardian of democratic values” (G7 1983) worldwide. In a similar vein, the G8 is emphasizing its democratic output, i.e. its promotion of external democratization. This mission also becomes apparent in the addressing of single states or groups of states as object of legitimation: “model pupils” are praised for their steps towards greater democracy and their entry into the “democratic community of nations” (G7 1991:§11) (with regards to South Africa G7 with Russia 1995: §2) und less compliant governments are called upon to implement democratic reforms (with regards to Haiti G7 1994: §6). While we can observe that the G8 is publicly demanding and praising the transition of countries into democracies, the G20 if at all prefers to speak about “open governments” (G20 2013a).

The G20 as a unique institution representing all world regions: The G20 has likewise established two unique characteristics which allow claiming for a position distinct from the G8. First, it is emphasizing a unique representativeness; second, it is highlighting its cooperation with emerging countries on equal terms. Overall, the G20 establishes itself as the “truly global solution” which is needed by the international community to respond to a “truly global crisis” (G20 2013a: 2).

Albeit being the bigger club, the claim of global representativeness is somewhat surprising. More than 170 nations are not taking part in the G20. Obviously, the G20 has developed a particular interpretation of representativeness. Different from the UN, this claim is not rooted in the ideal of giving the world’s nations the same rights. Rather, the G20 represents a hierarchical notion of representativeness which is based on economic capacities. Until today, the founding spirit of bringing together “systemically relevant economies” (G7 1999: §2 (finance ministers)) is reflected in its legitimation talk: “As a Forum representing over 80% of the
global economy, we have a responsibility to all citizens.” However, this claim apparently needs some further support. Thus, the G20 adds to this claim that it would take into account the interests “of countries at all stages of development” (G20 2013a:3). Accordingly, since its governance reform in 2011, it aims at integrating the interests of non-member states by giving the regional organisations ASEAN, AU and NePAD a seat at the G20 table.

As regards the second legitimation anchor put forward by the G20, its cooperation with emerging countries, the G20 hopes to become accepted because of being “unique in bringing together the major economies, advanced and emerging alike” (G20 2011b:§91) “on an equal footing” (G20 2011b:§93). Such legitimation talk might indicate a rather subtle form of dissociation of the G20 from the G8. For sure, it is necessary to make the exclusive membership of the G20 – albeit being the larger club – normatively acceptable.

Both normative anchors, global representativeness and cooperation with emerging countries “on an equal footing” cannot convincingly become required by the G8: Although the G8 realized in Okinawa 2000 that it had to reach out to emerging and developing countries alike in order to gain capability (G8 2000a:§3), it never established a dialogue with emerging countries that would qualify as cooperation between equals (Leininger 2009; Gronau 2015:223–227). Having said so, it is not very much surprising that the promising “Heiligendamm-L’Aquila-Process” with Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa (also called the “G5”) vanished without a say as soon as the G20 became upgraded and allowed G5-countries to participate more equally in global financial politics than within the G8 process.

In sum, normative anchors and legitimation objects identified in the G8 and the G20 legitimation talk reveal that both position themselves distinct from IOs by claiming to serve as managers of the global common good. Furthermore, the G8 establishes itself as the normatively more ambitious club, while the G20 introduces itself to the constituency as the more global institution.

Subtle forms of dissociation between the two clubs: Even in the international context, there might not exist enough space for two relatively similar managers of the global common good. Coming back to the potentially competitive situation (at least for the G8), it is remarkable that the two clubs hardly address each other directly. In five legitimation statements, the G8 is relating itself to the G20 in a rather supportive vein, thereby even mentioning the latter’s greater membership (G8 2009b:§27). Since a critical assessment of the G20 could potentially harm itself – G8 members are likewise taking part in the G20 – the G8 forgoes to demand the G20 to become more inclusive, more transparent, and so forth. Hence, it is treating the G20 different than the IFIs. In G20 communiqués, some policy programmes of the G8 are touched
upon – but without naming the G8 at all. Overall, the two clubs to not dissociate from each other explicitly. Rather, their cultivation of normative selling points stems from self-praise and legitimation talk about IFIs.

However, what can be observed are rather subtle forms of dissociation. While in every communiqué since 1975 the G8 had introduced itself as heads of states of “seven major industrialized economies” (G7 1996:§1), in the aftermath of the financial crash it began to consequently communicate itself as “the G8”, an experienced and well performing institution: “For over a decade, the G8 has engaged with African partners to address the challenges and opportunities afforded by Africa’s quest for inclusive and sustainable development. Our progress has been measurable, and together we have changed the lives of hundreds of millions of people.” (G8 2012b:§16, emphasis added).

4.3. Visual self-presentation: One club having the world behind it vs. one family club
Which photographic conventions do the G8 and the G20 establish over time and what similarities and differences of the respective visual self-presentation can be observed?

Concentrating on the core of summit business: Central to their visual self-presentation is a focus on the political business. In particular, long-term conventions include 1. photos presenting the group sitting around a conference table shortly before or after working sessions, 2. photos on which we can see all or a group of leaders seriously exchanging viewpoints in conference halls or on their way from one session to another, 3. the “family photo”, i.e. a photo depicting the group standing in a row, 4. photos documenting bilateral meetings that take place on the occasion of summits (i.e. meetings that can only become known to the public by such photos).

A modern way of holding court: In the aftermath of the financial meltdown in 2008, for both institutions a new convention can be observed. Photos showing the arrival of leaders as well as those reporting the official welcome of members given by the chair in charge now become added to the staged visualization of the core of summit business. At the same time, both the G8 and the G20 begin to excessively use their logos, banners, printed carpets and chairs, allowing observers to recognize at first sight that it is them and not any another entity that is depicted while doing world politics. Even the EU is bringing its own sign to a press conference to become apparent as a distinct and independent player. Taken together, this more recent visualization of summits might be considered to express the international community’s quest for a capable manager of global affairs. It seems rather like a quarrelling for attention; like if institutions’ could shout “Look, it is me! I am the one! I am not vanished”. Such an
interpretation might gain greater support if the G8’s renaming in 2009 is taken into consideration.

Interestingly, in the aftermath of its upgrade, the G20 established a visual convention that had become abandoned by the G8 by the end of the 1990’s: As mentioned in the introduction, the G8 for a long time published photos showing leaders in front of museums, having opulent banquets, and so forth. Similarly, spouses (and rarely husbands) were portrayed while participating in a fashion or a cooking show, having a stroll, or jointly enjoying lunch. In reaction to a grown critic and campaigning against the G8’s extravaganza and lack of seriousness, the G8 massively reduced its leisure-like activities. Accordingly, pictures that formerly raised the image of a “lobster and caviar summit” and “a party for the rich” were not produced anymore; the G8 dropped its symbolic ballast. Now, with its upgrade and having the leaders themselves coming to summits, the G20 developed a supporting programme, i.e. a banquets on the eve of the summit. However, it seems like the G20 has come to a more balanced portrayal of such events: It is providing the space probably needed for leaders to get to know each other (and to feel treated with a certain degree of dignity), but in a way not taking in the ballast previously discharged by the G8.

In sum, a rather similar visual self-presentation emerges from a focus on the business itself, which is now complemented by a modern way of holding court, thereby avoiding an unserious image. In what way these similarities, i.e. might converge with other institutions visual self-presentation cannot be answered yet. However, especially the family photo can assumed to be the highlight of many international institutions’ self-portrayal.

Figure 1: G20 group photo, Washington 2008
The G20 having the world behind it: The G20’s main normative anchor put forward in legitimation talk— at the same time an individual characteristic—can be regained in its visual self-presentation. In a series of annual family photos between 2008 and 2011, the G20 is picturing its members’ heads of state in front of an enormous world map. With such a design of the most often circulated type of summit photo, the G20 is cleverly emphasizing a normative anchor put forward verbally by employing visual means—and vice versa.

G20 head of states encountering G20 heads of business: Additionally, the set of visual conventions is supplemented by pictures presenting the G20 Business Summit; one of the G20’s stakeholder fora. The existence of group photos showing G20 members jointly with CEOs of transnational companies is already something remarkable. With these visual unifications of the international political elite and the international economic elite, the rather privileged position of the business world within the G20 governance system becomes apparent. Every other stakeholder conference does not take place during G20 summits but beforehand. In 2010, the motto of the Business 20 Summit, “The Role of Business for Sustainable and Balanced Growth”, is decorating the background of joint group photographs. With these pictures, the G20 enables itself to become perceived as especially committed orchestrator of publicly contested companies and their role in global capitalism by demanding a reorientation of economic global players towards greater responsibility and sustainability. Although the G8 and the G20 in their legitimation talk both demand “the private sector” to act more responsible (G7 1998: §8; G20 2008: Strengthening Transparency and Accountability, 2012:§59), it is only the G20 which is highlighting its committed and, thus, more credible role as orchestrator of the business world—and this is primarily done by visual means. Hence, this visual convention does not only an individual notion of the G20’s self-legitimation that cannot easily be derived from institutional characteristics. Moreover, the re-construction of visual self-presentation allows us to identify a facet of self-legitimation which otherwise would not have come to our knowledge.

The G8 as a family club ready to work: The more recent photos of the latest G8 reveal an image of friendship and family. They support the “like-mindedness” emphasized in legitimation talk, resulting in the G8’s legitimation policies of external democratization. While for the case of the G20 we can still observe an omnipresent usage of logos, banners, etc., the G8 in accordance with its “back-to-basics-approach” introduced in Camp David 2011 by Barack Obama has reduced its visual framing by way of the logos and so forth. Moreover, the pictures show an even more informal summit style: leaders’ are having their sleeves rolled up,
ties are put aside (figure 2), and they occasionally sit outside without a conference table, looking as if they were talking ‘free and frankly’.

Figure 2: Official welcome (loosened dress code, without visual framing material), Lough Erne 2013

Source: Bertrand Langlois/AFP/Getty Images

Figure 3: G8 working session, Camp David 2012

Source: Pete Souza/White House Photo Gallery

These photos produced in harmony with the idea of going back to the informal fireside chat of the founding days create an image of the G8 as a concentrated institution ready to work to the benefit of all, determined to come to the point. In addition, such a degree of informality expressed by a loosen dress code is underlining a sense of family and friendship inherent to the normative anchor of “like-mindedness” emphasized in legitimation talk (figure 3). By today, such a profile cannot be created by the less experienced and more plural G20. Additionally, the G8 might benefit from its re-definition of informality in both visual and verbal terms by claiming that bringing “the G-8 back to its roots in the spirit of Rambouillet: an intimate gath-
ering of Leaders capable of taking action together on areas of common concern” (U.S. Department of State 2012b:1) is of indispensable need in order to realize its more recent policies such as the “New Alliance on Food Security”.

4.4 Two managers of the global common good, but only one guardian of democracy

In sum, the re-construction of the G8’s and the G20’s self-legitimation in three modi reveals that both institutions share 1. a set of legitimation policies searching for greater participation/inclusiveness, more transparency, and accountability, 2. a verbal self-position in legitimation talk as responsible managers of global politics, thereby giving legitimacy advice to IFIs, and 3. a visual self-portraiture concentrating on political business which after the financial meltdown became expanded by a notion of modern “holding court”. However, their quest for legitimacy is separated along the line of “democracy”. As assumed, this separation can be explained by their different constellation of membership, i.e. the like-minded cold-war-product G8 on the one hand and a politically more heterogeneous G20 on the other, and, correspondingly, their different range of agenda topics. i.e. an all-encompassing agenda of the G8 vs. a G20 deliberately being in favour of economic issues. In the end, the international community can get two managers, but only one promoter of democracy. Due to the G20’s missing references on democracy and its focus on economic issues, both institutions are in a position to claim a distinct agenda – both in normative and in actual terms. Following from this division of labour is a setting in which both institutions can appear as distinct from each other. Moreover, their respective legitimation policies directed towards greater input-legitimacy and a legitimation talk emphasizing the promotion of the global common good might help to become perceived as normatively valuable in the eyes of their constituencies, thus, making it more likely to gain the diffuse support needed to last. Following the overall results, the assumed condition that might help to explain why the G8 still exists although its death bells have already rung and how the G20 managed to establish itself seems to be fulfilled. We can observe respective individual characteristics of self-legitimation.

Interestingly, neither the G8 nor the G20 distinct themselves from each other directly; they do not really refer to the other club in their legitimation talk and so forth. By contrast, more subtle ways of distancing can be observed after the financial meltdown and the upgrade of the G20: The renaming of the G8 from a network of states to a “three-decades-old” and, hence, much more experienced “institution”, the excessive use of visual framing material such as banners and even printed summit furniture, and the G8’s back-to-basics-approach providing leaders with the highly valued informality which cannot easily become offered by other insti-
5. Conclusion

Subsequent to the “renaissance of international legitimacy talk” (Clark 2005: 12), International Relations research has begun to ask for the various practices employed by international institutions to appear as legitimate. This paper aims at contributing to this new research perspective by focusing on the means of self-legitimation and a comparison on two informal rather than formal international institutions. First and more conceptually I asked how international institutions carry out self-legitimation. By expanding previous work on the concept of self-legitimation, I suggested to include both verbal and nonverbal communication into our understanding of legitimation processes. Three modes of self-legitimation, 1. legitimation policies, 2. legitimation talk, and 3. nonverbal self-presentation, were then developed. Second and from a comparative perspective I asked whether and how the G8 and the G20 managed to create a distinct legitimation profile which meets publicly prevailing normative standards for legitimacy – or at least do not conflict with these norms. With regards to the two clubs and their possibly concurring relationship, I proposed that a comparison of the three modes in use might help to identify their normative “selling points”. The identification of such individual characteristics should help to better understand how the G8 managed to further exist after decades of protests culminated in a serious crisis of legitimacy in 2008, while the G20 managed to establish itself as the premier forum for global economic governance.

Broadly speaking, it is the G8’s various references on democracy, its revived informality and its more focused and normatively ambitious policy campaigns such as the “New Alliance for Food Security” that seems to have enabled the more exclusive club to regain support from its various constituencies. This is suggested by a couple of empirical indicators which I can only touch upon here since I have been focusing on three modes of self-legitimation in use: As indicated by an analysis of evaluations of the G8 in quality newspapers in Great Britain, the U.S., Germany, and Switzerland between 1998 and 2013, after 2010 the public debate has become less intense and at the same time more supportive than during the remainder of the analyzed time period. Participants of this legitimation discourse emphasize for instance that “being a location for conversation is a strong justification of international [G8] summits’ (The Times, June 26 2010). Even NGOs such as Action Aid UK acknowledge the G8’s “potential to ignite significant global initiatives with the potential to improve dramatically the lives of the world’s poorest people” (The Times, July 10 2009). The less intense but more positive...
debate suggests a positive effect of public self-legitimation on the public constituency and the G8 is now in a more comfortable situation in terms of legitimacy (for more details see Gronau 2015 (forthcoming): chapter 2.5). Additionally, heads of states and governments still attend G8 summits and praise the revived informal spirit of “frank, open, leader-to-leader discussion” without “the baggage and bureaucracy of the past summits” (David Cameron cited in Guardian, May 18 2012). Finally, staff members obviously still do the G8 work on the ground, thereby supporting the club on normative grounds: “So clearly we’ve worked hard, but I’m pretty sure that every single one of us did it because it was a rewarding thing to do, we used our respective expertise and knowledge and skills to deliver what we thought is a good agenda, is a good summit, which reached out to many many people” (Head of G8 Sherpa team interviewed in 2013).

Despite the legitimacy problems inherent to the exclusive format, political practitioners obviously still value the G8. Interview partners from within the G8 and the G20 processes highlighted the unique and friendship-like atmosphere within G8 negotiations; a characteristic that would be missing for the G20 not only because of its greater membership but because of its greater plurality. In the end, it might be the highly valued and well-tended like-mindedness which encouraged Obama to introduce the back-to-basics-approach, and, thus, helped to stabilize member state support. While it was still uncertain how the G20 would develop, G8 members knew what they would lose when turning away from the G8: a “bigger sense of camaraderie” (Head of the British G8 Sherpa team interviewed in 2013), established working structures and decades of shared experiences. The greater plurality of today’s world might be better reflected in the G20. However, for those who celebrated the end of history (Fukuyama 1989) and hoped that democracy would become the “default setting” (Brown 1999) for societies around the globe, the G8 does not seem to have lost any of its relevance. This is even more true after the exclusion of the “not like-minded” Russian government.

In the case of the G8 and the G20, the integration of visual self-presentation revealed some important insights that would not have come to our knowledge otherwise. In particular, the appearance of public evaluations of the G8 as merely being “a party for the rich” can only be explained by taking a look at official G8 summit photography in the 1990’s. Here, visual self-presentation obviously caused a disharmony with a legitimation talk designed to prevent the image of a club following particular interests rather than the common good. By contrast, the G20’s self-presentation in front of a world map as well as the more family-like and “ready-to-act” depicting of the recent G8 demonstrate the supportive power of visual self-presentation for the other two modi. Moreover, the photo analysis revealed an individual aspect of the
G20’s self-legitimation which is presented by visual means only – and which cannot easily be derived from its institutional characteristics: group photos depicting the unification of the political and the business elite on the occasion of G20 Business 20-Summits indicate a stronger ambition of the G20 to become perceived as a manager towards a more responsible business world. Surely, more research will be needed to assess the value of Longitudinal Photo Analysis for an understanding of legitimation processes more generally.

What lessons can additionally be learnt from an analysis of the G8’s and the G20’s self-legitimation? Although both institutions are not equipped with formally binding authority, both institutions are quite actively searching for legitimacy. Hence, an understanding of authority depending on formal characteristics cannot be said to be sufficient if legitimation activity in the international sphere shall be captured comprehensively. Next, comparative research including more and various types of international institutions could help to identify possible “varieties of legitimation” (Nullmeier, Geis, and Daase 2012:29) across and within types of institutions. Such a perspective would help to answer what kind of institutions engage in self-legitimation, how self-legitimation is designed across and within different types of institutions and what is needed to make their quest for legitimacy successful.

References


