

Understanding International Organizations' Headquarters as Ecosystems: The Case of Geneva

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to explore the spatial and temporal dynamics of an important but often neglected space of global governance: the cities in which the headquarters of international organizations (IOs) are located. For this purpose, this article proposes a conceptualization and an empirical application of the concept of 'ecosystem'. This conceptualization builds on classic sociological ideas and organization theory to develop an innovative understanding of these cities which are more than mere hubs. We use this metaphor to describe an HQ city where one or several IOs have their seats. As a result, it is a space characterized by specific geographical and temporal features that can be qualified as spatial and temporal proximity between the elements composing the ecosystem. Based on original empirical sources, we apply this concept to the so-called International Geneva. We argue that conceptualizing headquarters as ecosystems helps to consider how HQs' location influences the daily work of IOs.

Policy Implications

- The geographical and temporal proximity that characterizes IO ecosystems can lead to positive outcomes for the work of IOs such as increased synergies between organizations, economies of scale, and having access to a qualified labor pool.
- However, these potential gains do not happen automatically. IO ecosystems need organizational leadership and resources to foster cross-organization work, that may have a trickle-down effect on other members of the ecosystem (e.g. national authorities, diplomatic representations, NGOs, etc.)
- Looking at an HQ city through an ecosystem lens helps to take into consideration the complex webs of relationships between actors in this location. For researchers, it can help them to better plan and conduct their field investigation.

As part of their research process, most (if not all) scholars willing to do 'fieldwork' on international organizations (IOs) must spend time in cities such as New York, Geneva or Vienna either to conduct interviews, explore archives or participate to international conferences. But the complexity of these global governance hotspots is tremendous. On the one hand, it can be overwhelming for practitioners, forcing them to make great efforts to cope with the practices and jargon in use in the duty station (Billaud, 2015). On the other hand, the presence on the same territory of high numbers of relevant stakeholders and of the multitude of formal and informal exchanges between them can result in an overflow of data which can make it difficult for researchers to conduct their analyses (Eckl, 2021).

Quite surprisingly, scholars in various social science disciplines have devoted little attention to these spaces of global governance. In anthropology, one can find few studies that delve into the relation between an IO and the city where it is headquartered (Abélès, 2011; Ivanova,

2021; Müller, 2013; Niezen and Spagnoli, 2017). Historians have provided useful accounts on the reasons why IOs settle in specific cities (Meyer, 2013; Mires, 2013). In addition, one can find several impact analyses of the presence of the UN on the cities of New York and Geneva for instance (Fondation pour Genève, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016; City of New York, 2016; Université de Genève, 2015). We argue in this article that it is essential to look beyond these political and economic dimensions of headquarters (HQ) cities in order to understand what effects the host city has on the work of IOs. Some recent studies have hinted at the importance of IOs' HQ notably for recruitment (Badache, 2020) or for socialization (Murdoch et al., 2019). We contend in this article that developing knowledge on HQ cities could help to better understand IOs themselves and global governance more broadly. In a nutshell, we argue that beyond the questions of *who* governs the world (Avant et al., 2010), *who* are the globally governed (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2018), or *why* global

governance is necessary (Acharya, 2016), it is essential to understand *where* global governance takes place.

The objective of this article is two-fold: first, to conceptualize the city in which IOs have their headquarters (hereafter HQ cities) as *ecosystems*. After reviewing the literature on the relationships between IOs and their locations, and theoretical accounts about IOs and their environment, we define an ecosystem as a place where several IOs have their seat. As a matter of fact, it is a site characterized by geographical and temporal proximity between an IO and its surroundings. We believe that the concept of ecosystem is a comprehensive tool to assess if these units of time and space are resulting also into a unit of action. By investigating the effects of spatial and temporal proximity, it could push forward the IO research agenda on the origins and rationale of IOs (how are ecosystems created?), their performance (does the ecosystem lead to a result?) and their future (is an ecosystem sustainable?) (for a review of time and space in the study of IOs, see Maertens et al, 2021). The notion of ecosystem could also have an epistemological function: by stressing the interactions between IOs and their environment, it could potentially help researchers to better understand their field of investigation and can assist them in building their sample and designing the adequate empirical approach.

The second objective of this article is to illustrate the concept of ecosystem with a case study: the city of Geneva, Switzerland. The so-called 'International Geneva', or 'Global Geneva', is an extreme case given the high number of international institutions it hosts on its small territory. Based on qualitative material collected through 50 semi-structured interviews with key institutional actors and workers in Geneva, the analysis of the Geneva ecosystem can start giving interesting accounts. This preliminary study highlights the fact that an IO ecosystem is built on people and requires human-based strategies in order to get created, sustained and supported.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the following section, we develop our conceptualization of HQ cities as ecosystems. Next, in the empirical section, we present the methodology and we illustrate our theoretical framework with the case of Geneva. The article ends with a discussion on the usefulness of the concept along with proposals for future research.

1. Conceptualizing HQ cities as ecosystems

Some scholars have already underscored that IOs are not 'islands' (Nay and Petiteville, 2011) and that they are 'live collectivities interacting with their environment' (Ness and Brechin, 1988, p. 247). Though IOs have been the subject of much research in various disciplines, the complexity of their relationships with their local environment is still too often neglected in analyses. In this section, we present the theoretical underpinnings of the ecosystem concept. We first review the relevant literature before presenting some of the well-known concepts used for studying organizations in their environment, while highlighting that these studies tend to neglect not only the geographic dimension, but also the temporal component. Finally, we conclude by presenting the concept of ecosystem and our theoretical framework

according to which the location of IO headquarters can affect their operations.

1.1. Literature Review

In this section, we review the two strands of the literature that are relevant to our research question: first, the studies in international relations embedded in the so-called 'local turn', and second, the literature that specifically addresses the topic of IOs' headquarters. We end this literature review with a discussion of some concepts that have been applied to IOs to capture their complexity.

1.1.1. The 'local turn' in International Relations: An opportunity for studying spatiality

Several scholars have acknowledged that most of the research conducted in the field of IR has focused on institutions, limiting the analysis to the loci of decision-making and power in the Global North and essentially looking at the macro-dynamics. The 'traditional' literature on IR is often seen as favoring a top-down approach. However, the so-called 'local turn' in IR uses a different approach. These studies adopt a critical perspective and have, for the most part, been conducted in the areas of peacebuilding (for a review see Autesserre, 2014a) and humanitarian aid. They can be categorized into two research areas.

First, scholars put emphasis on the 'everyday' of international intervention (Autesserre, 2014b; Fechter and Hindmann, 2011; Jennings and Bøås, 2015). In other words, they tend to focus on the daily lives of international interveners and of people living in the regions of intervention, as well as on the daily interactions between them. More and more studies propose a sociology of international workers (Goetze and de Guevara, 2014; Heathershaw, 2016; Mosse, 2011), and provide stimulating insights into the individuals involved in IOs' work. They show, for instance, that they share a number of social characteristics and values, and that their previous postings in the field are key in the construction of their professional identity and practices. Those studies also provide interesting perspectives on the interactions — or the lack of interactions — with the local populations (Mac Ginty, 2011; Pouligny, 2006), for example, scholars have shown how the security practices and procedures used by international organizations can result in an absence of interactions between the actors of organizations and the local population (Autesserre, 2014b; Higate and Henry, 2009; Smirl, 2015).

The second line of inquiry focuses on analyzing the spatial and material embodiments of international interventions and how they are perceived by local people. Those authors use concepts such as 'enclaves' (Higate and Henry, 2009; Smirl, 2015) or 'auxiliary space' (Smirl, 2008) to show how the buildings, cars and artefacts used during interventions create a specific space.

1.1.2. The study of cities where headquarters are located: what do we know so far?

Existing studies on IO HQ have followed two approaches. First, the question of the location selection for international

organizations has attracted much interest among historians. For example, Mires in her book “Capital of the World” (2013) analyses the competition, after the Second World War, between US cities to become the home of the United Nations. She shows that the primary factors in the selection of New York were practical and political in nature (in particular the land donations by the Rockefeller family). In the case of Geneva, many scholars have examined the reasons for choosing Geneva as the location for the League of Nations’ Headquarters (for an overview see Meyer, 2013). While many analysts argue that it was Geneva’s vocation or destiny to become the organization’s HQ (Kuntz, 2010), Meyer (2013) shows that this decision was, to a large extent, determined by the actions of key individuals and political considerations. Furthermore, some recent studies have demonstrated that national authorities play a key role in attracting IOs. For instance, Groen (2016) compares the policies adopted by three cities – Geneva, Vienna, and The Hague – to attract and retain IOs and NGOs. She shows that strong lobbying strategies and the use of policy networks are crucial.

The second strand of research examines the consequences of the presence of IOs on host cities, primarily in terms of economic and urban planning. Most authors place emphasis on the (social and urban) construction of ‘international neighborhoods’ such as those found in Geneva (Meyer, 2013) or in Brussels (Laurens et al., 2012). Indeed, the presence of international civil servants in relatively small cities such as Geneva or Brussels seems to lead to the emergence of ‘closed worlds’, or ‘ethnoscapes’ (Appadurai in Adly, 2013) characterized by the presence of expat centers, international schools, English-speaking crèches, and other special services, thus leading to the creation of symbolic (e.g. the use of English) and material (e.g. the high price of real estate) barriers. This phenomenon was observed in the *quartier européen* in Brussels (Laurens et al., 2012) and in Geneva (Adly, 2013). Other studies look at the positive impacts of the presence of an IO on the local and national economies (Ivanova, 2021; Fondation pour Genève, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016; City of New York, 2016; Université de Genève, 2015). Others shed light on the proliferation of one type of actors in a specific place (Davidshofer et al., 2019).

It seems essential to look beyond these political and economic dimensions of HQ cities. In particular, we do not know yet how the fact of having all these organizations impact the work of IOs themselves. To put it differently, the impact that IO settlement has on a host city and its population has been studied, but not the other way around: how the host city can influence the work of IOs based in its territory. One attempt should be singled out. Ivanova (2010; 2021) argues that the geographical location of UNEP headquarters in Nairobi affects its performance. By retracing UNEP’s creation, she shows that the choice of Nairobi was more a result of ‘the politics of the General Assembly than by considerations of effectiveness and efficiency’ (Ivanova, 2010, p. 35). She makes the point that the location of UNEP in Nairobi was critical to the organization’s performance because it impacted its ability to coordinate with other

actors in the field of environment governance and to attract qualified staff (Ivanova, 2010, 2021). Ivanova’s earlier contribution (2010) contribution focuses only on the single link between one organization and its HQ city, and does not aim at putting the accent on the interactions between different IOs of the Nairobi ecosystem.

1.1.3. Existing concepts to capture complexity

Other concepts have been used to study IO complex dynamics. Even though those concepts and theories are not primarily concerned with IOs, they could be useful when trying to investigate IOs from a viewpoint at the intersection of sociology and International Relations. A first relevant tool is Bourdieu’s field theory, which has long been used for international analysis, particularly in the field of European studies (Georgakakis and Vauchez, 2015). Its advantage lies in preventing the researcher from ‘reifying’, or uniformizing the analyzed IOs (Georgakakis and Vauchez, 2015). Furthermore, the aspect at the core of the concept of field – power struggles – could lead research towards considering the interactions between different organizations.

Another stimulating concept is that of epistemic communities, which was first introduced in the study of international regimes but calls for a more sociological approach (Demortain, 2017). Defined as a ‘network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area’ (Haas in Demortain, 2017), this concept has given rise to extensive research in international organizations studies, particularly in certain thematic areas of IO research (e.g. food safety, bioethics), in which the roles and responsibilities of IO bureaucracies, external experts and other structures, as well as their claim to epistemic authority, have been the object of scrutiny (Demortain, 2017; Littoz-Monnet, 2017).

A third well-known sociological concept, that of ecology or organizational ecology, is not often applied to international organizations but could help to overcome the above-mentioned limitations. In sociology, the concept of ecology refers to three components: actors, locations and the relationships between them (Abbott, 2005). International ‘relations scholars have recently adopted the concept of organizational ecology to the study of international organizations to show how organizational forms evolve over time (Abbott et al., 2016).

Yet, none of these concepts fully captures all the dynamics that seem to be at play in an IO ecosystem. Actually, if we use the metaphor of theater, we could say that these notions focus on the ‘unit of action’, but without taking fully on board the ‘unit of time’ and ‘unit of place’. We argue that the concept of IO ecosystem can incorporate these three units into the analysis.

1.2. The concept of ecosystem as a tool for capturing complexity

The first references to the metaphor of an ‘ecosystem’ can be found in the discourse of some stakeholders in the

International Geneva. For instance, the 'Geneva 2030 Ecosystem' is a platform that gathers various actors located in Geneva towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Geneva 2030 Ecosystem, 2020a). In several occasions, the former Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) – Michael Møller – used terms synonyms of 'ecosystem' to qualify the International Geneva (e.g. 'incubator', Interview MM, 29 March 2017).

In natural sciences, an ecosystem (i.e. an ecological system) is 'a unit of biological organization made up of all the organisms in a given area, interacting with the physical environment so that a flow of energy leads to characteristic [...] structure and material cycles within the system' (Odum, 1969, p. 262). We use this metaphor to describe an HQ city where one or several IOs have their seats. As a result, it is a space characterized by specific geographical and temporal features that can be qualified as spatial and temporal proximity between the elements composing the ecosystem. The constitution of an ecosystem could also borrow to the 'garbage can' model (Cohen et al., 1972): the existence of an IO ecosystem might be the result of an original configuration between actors, issues and solutions and not the product of a conscious strategy aiming at performance or optimization.

Thus, in an ecosystem, IOs necessarily share a temporal and spatial proximity with other global governance institutions such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), platforms and diplomatic representations. Sometimes they are located in the same building. Often, they use the same meeting facilities and infrastructures. Most of the time they have the same working hours. In a nutshell, an ecosystem constitutes a shared place and tempo for various actors; a unit of time and a unit of space. The key question is thus to what extent this shared temporal and spatial proximity affects IOs headquartered in an ecosystem and result into a unit of action. At the theoretical level, we distinguish three levels at which this temporal and spatial proximity can affect the work of IOs.

1.2.1. The social variable

The first variable is situated at the individual or micro level: an IO ecosystem is a social group or is composed of social groups. An IO ecosystem is composed of individuals who work for IOs (not only international civil servants but also consultants, short-term personnel), but also diplomatic actors (permanent mission staff, delegates or state experts), scholars (researchers from universities and other institutes situated in the city), NGOs professionals, personnel of the city government specialized in managing the relations with IOs, and other professionals involved in or largely affected by the presence of international organizations. An IO ecosystem can help to conceptualize the 'complex web of relationships between the different actors participating in the daily workings' of international organizations (Georgakakis and Rowell, 2013, p.1), and also to analyze 'the relational substrata of people's actual lives' (Padgett and Ansell, 1993, p.1259), that is to say, the events, moments and places in which people who work in or around the HQ of an IO actually meet (Badaro, 2011). It can also shed light on an often-

overlooked consequence of the concentration in one place of many global governance institutions: the creation of a labor pool from which IOs can recruit. This is consistent with a recent study that shows that the UN Secretariat tends to recruit locally (Badache, 2020). Human capital is usually seen as an asset for cities that house centers of international governance (Mori Foundation, 2018).

1.2.2. The organizational variable

The second variable looks at the meso level of the ecosystem. It lies around the idea of coordination between organizations within the ecosystem. An important element of the concept in natural sciences or in industrial ecology is the idea of labor division. Being in an ecosystem allows the different units to share constraints and resources and to attribute tasks according to specialization and mandates. In this vein, an ecosystem would also mean economies of scale, or optimization (Hess, 2009). This aspect has also been researched in business studies under the concept of 'agglomeration economies' which captures the 'economies arising from geographic clustering through informal interaction between firms' (Nachum, 2000, p. 373). Applied to IOs, we can expect that the gathering of IOs in a relatively constrained space is an asset for their work in terms of collaboration and networking. But it can also be seen as a constraint – IOs have to align their calendar in order not to overwhelm the city with too many meetings or conferences at the same time. Such an institutionalization of time could lead to a tempo led and imposed by the biggest organizations (Goetz, 2014).

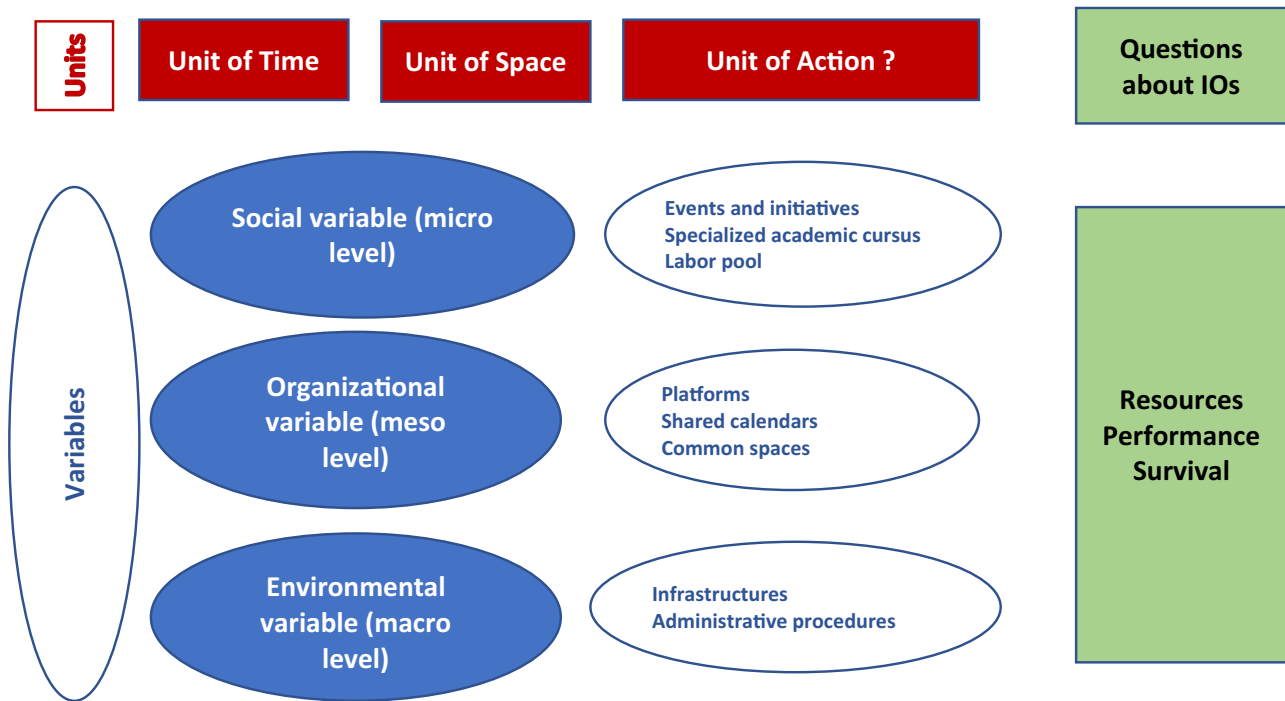
1.2.3. The environmental variable

The first two mechanisms shed light on the influence of the dimensions of time and space within an ecosystem. However, the definition of an ecosystem in natural sciences also emphasizes the link between an ecosystem and its physical environment. In particular, the environment provides resources and constraints for ecosystem development. Thus, the third mechanism relates to the impact of the national context, even regional context in which IOs are located on IOs operations. In more specific terms, the spatial and temporal features of the national (or regional) environment will impact the structure and characteristics of an ecosystem. This mechanism is derived from the open system theory (Scott, 1987). According to this mechanism, we can expect that the characteristics of an ecosystem will vary according to its geographical location. Figure 1 sketches our theoretical framework. We have identified three variables according to which the spatial and temporal characteristics of an ecosystem can impact IOs. In addition, we argue that taking seriously these dimensions can contribute to answering some important questions on IOs regarding resources, their performance and survival.

2. The International Geneva as an Ecosystem

The objective of this empirical section is to illustrate the concept of ecosystem. Since our research is exploratory,

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



Source: authors

case studies are particularly appropriate (Gerring, 2007). We will first present our methodological approach. In a second time, we will illustrate our theoretical framework with the case of Geneva.

2.1. Research design

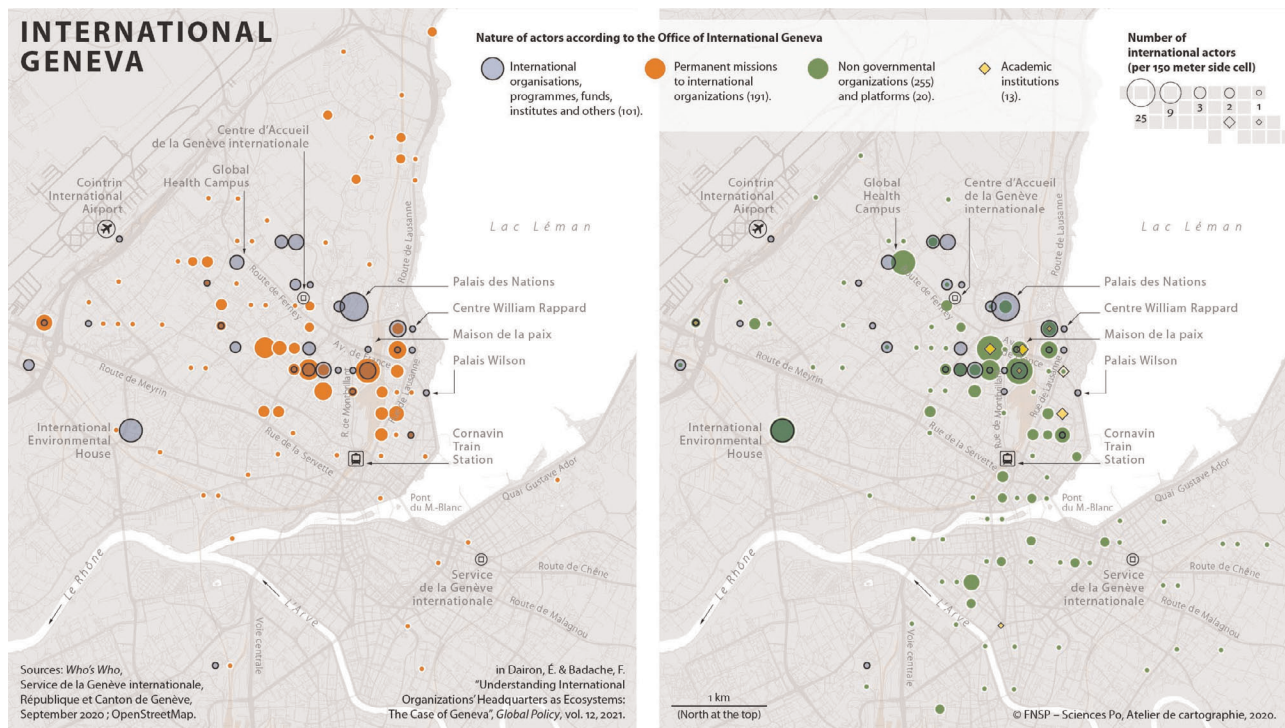
The population of possible cases includes all cities with IOs headquarters: New York, Vienna, Bonn, Nairobi, Rome, Paris, Montreal, the Hague, Washington DC, London and Geneva. We have selected Geneva for three reasons. First, Geneva ranks first in terms of the number of IOs' headquarters it houses. According to the office of the International Geneva – a bureau attached to the presidential Department of the Republic and Canton of Geneva – as of March 2019, more than 100 IOs, programs, funds and institutes are based in Geneva, 177 states are represented by a Permanent Mission, 255 NGOs and 20 platforms are present (Genève Internationale, 2020).¹ Figure 2 provides two maps of the International Geneva. These maps show the density of actors per 150 square meters. On the left side, we can see that most IOs and Permanent Missions are geographically concentrated around the Palais des Nations, built between 1929 and 1936. This settlement can be interpreted, at the same time, as a heritage of history, but also as a matter of logistics. The 'Quartier des Nations' is conveniently situated close to the Geneva International Airport and to the main Train Station, both also built in the 1930s (Kuntz, 2010). On the right side, we observe the high concentration of non-state actors and academic institutions along the same axis. Such

geographical proximity reinforces the impression of a unit of space.

A second important argument is that, during our research process, we observed that the concept of ecosystem was used by IO practitioners – ecosystem becoming an 'indigenous' concept (see above). It seems that this use was rather 'intuitive' and not backed-up by any official definition of the Geneva ecosystem. But it shows a certain level of self-analysis from the stakeholders based in Geneva, a sort of consciousness of the fact that they live and work in a peculiar environment that needs to be highlighted and eventually protected – as we will see below. Finally, another reason is that as we are based in Switzerland, we had an easy access to people for interviews and to events for observation.

Between August 2018 and July 2019, we conducted 14 semi-structured interviews, in French and in English, with 17 key actors of the IO ecosystem in Geneva. We initially built an interview grid with four open-ended questions such as 'What is the impact, on your organization, of being headquartered in Geneva?' The grid also included a counterfactual question: 'If you were not located in Geneva, would it be different for your work?' As our interviewees tended to talk very positively about Geneva, we included prompts about the negative effects in order to get a more balanced picture. Besides the interviews we conducted for this specific study, we also used qualitative material collected for another research project. Between March 2015 and June 2017, 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Geneva, in French, English, and Spanish, with respondents who

Figure 2. Maps of the International Geneva



worked or had worked in six different UN organizations in Geneva or elsewhere. We also relied on primary sources and archives to conduct our analysis.

2.2. The Geneva ecosystem in action

As described earlier, the three variables through which location affects IOs' operations are situated at three different levels (from micro to macro) and are crossing the units of time and space. It means that they all contain characteristics of shared time and shared space. Yet, they all rely on different mechanisms. In this section, we provide an analysis of these practical, day-to-day effects for the case of Geneva.

2.2.1. The International Geneva as a social group

Approximately 35,000 persons work in the so-called International Geneva.² There is no doubt that such an environment is indeed a 'social environment' that has an impact on the attitudes and values of individuals (Murdoch et al., 2019). But how does this social environment manifest itself?

For IOs located in Geneva, the spatial proximity with organizations operating in a related area is an opportunity in terms of human resources. The idea is conveyed by several interviewees: Geneva is a 'recruitment pole' (Interview YR, OH and PC, 14 February 2019 and MBL 5 July 2019). A person in charge of recruitment in an international NGO explains: 'Here we are also lucky enough to have a lot of well-educated people in different areas, with different expertise. Because it is so multicultural, multi-professional, so that they could bring in their experience'. The interviewee also

notes that 'We do receive more (applications) from people based in Geneva and/or in neighboring France'. (Interview MBL, 5 July 2019). This labor pool is also made possible thanks to the presence of a high number of academic institutions which offer training relevant to the work of the International Geneva such as international affairs and humanitarian training. For instance, out of the 53 persons interviewed, seven graduated from the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva. Their graduated students constitute an important part of the cohort of skilled individuals applying to international jobs in Geneva, either because they want to stay in the city or because the opportunities that arise there (Interview MF, 24 November 2016; interview KP, 14 December 2016). Sharing the same education background is also a socialization channel that can have influence on the way people build their professional network (Interview NM, 7 December 2016; interview JS, 14 December 2016).

But having been to the same university is not the only way of socializing. Actors of the Geneva ecosystem have numerous occasions to meet. In 2018, 3,236 'official' meetings were held in Geneva. These meetings can be seen as occasions for professional, or expert socialization, a socialization which is based on a shared professional interest for a certain topic: '[the profile of people in Geneva] (...) is more thematic than institutional' (Interview NI, 22 November 2018). But in Geneva even the informal, personal socialization is institutionalized and organized by the IO ecosystem: for instance, the Mix and Mash events, organized every three months with the assumed objective of mixing the

local population with IO staff members; or the SDG Lunch Collider, an initiative aimed at making people meet over lunch, to expand knowledge on the SDGs (Geneva 2030 Ecosystem, 2020b).

Being a labor pool, Geneva also entails the possibility for individuals to build a diversified career without having to move out of the region. Indeed, a large percentage of our interviewees, including former UNOG Director-General Michael Møller, have long professional histories of working for different bodies in the Geneva international ecosystem.³ Many people report having a 'special long-time relationship with Geneva' (Interview MM, 29 March 2017) and wishing to continue living on the shores of the Lake Geneva, for family or other personal reasons.⁴ This leads to the presence in Geneva of a large number of people who have had careers in many different institutions: 'Following the same persons, over ten years, you can find them with different business cards. For instance, there seems to be an individual ecosystem for human resources' (interview OC and JB, 25 October 2018). However, this professional mobility is limited to the (international) public sector: 'there is an hybridation with the public sector, but not so much with the private sector' (Interview NI, 22 November 2018).

2.2.2. Better coordination?

In theory, the geographical proximity between organizations within an ecosystem should lead to more coordination and better results. Many interviewees recognize that the small size of Geneva facilitates their daily work: 'Then just the size of Geneva. Jumping on a bicycle you can meet 15 to 20 people in one day. Having to take the subway and get stuck. It is much easier to develop a tight and diverse network in Geneva than in New York'. (Interview NI, 22 November 2018). Another interviewee compares New York and Geneva: 'We see each other, it is not New York!' (Interview AP, 11 October 2018).

What is interesting in the case of Geneva is that it is only recently that actors have started to take advantage of this geographic proximity. As one Swiss diplomat acknowledges, 'The actors have been here for a long time and haven't talked much with one another. We want them to talk more with each other, and I believe that people are looking for that' (Interview YR, OH and PC, 14 February 2019). In other words, collaboration does not happen just by the fact that 'everybody is here' (Interview MM 5 September 2018). Most of the interviewees stress the political will behind the existence of an ecosystem in Geneva, and the key role of some individuals such as Michael Møller, former Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva. In addition, several initiatives have been recently put in place aiming at 'reinforcing synergies and collaboration between different actors' (Interview YR, OH and PC, 14 February 2019). But competition is fierce between those platforms: 'There are already so many things in Geneva, for a platform to have a value added, its leader should have a capacity to mobilize people; otherwise it just becomes another actor which superimposes' (Interview YR, OH and PC, 14 February 2019). These platforms aim at bringing together actors present in Geneva

but from different institutional horizons. There are also internal initiatives within the UN system in Geneva, in order to foster collaboration between different entities and to provide incentives to innovate. One of them is the Knowledge & Learning Commons, created in April 2018 by the Library and the Human Resources Management Service/Centre for Learning and Multilingualism of the United Nations Office at Geneva to provide a space for collaboration, learning and exchanges.⁵ But it could also be a response to the 2017 'UN Staff Engagement Survey', when respondents asked for cross-assignments, incentives and resources to innovate, and cross-fertilization opportunities to exchange ideas and best practices, as the three top needs of the UN Geneva. Hence, in spite of the high level of organization of the ecosystem, it seems that there are still challenges for the UN staff to understand what the ecosystem does for their practical, daily professional life.

2.2.3. The impact of the Swiss national context

The last mechanism through which location can affect an IO is the impact of the national context. For Geneva, the impact of being located in Switzerland is two-fold. First, the Swiss political authorities at different levels provide resources to the International Geneva. Second, this location impacts the temporality within the IO ecosystem in Geneva (Kimber and Maertens 2021).

The first dimension sheds light on the importance of the host state. Geneva, and Switzerland more broadly, has a long history in this respect. For instance, the International Red Cross Committee was established in Geneva in 1863, the Universal Postal Union was in Bern and the International Labour Organization in Geneva in 1917. The League of Nations since 1919. As officials summarize: 'It is a vocation. Since almost two centuries – 150 years – this is really something embedded in the Geneva identity. We have this role of supporting the actors who try to solve problems that go beyond the competencies of a single country' (Interview OC and JB, 25 October 2018). The Swiss political authorities – the Swiss federal government through the permanent mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva, the canton of Geneva and the city of Geneva – demonstrate a strong will and support to the work of international organizations in Geneva. For instance, the Swiss confederation developed a strategy composed of two main pillars: reinforcing the infrastructures and services as a host state and increasing the impact of the International Geneva. As a diplomat in the Swiss permanent mission to the UN in Geneva summarizes: 'Yes, it is part of a federal strategy, based on the "hardware" (buildings, visas) and all the software: synergies, communications, to have in Geneva the capacities to think of all these challenges' (Interview YR, OH and PC, 14 February 2019). As regards to the first pillar, in 2013, the City of Geneva launched a vast project of renovation and extension of the Quartier des Nations. The urban planning project spreads over 130 hectares and aims at 'making the presence of UN organizations durable'. In total, three billion Swiss francs will be spent for the renovation and extension of the Genève internationale (Bernet, 2017). To implement the second

pillar, Switzerland funds a lot of initiatives such as the SDG Lab, Ecosystem2030 platform and dozens of other platforms in several fields (Département Fédéral des Affaires Etrangères, 2017) (see previous section).

Beyond the case of Geneva, the example of the United States provides another example of the impact of the political national context in which IOs operate. For instance, the Trump administration took several decisions in terms of visa and travel authorizations that had a direct negative impact on UN staff in New York.

Finally, there seems to be a link between the size and 'vibe' of the city of Geneva and the work pace as the two following interviewees explain: 'Geneva and New York have two different cultures, and different temporalities' (Interview SJ, 29 September 2016). 'And I think the pace of the city has an influence on the people' (Interview NI, 22 November 2018). In other words, contrary to New York, which houses the main political organs of the UN (e.g. the Security Council), Geneva is perceived as a headquarter duty station characterized by a slower pace. Working at the UN headquarters in New York is considered more 'stressful', more seasonal, while working hours in Geneva are often seen as more 'relaxed' (interview LB, 1 June 2017).

This empirical illustration has demonstrated that being located in the International Geneva (the IO ecosystem) impacts the work of IOs in several ways. First of all, the geographical proximity with other global governance institutions leads to the creation of a labor pool from which IOs can recruit (social variable). Regarding the expected positive impacts in terms of coordination, the findings are contrasting. Interviewees recognize that the temporal and spatial proximity facilitates coordination between organizations. Yet the case of Geneva demonstrates that the ecosystem needs individuals (for instance Michael Møller) and initiatives to take advantage of this proximity. Finally, the creation and development of the ecosystem in Geneva is closely linked to the proactive attitude of Swiss authorities. Last but not least, the temporality of the ecosystem is also affected by its location.

3. Conclusions

The objective of this article has been to explore the spatial and temporal dynamics of important but often neglected spaces of global governance: cities where the headquarters of international organizations are located. We have argued that, compared with other well-used concepts in social sciences, the concept of *IO ecosystem* is useful for capturing these dynamics because it accounts for flexibility (e.g. moving frontiers), considers the long term (history), considers all the actors (beyond categories such as governmental/non-governmental), puts emphasis on performance, and highlights the particularities of a given place. At the theoretical level, we have suggested three variables through which HQ location affect IOs. We have applied these analytical dimensions to the case of Geneva.

Regarding the social group dimension, our exploratory interviews were useful to identify some trends. First, it

seems that the presence of so many organizations along with several training institutes confirms that it creates a recruitment pool for global governance organizations (Badache, 2020). Second, professional mobility within the ecosystem seems to prevail more than inward/outward mobility. To go further in the analysis of this social group's composition, one would need to collect more systematic data on the socio-demographic profile of these professionals and their professional trajectories.⁶

As regards to the second dimension, we could expect that the fact of having so many organizations into one place could foster collaboration, and ultimately the performance of IOs in Geneva. Our empirical analysis has demonstrated that these gains do not happen *de facto*. Yet more research needs to be done to provide empirical evidence regarding the link between HQ location and performance (Elsig, 2010; Ivanova, 2010).

Regarding the environmental dimension, we have seen that the ecosystem in Geneva has a structure and temporality that has been influenced to a large extent by its geographic location in Switzerland. Thus, we share the conclusion with Kimber and Martens (2021) that temporalities are not the same in all headquarters cities. A step further would be to look at the different temporalities within one ecosystem (Verlin 2021). In addition, we have seen that the IO ecosystem in Geneva is strongly shaped by the Swiss political authorities.

The concept of ecosystem is also useful to shed light on the inherent fragility of these spaces, especially in times of turbulence (Ansell and Trondal, 2018). In the case of Geneva, discussions about the relocation of UN entities regularly emerge. For instance, in 2016, several member states of the International Telecommunications Unit (ITU), established in Geneva since 1948, have offered to house the organization (Petite, 2016). The United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) has relocated 46 administrative posts to Budapest (Bussard, 2018). In the same vein, the COVID-19 pandemic questions the added-value to being physical present in the same city. These elements show that, despite its long existence, the IO ecosystem in Geneva is not taken for granted and faces several challenges and pressures.

We consider the concept of ecosystem as a dynamic tool for understanding the variety of HQ cities. It is not surprising that we found that Geneva is a well-established ecosystem since it has a long history as a global center even though we observed that initiatives to foster collaboration are relatively recent. Thus, one important future step will be to apply these dimensions to other IO headquarters, so as to understand the degree of maturity of their ecosystem. What about in New York? How does the ecosystem function in Nairobi?

Even if we cannot make a generalization from a single case, the present study has interesting implications for research on IOs, and, more broadly, on global governance. First, approaching IO headquarters as ecosystems helps to capture how a variety of actors – the local authorities, the foreign affairs department, international organizations or NGOs – strategically use a place for various ends. We have seen that it is used to attract and keep global governance

institutions in the city and to improve the performance of organizations. Second, while IR studies on IOs have mostly focused on formal organizations, the ecosystem concept highlights the importance of informality and day-to-day relationships between individuals. Finally, methodologically speaking, approaching international organizations as ecosystems may help researchers to avoid certain mistakes and to familiarize themselves faster with this specific space. In particular, it encourages to consider all actors, beyond rigid categories, and their relationships.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that supports the findings of this study are available in the supplementary material of this article.

Notes

1. These figures differ depending on the categorizations employed by various institutions.
2. However, this figure does not include the high number of individuals working under precarious status (short-term, consultants) for IOs. Thus, in spite of the efforts of the International Geneva website and the Statistical Office of the Geneva canton, it is very challenging to know exactly how many individuals are effectively working in the International Geneva.
3. Interview SB, 14 December 2016; interview FF, 13 September 2016; interview FP, 16 March 2017; interview Michael Møller, UNOG Director-General, 29 March 2017; interview AP, 11 October 2018.
4. Interview MJ, 11 October 2016; interview AS, 2 December 2016; Interview DC, 12 September 2016; interview CB, 2 November 2016; interview AV, 24 November 2016; interview MF, 24 November 2016; interview KP, 14 December 2016.
5. See website: <https://commons.ungeneva.org/>
6. We would like to note that the authors tried to disseminate such a survey in several IOs and NGOs in Geneva, but despite the formal agreement of the previous Director of UNOG, organizations were not willing to participate or did not even respond to our request.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix S1. List of interviews.

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