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Identity and Discourse Within Diverse International Networks

The Managing Global Governance Network Seen Through the Lens of Thematic Oral History

J. Carlos Domínguez

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Abstract

The MGG Programme is an innovative and ambitious initiative implemented by the German Development Institute (DIE) with the support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Although the scope and objectives have changed since it was launched in 2007, there is a clear vision that summarises its overarching goals: to construct a network that functions as an effective, high-quality, knowledge-based cooperation system for promoting global governance and sustainable development in the long run. In this respect, managing and crafting symbols, perceptions and collective identities within the MGG will remain crucial as a glue that enables collective efforts and maximises the network's overall impact.

Under what conditions does cooperation among diverse groups become sustainable? How does the MGG look when analysed as part of the longer-term life trajectory of its participants? How do individual identities intersect with a collective sense of belonging to the programme and to the network? What is the role of the collective identity and the collective narrative that underpins MGG efforts? The main goal of this discussion paper is to apply oral history methodologies to answer some of these questions. The assumption is that the long-term impact of the MGG Programme depends on how well individual motivations, which are shaped by complex life trajectories, intersect with national interests and broader global cooperation narratives.

By confronting theory with empirical evidence, this paper also draws some lessons and raises some interesting questions that may be useful for MGG staff to consider when planning future activities.

Foreword

The Managing Global Governance (MGG) network connects governmental institutions, think tanks and research institutions as well as civil society and business organisations from Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa as well as Germany and Europe. It provides an innovative platform for learning and networking with global partnerships operating at eye-level.

The network has developed since 2007 based on initiatives of the MGG Programme as implemented by the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) in Bonn and funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The MGG Programme's three core elements are a dialogue- and training programme called MGG Academy, knowledge cooperation within the context of research projects, and policy dialogue in the form of focused consultations on strategic political processes from a German perspective and in the partner countries of the Global South.

The main objective of the MGG Academy is to support and prepare future change-makers from the global partner countries and Germany/Europe for a professional and personal life dedicated to sustainable development at home and in the world. The building of trust, exchange of perspectives and development of mutual understanding are among the core assets of the format. The MGG Academy is based on the premise that profound knowledge, leadership qualities and visionary action are key to transformative change. The four-month course blends academic modules, modules on leadership development and applied project work. The didactical concepts, thus, combine intellectual input, space for reasoning and social experience, which together give a glimpse of what international cooperation can be and achieve for the global common good.

MGG activities in the topics of knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue address critical issue areas of global governance and sustainability agendas. These range from initiatives to strengthen capacity development in the public sector and peer exchange on (voluntary) sustainability standards for the private sector to inter- and transnational policy dialogues on the future of multilateralism and global partnerships. These cooperation formats bring alumni from the MGG Academy together and can be initiated by them. Beyond that, they also involve representatives from MGG Network partners that have not participated in the Academy, and institutions without MGG alumni, such as international organisations. The combination of alumni and long-term committed partner institutions in the MGG Network is the basis for the successful development and implementation of its contributions to address global challenges and achieve joint impact.

With the focus on the MGG Academy, the discussion paper at hand, hence, addresses a core component of the MGG Programme. The author's initiative is embedded in the framework of MGG's research efforts to better understand the factors of successful functioning of global networks and inter- and transnational cooperation. At the same time, the exchange between the author, the MGG team in Bonn and reviewers on the topic is an example of knowledge cooperation within the MGG Network. In this spirit, we are thankful that the study is an extremely valuable source for future joint reflections on the impact and further development of the Academy and the MGG Programme as a whole.

Wulf Reiners, Head of the MGG Programme

Preface

In 2013, I was part of the Managing Global Governance (MGG) Academy. This means that, together with another 21 participants from seven different countries,[1] I belong to the 11th batch of the MGG's training programme format. We spent almost six months together and engaged in academic dialogues, training courses, study trips and social activities. As far as I remember, there was indeed a shared identity that was developed little by little among us, despite our personal, professional, age and cultural differences. And yet, at the risk of being indiscrete, I will confess that there was very often a topic that lingered in corridor conversations among cohort colleagues: at least at the beginning, most of us did not really grasp why the German government had decided to invite us to spend six months in the country, with most of the costs covered, paying particular attention to our individual well-being and making extraordinary efforts to nurture our collective bonds.

From time to time the uncomfortable question would be raised among the loudest members of the group, "What is it exactly that you want from us?" If I remember well, there was even one time, at the very beginning of the programme, when one of my MGG colleagues from India openly raised this question to a relatively high-ranking manager at Germany's organisation for international development cooperation, GIZ (which, at the time, was a co-organiser of the MGG Programme). I don't remember exactly what her reply was, but I do remember that it was a very unsettling question, there were some nervous laughs, and the whole atmosphere became a bit uneasy for a few seconds. It ended up not being a big deal. The GIZ official probably gave an answer that, even if it sounded carbon-copied from the MGG brochure, was partially satisfactory. My colleague from India fulfilled all his duties during the programme and, even though he is not very active in the wider MGG Network at the time of writing, he is still in touch with the rest of the batch. Furthermore, the legend goes that MGG11 was one of the most cohesive and fun groups in the whole history of the programme (a legend that is probably renewed every year and that lingers in the minds of many participants across different MGG cohorts, thinking that they are the "best" MGG generation ever).

Sure, most of us shared an interest in studying social and economic problems (mainly in our own countries); global challenges, such us climate change; international relations; NGOs; development; or a combination of all of these. However, my general (and very personal) impression is that it took us all a long time and a sinuous way to grasp what the MGG was about.

It may be useful to picture a hypothetical situation. Imagine a restaurant that specialises in international and fusion food. A group of people gather there; they do not know each other, and they are not really sure why they have been brought together to this particular place. At the beginning, they voice their doubts and, reluctantly, stay on board. Half do so out of politeness and half because they are convinced by the arguments given. They all make an effort, and eventually, after one or two rounds of free beer, they develop a general sense of belonging, a sort of collective identity; they giggle together, sing and come up with their very own jokes (actually the jokes are so cryptic and folkloric that no one in the

1 The list of participating countries included Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan and South Africa.

neighbouring tables can really understand them). Towards the end of the evening, the members of this group have learned how to communicate with each other and even start liking the idea of subscribing to the collective narrative that the host has proposed to explain all the hassle.

The questions are obvious. How enduring are both the collective identity and the collective narrative that have been proposed to the guests? Are those two elements enough to guarantee any sort of collective action in the long run? Is there something we can learn from this example that might be useful for other networking efforts, in different contexts and social settings? Is there something that the host of the above-mentioned party can learn to improve the impact of his or her bigheartedness?

Of course, the answers to these questions depend on the identity and the narrative that has been proposed, but they also depend on the following key issues. Who are all those mysterious characters that were invited to the table? What are their backgrounds? How did they end up being invited? Where do they come from and where are they heading after having dinner together? In hindsight, could we say that the dinner constituted an unforgettable event that changed the diners' lives or was it a negligible social gathering that will be quickly forgotten, leaving no trace behind? In other words, we need to know a little bit of their life histories to understand the paths and trajectories that brought them all the way to such a concrete chronotope.[2]

I do not attempt to minimise the MGG Programme or to neglect the significance of its goals, implementation or historical outcomes. At the end of the day, the level of engagement of individual participants in the network long after they have graduated from the MGG is a testament to the programme's relative success and the enormous potentialities that accompany the respective network. Still, a glimpse into how the MGG intersects with the longer-term trajectories of its individual participants might offer additional insights into the factors that enable networking efforts in the long term. This discussion paper summarises my own very personal effort to contribute to exploring this issue.

Carlos Domínguez

2 In philosophy and literary theory, a chronotope refers to a concrete configuration of time and space. The first to refer to this notion was Mikhail Bakhtin and it was later used by other philosophers, including Roland Barthes. For an extended debate, see Bemong et al. (2010).

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The author is grateful to the comments provided by Sven Grimm, Maximilian Hoegl, Eva Lynders, Wulf Reiners and Imme Scholz.

Although a peer-review of this paper was undertaken by the above-mentioned colleagues, the structure and content of this paper also owes to formal and informal conversations with Citlali Ayala, Paulo Esteves, Anna Schwachula and other colleagues from the MGG Network that participated in workshops and meetings in Brussels in 2018 and Bonn in 2019.

My own experience as an alumnus from MGG11 in 2013 and my continuous interaction with DIE colleagues, including Dirk Messner and Imme Scholz, and with MGG staff in particular (Bettina Beer, Johannes Blankenbach, Thomas Fues, Regine Mehl, Tatjana Reiber, among many others) also constitute valuable inputs that influenced this work directly or indirectly.

Contents

Abbreviations

BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development / (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung)
CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (Centre for Research and Teaching in Economics, Mexico)
DIE	German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik
FIDE	Fideicomiso para el Ahorro de Energía Eléctrica (Financial Trust for Promoting Energy Efficiency, Mexico)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Germany's organisation for international development cooperation)
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (Germany's agency for technical cooperation, a precursor to GIZ)
InWEnt	Capacity Building International (Germany) / Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung
MGG	Managing Global Governance
PEMEX	Petróleos Mexicanos (Mexico's state-owned oil company)
SEMARNAT	Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Mexico's Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources)

1 Introduction

In a few words, the Managing Global Governance (MGG) Programme aims to create a space for policy dialogue, training, knowledge creation and networking among representatives from the so called "emerging powers" (mainly Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa) and their German and European counterparts to promote global governance and sustainable development through different forms and modalities of international cooperation. The programme emphasises a participatory, knowledge-based, problem-solving approach (DIE, 2018, p.1).

At the intellectual roots of its conception there are a number of geopolitical trends that have been evident since the beginning of the new millennium. There were "tectonic shifts of power" (Messner, 2015, p.17) from the industrialised Western World, led by the United States, to a multi-polar world where emerging players gained economic and political leverage, started to play a more active role and became essential to tackling global issues, such as climate change, trade, peace and security. A new distribution of power also meant that the established international architecture, which emerged as part of the post-Second World War bipolar scenario, was outdated and irresponsive to an emerging balance between old and new players in the international arena. In this context, there was a need to look for new ways to promote and sustain international cooperation, and although modest and confined to a certain scale, the MGG aims to build a network of professionals that contributes to filling that gap.

Given that the MGG has existed since 2007, it is important to note that the programme has experienced a number of transformations and adjustments, most importantly, the inclusion of the Agenda 2030 since its approval in September 2015.[3] In fact, the Agenda 2030 constitutes the main framework that currently guides collective action within the MGG. Other important changes include the duration of the MGG Academy (some editions lasted up to six months, and some years had more than one edition); the countries that are considered Germany's global development partners (for example, Egypt and Pakistan were included for some years); and the institutions that have been involved in structuring and managing the MGG. One example of the latter is the German organisation Capacity Building International (InWEnt), which took part in the MGG during the very early stages and later merged with Germany's agency for technical cooperation (GTZ), which in turn became Germany's organisation for international development cooperation (GIZ) in 2011. Then, GIZ co-managed the programme with the German Development Institute (DIE) until 2015.

With this background in mind, the main goal of this paper is to extract some lessons from the MGG Network itself. Being such a unique and interesting case, it is possible to draw knowledge that might be useful for network studies specifically and for international relations and social sciences in general. MGG is an exceptional opportunity to confront theory and empirical evidence from different angles and through various lenses.

3 In addition to the Agenda 2030, the MGG has also included an emphasis on increasing its long-term networking capacities in contrast with the sole goal of "capacity building", which was emphasised during the early phases of the programme.

What can scholars and practitioners interested in network studies learn from the MGG experience as a platform that aims to promote global governance and sustainable development? Under what conditions does cooperation among diverse groups become sustainable? How does the MGG look when analysed as part of the longer-term life trajectory of its participants? How do individual identities intersect with a collective sense of belonging to the programme and to the network? What is the role of the collective identity and the collective narrative that underpins MGG efforts?

Although other works and official assessments have explored these kinds of questions, the novelty of this paper lies in employing a more personal, narrative perspective, using oral history methodologies with a particular emphasis on the role of identities and collective discourses. The task is twofold: on the one hand, the purpose is to explore how MGG is perceived in the context of broader life stories and, on the other, how these life stories have been modified by the MGG Programme and Network. My own experience as observer/participant inevitably adds to and complements the analysis of the evidence.

It should be noted that this work does not attempt to undertake a formal or comprehensive assessment of the programme or the network. The first reason is that such a task has already been performed by independent consultants in the context of the MGG 10th anniversary and there is no need to duplicate such efforts.[4] The second reason is that doing a comprehensive assessment is incompatible with the methodological, epistemological and ethical assumptions that underpin the practice of oral history research and, therefore, it falls beyond the scope of this paper. However, as explained in greater detail in Section 5, oral history offers the ideal lens through which to understand processes and dynamics that manifest their qualitative impact in the longer term and that are not easily recognisable through other methodological approaches. The assumption is that the long-term impact of the MGG Programme depends on how well individual motivations, which are shaped by complex life trajectories, intersect with national interests and broader global cooperation narratives.

This discussion paper is structured as follows. Section 2 offers additional background on the MGG Programme, Academy and Network. Section 3 develops the theoretical lens that will be used to analyse identities and discourses in the context of the MGG. Section 4 outlines the main methodological and theoretical considerations in applying oral history methodologies for these purposes. Section 5 couples theory with the empirical data that was collected specifically for the purposes of this work. Section 6 offers some conclusions and further questions to be considered by MGG staff, in particular, and network managers in general.

4 A review of the literature and personal communication with MGG staff both confirm that Umfragezentrum Bonn (UZBonn) has taken a series of quantitative and qualitative assessments of the MGG Programme, which include tracking the professional paths of MGG participants in the medium term. Although such exercises are likely to find similar conclusions to the ones presented in this discussion paper, particularly in regard to the impact of MGG on professional trajectories, a key difference between the efforts is our focus on a retrospective analysis of life trajectories, which oral history allows. In this way, personal paths are reconstructed with a longer-term view.

2 The MGG Programme

The MGG Programme aims to construct a network that functions as an effective, high-quality, knowledge-based cooperation system for promoting global governance and sustainable development in the long run. Most activities have been sponsored and headed by the German counterparts DIE and the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)), but the goal is to reach a more horizontal distribution of responsibilities soon and in a way that participants and partner institutions are equally able to exert their "steering capacity" (Kickert, Klijn, & Koppenjan, 1997, p. 11; Termeer & Koppenjan, 1997). In this respect, managing and crafting symbols, perceptions and collective identities within the MGG will remain crucial as a glue that enables collective efforts and maximises the network's overall impact.

Rather than being a goal itself, the network should eventually serve as a solid backbone with numerous spill-over and multiplying effects. This is expected to happen through successive steps that go from early stages, when concrete actors in the MGG Network use their problem-solving capacity to implement practical solutions to tackle concrete aspects of the 2030 Agenda; to mid-term stages, when knowledge is shared with decision-makers and other key change-makers in relevant sectors; until a system of knowledge cooperation is built in the longer term (DIE, 2019, p. 6). It is an ambitious initiative that has been designed and implemented by DIE with support from the BMZ.[5]

To achieve these goals, the MGG has many strands of action and incidence. One of these elements focuses on supporting key decision-makers with policy advice and capacity building. In later years, for example, the programme has supported an important training initiative to strengthen capacities of public servants to implement the 2030 Agenda in partner countries. Other efforts, which are centred on fostering policy dialogues, include the participation of MGG Network members in inter- or transnational forums, such as Think 20 (DIE, 2018, 2019; Fues, 2018).

One of the main pillars of the MGG Programme is the MGG Academy, which targets young professionals from the above-mentioned countries who are or may become "future leaders and influencers in governmental institutions, think tanks, civil society or the private sector" (DIE, 2019, p. 2). In its current format, the MGG Academy invites a group of about 22 participants from partner countries to spend almost four months in Germany and engage in training, dialogue and mutual learning activities. It provides a platform on which participants continuously develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required to implement Agenda 2030 (DIE, 2018, p. 2). Once participants complete the MGG Academy, they become alumni and join the MGG Network. One of the premises is that individual participants can be trained as potential change agents that will later have the opportunity to trigger meaningful transformations at the institutional, societal, and maybe, at the national and global levels (Blankenbach & Reiber, 2012). Even though the MGG Academy does not intend to "change lives" as such, it is acknowledged that the MGG should represent some sort of transformational experience at the personal and professional levels so that MGG alumni continue to cooperate with the MGG Network in the long run (DIE, 2019, pp. 2-3).

5 As mentioned in the Introduction, GIZ was also involved during the first years of the programme.

Unlike other initiatives that are underpinned by a realist approach to international relations, the MGG recognises the need to build horizontal, transnational dialogue between different countries with multiple cultural and historical backgrounds, as well as diverging interests, in a global scenario characterised by constant power shifts. This aspiration comes with two key assumptions: first, despite obstacles and difficulties, international cooperation can be achieved with an emphasis on its behavioural dimensions, as proposed by Messner, Guarín and Haun (2013), among others; and second, to have any effects on a larger scale, these behavioural dimensions should be placed within the meso level of international cooperation (that is, in the institutions, forums and other venues where individual interests intersect with the broader dynamics of macropolitics).

On the one hand, the behavioural aspect is achieved by bringing young professionals of partner countries to spend time together in Germany and engage in different training and dialogue dynamics. Although there is free time and there are enough opportunities that individuals may use for their own purposes, the MGG includes plenty of joint activities that require participants to engage in constructive dialogue, understanding, negotiation, study and work in joint projects throughout the duration of the programme. In this respect, there is little doubt that the MGG constitutes an experiment, a sort of microcosm of global governance and a "lab for global cooperation" (Fues, 2018, p. 1).

On the other hand, the meso level of international cooperation is implicit in the way participants are selected. Rather than being a decision based purely on individual merits, the process is usually linked to partner institutions that also become part of the MGG Network. The contributions and commitment of many of these institutions might fade through time and new ones may come on board, but there are many that have participated consistently, collaborating to different extents and remaining loyal to the MGG. There is a two-fold logic behind this selection philosophy. First, at least in theory, it is at the meso level of international relations where the behavioural approach can be applied to find new ways of cooperation. And second, given that working with national governments at the macro level is unfeasible, it makes more sense to work with individuals who fall under one or more of the following categories: those who return to and nurture their own institutions with insights on global governance and sustainable development; those who are likely to remain linked to the MGG Network in the long term, contributing to its growth and expansion; and those who are in a position to develop and exert influence through institutions and multilateral forums where key issues regarding global governance and sustainable development may be decided in the future, that is, those who can become "change agents" (DIE, 2019, p. 3).[6]

Since the MGG Academy welcomed the first cohort of participants in 2007, the programme has had mixed results, but apparently leaning towards a "very positive" assessment. As Fues (2018) has shown in his very personal but still comprehensive appraisal, there are indeed interesting outcomes that should be highlighted and that justify the continuance of the MGG in the medium and longer terms. For example, there have been significant contributions made by individuals and subgroups within the MGG Network, particularly in the areas of policy dialogue and training. These include publications, forums, training of public servants

6 These three scenarios seem to be compatible with one another, however, as we will see later in this paper, this is not always the case.

and other initiatives that cannot be minimised. This is remarkable if we consider the complexity and ambition of such an endeavour.

Beyond these contributions, nothing provides better proof that the MGG Programme has yielded positive results than the extension and richness of the current MGG Network, which has reached a certain maturity and constitutes an incredible asset for collaboration among global players from all partner countries (and beyond). To date, after more than a decade of existence, the MGG Network encompasses more than 100 partner institutions and more than 350 alumni that have participated in the MGG Programme throughout 17 generations and who are still active with varying levels of commitment and participation.

The size of the network constitutes an important milestone, an inflection point between a mere training programme or a confined space for policy dialogue and a "think-and-do-tank" (Fues, 2018) with enormous possibilities for promoting transformative change. In this respect, the 10th anniversary since the first MGG generation graduated marked the starting point of a series of activities and initiatives that aim to make the promises of such a horizon possible.[7] This discussion paper, for example, is itself part of a broader effort by DIE colleagues to bring together different members and friends of the MGG Network to engage in knowledge creation beyond the original MGG Programme.

3 Frames, discourses, narratives and identities

As the number of participants increases and the goals of the MGG become more ambitious, its cohesion and potential impact will depend on the sharing of common goals and identities, while at the same time leaving enough room for the richness of difference and diversity among participants. This task constitutes a difficult balancing act because the sense of belonging to a network depends on the intersection between complex life trajectories at the individual level and the crafting of frames and discourses at the collective level. How has this intersection occurred in the MGG so far? What lessons can we learn after more than a decade of the programme's existence?

In order to reach conclusions that are not only based on empirical evidence, but also informed by theory, it is useful to clarify a number of concepts that will be employed to complete our task. For this purpose, it is necessary to depart a little bit from the literature on international relations and global governance that permeates the MGG and enter the field of political sociology. For example, although they seem interrelated and are often used as synonyms, the following three concepts are not quite the same: frames, discourses and narratives.

3.1 Frames and identities

The concept of "frame" was originally used by some sociologists, particularly Erving Goffman in 1974, as part of a broader theoretical approach that is based on symbolic

7 The 10th anniversary was celebrated in Bonn in December 2017.

interactionism. In this respect, there are two features that should be understood more deeply. On the one hand, symbolic interactionism draws a metaphor between theatre and social life. The main assumption is that we tend to construct an identity that is presented to others in ways that resemble the construction of drama characters. Put otherwise, we play social roles as if we were taking part in a theatre performance. The identities that we uphold in different social contexts feed from, but do not fully match, the identity that we continuously construct as part of our own, very solipsistic, internal dialogue. The former identities work as presentation cards that we use to interact socially, depending on the specific social setting, on how we perceive the others, on how we perceive ourselves, and on how we perceive that others might perceive us in the context of our interaction with them.

On the other hand, the metaphor between theatre, drama, and social interaction can be stretched to include an element that is missing in our explanation. That is, nobody moves on the stage aimlessly and, therefore, we need a script to have some sort of idea of what to do and where to go. The term "frame" refers to this kind of script in social life. In short, a frame is an account of the outside world that outlines who we are, who the others are and what should be done as part of the theatre play (or social drama). Following Goffman, a frame is a guide for moving through the world, it denotes

> schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large. By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organise experience and guide action, whether individual or collective. ((1974), as cited in Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986, p. 464)

According to Goffman, there is not a single experience that can be left without explanation (i.e., that is not somehow framed). If the reader thinks about it, even the most absurd instance, like watching an unidentified flying object cannot be left unexplained. Our mind needs to provide some sort of account, even if it is provisional and even if it is discarded afterwards on the basis of better information. This explanation is a way of *framing* a particular experience: "There is a UFO! This means we are being invaded by aliens. Run, hide or look for shelter!" We do it all the time and it constitutes a tool that we use to navigate the world.

In the context of group dynamics, this framing process is a crucial factor that facilitates collective action in general. Without a suitable collective action frame, we would not be able to justify to others and to ourselves why we engage in this or that endeavour.[8] In other words, we need a good reason to act together, and this hardly ever arises spontaneously out of pure collective desire. We need to construct "good" reasons and frame them in ways that take into account who we are, who the others are, and why we all need to work together towards a joint objective. For example, it is often mentioned how important it is for the MGG

8 Seminal works such as *The Evolution of Cooperation* (Axelrod, 1984) suggest that identity is not a necessary pre-condition for cooperation. This is true in the examples provided by Axelrod, where routines and relatively simple tasks are jointly completed by different agents (even if they are antagonistic, as in the case of German and British soldiers in the trenches during World War I). However, to be sustained for longer periods of time, more complex forms of cooperation and collective action are enabled by a common identity and a shared cognitive frame among participants.

Programme and Network to construct a "we-identity" based on a different cooperation narrative. The explicit wording would be something like the following: "during the Academy, a spirit of change and 'we-identity' develops" (DIE, 2019, p. 3) or "the notion of we-identities, a key category of the cooperation hexagon, has evolved as a powerful unifying concept for the MGG Programme" (Fues, 2018, p. 24).

It is also important to notice that the reference to such a requirement in the MGG context might also be implicit. In other words, even if the words "we-identity" are not mentioned, some documents still refer to a notion that resembles it. When staff and participants talk about a bond that joins them together, or when there is mention of an "emotional connection [that] motivates alumni to devote their free time, their resources, and their know- how to the MGG Network" (DIE, 2019, p. 3), the importance of a collective identity is being implicitly hinted at.

Narratives and identities are concepts that criss-cross and overlap with framing processes, but they are not exactly the same. The we-identity is just part of a larger set of things that are placed within a broader frame and the narrative refers to the ways these different things are knitted together, creating a whole that is relatively coherent. In fact, we-identities do not function as static pre-conditions for acting collectively, but they are also shaped and adjusted continuously through action and in relation to the other components of the collective action frame as a sort of kaleidoscope.

This subtlety is important, for example, because frames tend to be more malleable than *individual* identities. Collective action frames in particular need to borrow from history, traditions, political cultures, ideologies, symbolic elaborations, mentalities and even emotions, among other ingredients, to create a big umbrella under which a variety of actors and participants can fit and feel comfortable. They should evolve and adapt to changing circumstances. In fact, as argued elsewhere (Domínguez, 2015a, 2015b; Snow et al., 1986) an effective collective action frame should meet two requirements that are sometimes complementary but could also create a bit of tension. The first requirement is that the collective action frame should be familiar enough that potential adherents find things that ring a bell, that they know and with which they feel identified.

The second requirement is that the collective action frame should be flexible enough so that a broad range of people, with different backgrounds and from diverse walks of life, feel comfortable when labelled as part of the same group. An example is the following statement by Thomas Fues (2018, p. 1) when explaining the goals of the MGG, "as the extensive collaboration under the MGG umbrella demonstrates, partner countries share with the German side *the preference for the global common good* [emphasis added], despite the predominance of domestic concerns for poverty reduction and growth on their side". Another example is the following, "*all alumni* come from emerging countries from the Global South and *share a passion for the [Sustainable Development Goals]* [emphasis added]" (DIE, 2019, p. 6). Here, we get a taste of a collective frame that justifies cooperation on the basis of something that might not be familiar to everyone but is flexible enough to gather support from a diverse set of adherents: the assumption that we all strive for and aspire to contribute to the global common good (which in some cases might also be understood as equivalent to implementing Agenda 2030).

By contrast, although individual identities are also fluid and change over time, they are tied to complex life trajectories. If we ask, "Who is that person?", there are many possible answers to such an *identification* enquiry, but one of them is to describe the person in terms of *what* they have done (throughout their life) and *why* they have done it. In other words, the relative pronoun "who" may be grasped by answering all the whats and all the whys that together describe the specificities of the person's selfhood.

Therefore, no matter how convincing a collective action frame is for many adherents, it won't easily appeal to those individuals who don't perceive a logical and/or emotional intersection between their trajectories/identities and the we-identity that is crafted and portrayed (explicitly or implicitly) by whomever is in charge of the framing process. The collective action frame might be adjusted with plenty of leadership and a little bit of creativity (buzzwords and big concepts abound), but it is more difficult to change life histories. We can reflect upon them, learn from the past and change some of our practices, habits, and attitudinal dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990, 1992, 1996) but as such, life histories cannot be modified. If the collective action frame is a sort of modular umbrella that can open and close, expand and contract, with relative ease, individual identities are like riverbeds that have been carved over the course of many years.

3.2 Discourses

"Discourse" is another term that is useful for our enquiry, not in the rhetorical sense of the word but from the perspective of critical philosophy. According to Michel Foucault, the concept of discourse refers to devices or dispositives that are crafted strategically; they are located at the confluence of knowledge and the exercise of power, they create new objects and redefine subjectivities (Agamben, 2015, pp. 10-11; Foucault, 1970, pp. 65-81). Discourses, understood as devices, include speech and/or performative acts. Even a dance performance that does not rely on words deploys some kind of discourse. However, those discourses that are displayed linguistically could be understood as a collection of statements and speech acts that are organised systematically and regularly.

We can find some examples within the area of ecology and environmental policy. As Dryzek (1997) explains, different environmental discourses underpin a variety of perspectives on nature, ecology and environmental problems. In each and every case, these discourses work as mythical stories that try to explain – usually in antagonistic and dramatic ways – who we are, where we are going and what should be done to tackle environmental problems. For Dryzek, an environmental discourse works as a sort of mythical story that contains certain epic ingredients to spice them, including heroes, anti-heroes, adversities and tragic outcomes.

One example is the discourse of political ecology and the "environmentalism of the poor", which may be described more or less as follows. The problem is the unequal and unjust distribution of ecological costs brought about by modernisation. We live in a world where the poor (or marginalised and subaltern groups) bear the costs disproportionally, while the rich enjoy most of the benefits of progress and modernity, and, therefore, environmental problems won't be solved without redistribution and without a dramatic shift of power from the rich to the poor. Examples of these political ecology perspectives are included in the works by Guha and Martínez-Alier (2000), Martínez-Alier (2002) and Paulson (2015).

Notice that, according to this perspective, there are clear objects that have been constructed as part of this discourse: the good guys (the poor), the bad guys (the rich), the obstacles (modernisation and inequality), and the outcomes (redistribution and shift of power). This does not mean that these discursive objects exist independently or that they have a life of their own, but that they are a result of intersections and strategic relations that have been crafted as part of the overall discourse.

John Dryzek (1997) offers a similar analysis for other environmental discourses, including, among others

- the so-called myth of Prometheus (reason and science will always come to the rescue);
- the rational-administrative point of view (we are lacking better management and mitigation policies);
- the technocratic fetish (we only need to leave it to the experts, and they will sort it out);
- the conservationist perspective (nature should remain pristine no matter what);
- and the discourse of sustainable development (the key is to find the right balance between economic growth, environmental protection and social justice).

It is important to notice that these environmental discourses and their mythical accounts are often incomplete because they highlight particular actors and particular dynamics. They construct objects and new subjectivities in ways that simplify the world and, therefore, they end up displacing other aspects and evaluative dimensions that are crucial to achieving a more comprehensive understanding of environmental challenges.

A collective action frame is a kind of discourse, even though it is much simpler, schematic and ephemeral than other discourses that are located within complex regimes of knowledge and used by certain epistemic communities. Furthermore, a collective action frame can also intersect and borrow from other discursive streams that show some of the features suggested by Dryzek (1997), but it usually won't go into much detail because making things too complex works against achieving the two conditions (familiarity and flexibility) that make a frame effective.

Take the example of the MGG. Some terms and concepts that are constitutive of the programme's philosophy and goals include "global governance", "international cooperation" and "Agenda 2030". From a sociological point of view, these are discursive objects that meet some of the features described above: they are symbolic elaborations in the context of strategic power relations, they highlight certain aspects of reality while displacing others, and they provide a guide for action for those who identify with them.

Understanding how discourses work is essential to understanding the discursive features of collective action frames. This deconstruction exercise helps to keep an eye on the kind of objects that are embedded in them and that are often taken for granted. Do MGG participants identify with these discursive objects that are part of the MGG collective frame? Do

participants buy in, question them, or simply remain oblivious to the way discourse operates? How are these concepts negotiated in the context of individual life trajectories?[9]

3.3 Narratives

The word "narrative" refers to another concept that is often used as an equivalent to frame and/or discourse. In fact, it is the term that seems to be preferred within the MGG Network since it figures very often in official documents and discussion papers about the MGG in general.[10] However, it must be clarified that even if narratives overlap with discourses and frames, strictly speaking, they are not synonyms. Following another French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1992, 2000), narrative is the only resource we have to grasp our experience of time and the only way to structure history. In this sense, a frame or a discourse that intends to portray a change from state *t* to state *t+1* requires a narrative to account for the temporal dimension that is inevitably involved, albeit implicitly. In fact, "history" does not refer to the objective facts that were registered through time but to the narrative account of how those facts were linked together or not (Agamben, 1993).

If we talk about achieving higher levels of global governance and sustainable development by building trust, reciprocity and other components of the cooperation hexagon (Messner et al., 2013), we are assuming that there is *a process* that will take *time* and that there will be a day *in the future* when these two goals will be achieved. This is what "a common narrative of trust and reciprocity" (Messner & Weinlich, 2016, as cited in Fues, 2018, p. 26) tacitly suggests. Of course, the stated goals and the building of trust and reciprocity require continuous efforts on behalf of different actors, but this is an aspect that might be oversimplified by narratives themselves.

4 Thematic oral history: theoretical and methodological considerations

Section 3 explained how collective frames are knitted together through concrete narratives and nourished by other discourses. The current section analyses how these elements interact with life trajectories and explains the reasons for applying oral history methodologies. Section 5 will focus on our concrete case study, analysing how well the MGG collective frame and the MGG we-identity fare when they try to integrate diverse individuals, coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds and carrying infinite possibilities in terms of life stories.

9 Deconstruction can be understood, in a few words, as an effort to bring to the surface the assumptions and internal workings of language and conceptual systems that are often invisible or taken for granted.

10 Perhaps, the reason for this choice is that "frames" and "collective action frames" are perceived as too sociological and not fit enough to describe international phenomena, whereas the term "discourse" probably is perceived as misleading, either because it evokes pure rhetoric (and no action) or because it evokes, precisely, the post-constructivist (anti-systemic) debates fuelled by critical thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

There are many reasons why oral history constitutes a valid and useful approach to studying social phenomena. The first argument is that oral testimonies allow people that might be underrepresented in documents, public statements and other written sources to voice their opinions and perspectives on certain historical events or social arenas where they take part or play a role. A second argument is that people's subjective experiences and the meanings they attribute within specific social worlds render oral history valuable to understanding the rules and dynamics that prevail in them (Slim & Thompson, pp. 1-9). A clear example is *Voices of the Poor,* a project that was undertaken by the World Bank throughout the 1990s and that yielded several publications. The main goal of this effort was to reach a better understanding of the complex and multi-layered aspects of poverty conditions by listening to the stories and accounts of those who are directly affected but often underrepresented in official documents: the poor themselves.

The intention is, by no means, to suggest that MGG participants are poor (or mistreated as if they were poor). No matter what their socioeconomic background, most of them have achieved levels of wellbeing, education and professional development that are enviable. We are not trying to suggest that their voices are never represented either. In fact, there is plenty of room throughout the MGG Programme to voice one's own point of view and there are official documents that gather anecdotes and isolated testimonies, such as the discussion paper by Thomas Fues (2018). However, *Voices of the Poor* constitutes a good example of how documenting the subjective experiences that individuals have of certain objective conditions is useful for getting a more comprehensive understanding of a particular social phenomenon. It is a good example of how oral history can be employed for purposes that are tangible and easy to grasp for people working on international cooperation, development, global governance and related areas.

A third argument is that oral history is a qualitative methodology that offers a good way to embark on an initial exploration of a particular area of research, whether it pertains to a development problem, a concrete social and economic sphere or a policy arena.[11] Oral history might not be enough to confirm or refute hypotheses with a positivist mindset, but it helps identify general trends, possible causal mechanisms, dynamics and processes of change that may then be looked at through other methodological lens. This, in turn, may also contribute to identifying directions for future research.

Fourth and finally, oral testimonies reveal how people think and feel at a given point in time (Bertaux, 2005, pp. 51-52). They are useful to understanding how subjects structure their experience around the notion of time and the way in which actions, events, causal factors and variable contexts exert an influence on life trajectories (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 118). Oral testimonies help to sketch what happens when diachronic accounts intersect with synchronic

11 Some examples include my own work in two completely different areas: development and cultural studies. In the first case, I have gathered and analysed testimonies from people that were forcedly displaced by large infrastructure projects in Mexico, which is an example of a development problem in a concrete policy arena (see Domínguez (2018) and Domínguez and Chávez (2017)). Such work was inspired by previous research around the world, particularly a study by Bennett and McDowell (2012). In the second case, I gathered and analysed testimonies from independent theatre artists and producers to understand how identities and ways of theatre production have changed in the past two decades in Mexico (see Domínguez and López (in press)).

factors at different chronotopes. They describe situational logics that depend on objective factors but also on individual experiences and subjectivities (Bertaux, 2005, p. 19); if individuals act in one direction or take certain paths among many possibilities, this is based on both what is real and what is perceived as real.

This methodology is not devoid of criticism. For example, sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu (2011), have expressed scepticism about the possibilities of reaching general conclusions on the basis of individual testimonies. Rightly so, they argue that narrations do not automatically imply causality of historical events (Bourdieu, 2011; Dosse, 2011, pp. 198-201). Another criticism, closely related to the latter, is that oral historians often assume that a life story constitutes a coherent whole that is driven and organised according to a clear chronological order. The very notion of "trajectory" is deceptive because it invites us to think of a series of successive positions that are filled by the same person in a space that is constantly transforming itself and coming to being.

Indeed, there is a tension between the scientific aspirations of sociologists that work within a nomological model and the assumption by some historians that narrations and narratives are the only means by which to structure both history and our experience of time. And yet, we can reply to the aforementioned criticisms in ways that are relevant to the objective of this research. For a start, research findings that aspire to nourish sociological debates should not be based on one single interview but on a sample of them. Without being fully conclusive, it is the task of collecting and analysing a set of narrative interviews that allows us to find some cues on broader social dynamics. This effort in prosopography[12] helps in understanding how a set of individual experiences are structured on the basis of variable social backgrounds. In the words of oral historian Jorge Aceves (2017), every single interview contributes to assembling the source of information as a whole.

At the same time, oral testimonies should not be analysed in isolation. Any robust research requires many lines of evidence and, therefore, it is necessary to undertake some sort of methodological triangulation to validate data (Seale, 1999, p. 56). In our case, for example, narrative interviews were triangulated with two other sources: secondary bibliography, such as selected DIE documents, and my own participatory observation both during the MGG Programme in 2013 and as an active member of the MGG Network , particularly from 2016 to date.[13]

As a final consideration, we should mention that oral history constitutes a methodological approach that has many genres and various levels of ambition. On the one end, researchers may want to document comprehensive life stories, trying to understand every detail, in every single stage of a person's life, no matter whether it is related to childhood, education, family, love, professional career or other spheres of experience. This is by no means the aim of the research behind this discussion paper.

12 This concept refers to the task of collecting individual biographical traits based on life stories and analysing them in a timeline.

13 For reasons that pertain to my own personal and professional trajectory, I was not very active between 2013 and 2016.

The research for this paper rather situates its efforts within the area of *thematic* life stories. This entails that narrative interviews aim to include a long-term and retrospective view on the informants' overall life experience, but the analytical axis is always a specific theme: the MGG experience. Was it transformative, either personally or professionally? Did it make sense to become part of the programme, considering a longer-term perspective on the informant's professional trajectories? Do individual identities, aspirations and convictions intersect with a sense of belonging to the MGG? Is there anything to learn from these testimonies that might be helpful in identifying areas of opportunity and adjusting certain aspects of MGG in the future?

5 Case study: frames, identities and life trajectories among the Mexican MGG participants

Before carrying on, it might be useful to recapitulate the steps taken in previous sections. Section 3 clarified a number of interrelated concepts, including frames, discourses, narratives and collective identities. This was useful for identifying certain requirements that collective action frames and we-identities – such as the ones portrayed by MGG – should meet to be effective. A key question is whether a frame intersects adequately with and appeals to individual identities. Section 4 outlined some reasons why oral history is useful for understanding individual trajectories and identities. The current section looks at the evidence on how these two latter spheres interact. In other words, we need to ask whether the broad, malleable, umbrellas of collective frames and identities are able to fit in individual identities and trajectories – which tend to be more rigid – in a way that they indeed enable collective action (towards global governance and sustainable development).

As mentioned above, the MGG initiative takes into account a behavioural perspective on international cooperation. In other words, such an approach claims that individuals are much more prone to cooperating than traditional international relations realists or neorealists usually assume. Against the latter's assumption that cooperation will be continuously hampered by power struggles among different actors, behaviourists argue that experience in many different areas and throughout history testify that cooperation is part of our nature as human beings and that it may materialise if we enhance the right facilitators. Based on comprehensive research in behavioural science, anthropology and evolutionary biology, Messner et al. (2013, pp. 15-21) synthesise seven factors that enable cooperation in collective action problems: reciprocity, trust, reputation, fairness, communication, enforcement and, last but not least, we-identities.

It is not our aim to undertake a comprehensive and critical revision of the cooperation hexagon, but we should mention two aspects of it. The first one is the role attributed to we-identities:

> It is very important that we guess correctly which individuals are more likely to reciprocate.…One of the fundamental ways we do this is by looking for those who are somehow similar to us…[because]…we tend to cooperate better with those who believe in the same things we do.…[However]…similarity is something we actually build…[and therefore, cooperation requires that]…we learn and build joint narratives that reinforce our sense of belonging (Messner et al., 2013, p. 21).

In other words, just as we explained in Section 3 of this discussion paper, the task of constructing we-identities entails framing processes that implicitly provide good reasons to act jointly. Thus, even though the cooperation hexagon places reciprocity at its very centre (Messner et al., 2013, p. 16), cooperation will hardly happen if we do not identify with others. Put metaphorically, if reciprocity is the foundation of cooperation, we-identities constitute one of the pillars that hold the whole building together.

As explained above, a collective action frame feeds from different discursive streams and relies on concrete narratives that thread the complex fabric of identities (who we are) and intentionalities (what we want to achieve jointly moving forward into the future). To be effective, a collective action frame needs to be both flexible and familiar to potential adherents. For example, in the case of MGG, we can find three explicit pillars: international cooperation, global governance and sustainable development.[14] These tend to attract a broad group of individuals from emerging powers to join a network of professionals interested in debating and working – together with German and other European partners – towards the global common good in a context of continuous power shifts.[15] This does not mean that participants should agree on everything, for example, on a concrete and literal definition of global governance. Quite the contrary, having a loose notion of the meaning and importance of this kind of concept may actually serve to bring participants together.

Let's move to the second consideration. Based on a behavioural approach, the hexagon focuses on the factors that enable cooperation among individuals. Therefore, the key question when we talk about fostering cooperation to solve problems at the global level is how we can move up from individuals to national governments and then to the international and global levels. This is a challenge that has also been identified by Messner et al., (2013, p. 23). The main hypothesis is that those enablers that are part of the hexagon can actually be scaled up if we consider the dynamics at the meso level of international politics. The meso level includes international forums, such as multilateral institutions and global conferences, where individuals representing nations meet to exchange information, negotiate, cooperate and reach agreements.

The MGG Programme does aspire to build a broad network of professionals whose cooperation at the micro level can be scaled up to the meso level in ways that have (positive) inter- or transnational and global repercussions. Conditions that resemble those of the meso level are continuously replicated during the MGG; participants take part as individuals, but they commit themselves to go back to their institutions and play a role in promoting the three pillars of the MGG. Thus, to a certain extent, the long-term impact of the MGG

14 It may be argued that the MGG Programme has changed so much through time that the core pillars have also been transformed. Since the interviews conducted as part of this research included members from different MGG batches at different stages of the programme, it was considered that this was the best way to identify the common threads for someone that was part of the MGG in 2007 and for someone that participated after 2015, for example.

15 It may be argued that there are different views on what exactly the global common good is and, thus, that offering a space for such debate is one of the intrinsic goals of the MGG, even if this leads to certain disagreements among participants. However, it should be noted that, even in the context of differing views and perspectives, there is an abstract and aspirational concept – "the global common good" – that is supposed to work as a buoy to align the efforts of MGG participants and alumni.

Programme depends on how well individual motivations, which are shaped by complex life trajectories, intersect with national interests and broader global cooperation narratives.

In this way, the MGG Programme intends to and is considered to be successful in "supporting personalities in transforming into change agents" (DIE, 2019, p. 3). So, again, the key is to find meaningful "intersections" between individual trajectories/identities and the programme itself. There are a lot of unknowns and uncertainties that still need to be studied, but this is the point at which the frames and we-identities that were analysed in Section 3 meet with the life trajectories we talked about in Section 4.

What does the evidence tell us? For the purposes of this research, a number of narrative interviews were conducted to gather thematic life stories. At this point, the focus has been only on the Mexican participants and any conclusions drawn must consider that constraint. The main reason is that life stories tell very little if they are not contextualised within broader social, cultural and political contexts. In this respect, an effort to include in the analysis all the MGG nationalities would have required an ambitious research on the cultural and historical specificities of each partner country. At the same time, the number of interviews would need to be multiplied five or six times, amounting to a massive effort in terms of recording, transcribing and systematically analysing all of them. This task is not impossible, but it is beyond the resources behind and the scope of this discussion paper.

For the same reasons, it is important to mention that designing a sample that has any sort of statistical significance in the context of oral history research is usually very difficult. This is due to the fact that social phenomena that are viewed through the lens of this methodology may potentially involve large numbers of people, and narrative interviews imply so much effort and so much detailed material that the invested time outweighs any benefits from conducting additional interviews. In this respect, the aim was not to achieve statistical significance but to conduct a number of interviews that intuitively made sense, considering the size of the overall universe (Mexican MGG alumni to date). It was decided that interviewing a 10th of them was adequate for the purposes of this work.

The interviewees were picked in the following manner. First, the number of participants that had completed the MGG Programme by the time this research started (August 2020), as provided by Juan Carlos Mendoza, MGG alumni and current focal point of the MGG Network in Mexico, was 44. This number includes all the participants from MGG1 in 2007 to MGG17 in 2019. Thus, the number of interviewees was set at four.

Second, the names of individuals were drawn randomly a couple of times, until two criteria were met: none of the participants of MGG11 (i.e., my batch) should be part of the sample, so that I could get perspectives from other batches and from individuals whom I was not familiar with and there should be a mix of male and female participants, ideally two of each. Third and finally, I got in contact with the potential interviewees, explained to them the aims of the research and asked for the interview. Two of the originally selected individuals did not provide a definitive answer, so two more names were drawn. Given the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted virtually.

To achieve a more detailed understanding of a personal trajectory, comprehensive life stories may require around 10 interviews, each of them lasting several hours. However, thematic life stories can be built decently with one or two interviews, depending on the

specific topic to be covered. To meet our purposes, it was enough to apply one interview that lasted between one hour and one and a half hours in every case.

In this respect, there are three main differences between a short narrative interview and a simple semi-structured one. The first difference is the emphasis that oral history puts on the interviewees' narrative account of their experiences, in ways that are less predictable in comparison with the more direct answers that are usually provided in the context of semi-structured interviews. The second is an emphasis of the former methodology on the subjective experiences and individual perceptions in comparison with the focus on "objectivity" that other research tools may have. Third and most important, even though the thematic focus was the MGG, all interviewees were invited to give a longer-term account of their life trajectories, including childhood, adolescence and university years. They were also asked to talk about their family contexts and general backgrounds, including some anecdotes or events that they considered life changing. Exploring all of this was key to understanding how particular life configurations intersected with the MGG experience.

Taking into account the analytical building blocks that were developed in previous sections, the ideal scenario (from the MGG perspective) is one in which the distance between individual identities – shaped by life trajectories – is shortened with respect to the collective action frame and we-identity that underpin the MGG. Reducing the distance and putting the pieces together works like Legos, a game that offers many matching and mismatching possibilities.

How well has the MGG Programme and network performed in this respect? For a start, the metaphor suggested in Section 4 of life trajectories as "riverbeds" that are relatively fixed describes very well the life stories that were collected. There is a remarkable consistency in how family backgrounds, childhood and youth experiences, as well as professional aspirations, shape certain predispositions and ways of thinking about different subjects, including the discursive pillars of the MGG. As argued below, this does not mean that all MGG alumni think in the same way but that there are interesting identifiable patterns.

Even if this is not the original aim of the programme, there is no doubt that the MGG is most of the time subjectively perceived by participants as a sort of life-changing event,[16] and the reasons behind that perception are not necessarily coupled with dramatic turns in the willingness to modify professional paths and engage more actively in promoting global governance and sustainable development through international cooperation. In other words, any transformative experience depends to a greater extent on the baggage that each individual participant is carrying, on who they are in terms of *what* they have done in the past and *why*.

In other words, the exposure of participants to discussions about the three MGG conceptual pillars (i.e., international cooperation, global governance and sustainable development) does modify certain points of view, increase awareness of global problems and foster a sense of

16 The concept of "event" has become a subject of heated discussion in social science, philosophy, history and other disciplines within the humanities. Given that it is an essentially contested concept and that there are many edges to the debate, this work proposes the straightforward definition by the very unorthodox, neo-Marxist and critical intellectual, Slavoj Žižek (2014, p. 6), as "an effect that exceeds its causes".

belonging to the network, but this happens in various degrees that depend greatly on life trajectories previous to the participation in the MGG Academy itself. The programme hardly ever changes the core professional goals that were already there before a participant joined MGG. In fact, the main reasons why participants often consider the programme as a life-changing experience (or event) are more often related to the availability of professional opportunities right after graduating or to the opportunity that spending a few months in Germany offers to engage in a general reflection on one's place in the world, so to speak.

This is easier to understand if we get a taste of life stories and individual identities, so that they can be contrasted to the MGG collective frame and we-identity. In this respect, based on the ex post analysis of the evidence collected, I have initially identified three possible categories among MGG participants: (1) critical thinkers, who also resemble the notion of the *enfant terrible*; (2) neutral-passive people; and (3) convinced-active or "true believers" of transformative cooperation and change.

5.1 The *enfant terrible*

These participants do not necessarily stay away from the MGG Network. In fact, they can be very active and their proposals may constitute some of the most creative and innovative initiatives that nourish and revitalise the MGG tissue. However, their engagement is based much more on personal interests than on a true belief that global governance and sustainable development represent uncontroversial, achievable and/or worthy aspirations. They constantly question the assumptions behind these discursive streams, which are central to the MGG frame and we-identity.

Such critical stances do not come by accident. They are the consequence of concrete trajectories and family backgrounds, all the way from early childhood and teenage years. This is the case of our first interviewee, a 29-year-old Mexican participant who, with no doubt, represents a good example of the so-called *enfant terrible*. The following text is a transcription of his answer to the very first question, "who are you?":

> I am a very confused person. I studied International Relations…and I have various interests…but most of them spin around studying how the exercise of power influences discourses and behaviours…throughout different projects I have always tried to answer how power is exerted, who holds power [and why]…this kind of things…I don't remember a particular event that fostered these interests, but my mom was a sociologist and these issues were on the table since I was very young. She was always questioning [everything] and she taught me how to question myself…and I always thought that the most interesting is to question those things that are not visible, that is, relations of power. (Interviewee 1: "The *Enfant Terrible*", 2020)

This is just a taste of a particular way of thinking that appears consistently in different stages of his life trajectory. Take another example, the scepticism towards the discipline of International Relations:

> I am a little bit ashamed of what I am going to say now…but as a matter of fact, I knew I would study something within the social sciences…I knew that my interests lay somewhere there…and [International Relations] was the choice that would allow me [to achieve] two things: first, it seemed to me that I could play around it, given the fact

> that I was not very clear on what exactly I wanted to study; second, apart from IR allowing me the opportunity to do plenty of things, I knew that I wanted to live elsewhere once I was older…and such a career opened opportunities to work abroad.…In fact, I was very pragmatic and I wanted to keep doors open for the future….I am one of those persons that makes fun of people who want to be diplomats and work in the United Nations…so, [when I decided to study International Relations] I never had that sort of ambition….The only thing that I envisaged was to have a job that allowed me to be half of the year in Mexico and half of the year somewhere else. (Interviewee 1: "The *Enfant Terrible*", 2020)

The interviewee's account continues through different stages, including the time when the MGG Programme appeared in his life:

> While I was still finishing my undergraduate thesis, I was working with a researcher at my university and she showed me the invitation to be part of the MGG. She told me that I was the only one to meet the requirements and she said: 'I thought you might be interested'…. To be honest, I knew very little about international cooperation and I was as such not that interested…but it seemed a good opportunity to spend six months abroad and I was confident I could do it.…I feel that my decision was very similar to the time when I decided on what to study [for my undergraduate]….It was like: 'I don't really know what I want to do, but this sounds like a good opportunity to take some time and define my interests. Perfect!' (Interviewee 1: "The *Enfant Terrible*", 2020)

Has the MGG Programme made a difference in the life of the "*Enfant terrible*"?

> My experience in the MGG was very good….it was a very illuminating experience, not only because of all the people that I met – which probably everybody agrees about – ….but it was very edifying; I realised how much I already knew and I discovered that there were other topics where I could dig in, such as education for sustainable development….I built partnerships with some of my peers, even though [our projects] are not directly related with the international cooperation agenda (I think the agenda was the least I got interested in and the last I value from the whole experience…[the MGG] was more important in terms of individual things or parallel topics, rather than this whole thing around Agenda 2030.
>
> Before the MGG I was a bit more lost….[long silence]….I had fewer possibilities. I had fewer possibilities in my mind. In terms of my identity, the MGG gave me a lot of confidence….and this is the result of my time there and the interaction with my MGG colleagues….I realised that I could use all the things they were teaching me [in the MGG] together with the things I already knew. So, yes, it gave a lot of confidence, expanded my professional possibilities. (Interviewee 1: "The *Enfant Terrible*", 2020)

And finally, the key issues of our research: does the "*Enfant terrible*" agree with the discursive pillars of the MGG Programme? Does he feel represented by or attached to the MGG we-identity?

> The MGG showed me things I was not very aware of, such as international cooperation and many things about the United Nations. [Before the MGG] I did not really care about all these things and to date I am a bit more interested, but mainly to point out what is wrong….so, the MGG contributed to increasing my criticism. It is a sort of boomerang effect: they tell you something again and again and they repeat it so often that you say hmmm, no, wait a minute, if they are telling me all this so often, there is something that

> is fishy and, therefore, you become more critical….I am not saying that everything is wrong…there are also positive things about that discourse.
>
> I do not feel a strong MGG identity….I remember whenever they mentioned it, I would roll my eyes…. And I think it has to do with the fact that I do not share some of these dominant views on the world. I think that is the reason why they are dominant, because most of the people agree with them. However [the MGG identity] does not necessary cause me conflict. Or maybe sometimes, in some conferences…I either do not agree or I find it redundant or boring. But I also realised that the MGG Programme was the place where I met very interesting persons who were also very sceptical. So, I found an interesting niche…it is not that I reject the MGG identity, but I reject the generalities around such identity. (Interviewee 1: "The *Enfant Terrible*", 2020)

5.2 The neutral-passive participant

This type of participant may be very grateful to MGG organisers and recognise the impact that the programme has had in advancing their careers. However, their interests rest elsewhere, far from global governance or sustainable development debates. They acknowledge that they learned and became more acquainted with such topics during the MGG programme, and they are willing to implement those insights in their everyday life, but their professional career is situated far from the meso level of international cooperation. In this respect, the main difference in comparison with the *enfant terrible* is that their life trajectories have exposed the neutral-passive participants to a more conservative and less critical way of thinking. Their passivity towards the MGG pillars of international cooperation, global governance and sustainable development is not a consequence of their scepticism but of their very personal preferences, aspirations and professional interests.

The following text is a transcription of our interviewee's reply to the first question, "who are you?":

> I am from Puebla. I am 38 years old; I am very linked to the German culture because I studied at the German school in Puebla my last years of primary school and high school, and I had the opportunity to live in Germany twice before the MGG scholarship. I speak German and that is why I applied to be part of the programme, because of that close connection. I studied political science….and I have always worked in the public sector, all my life, since I graduated from university and until one and a half years ago….I have a family: a wife and two daughters. Together with my work as a public servant, I have always tried to nourish my academic side….I think that is the general outlook: someone who has worked in the public sector, who has connections to Germany, studied political science and international relations, and is devoted to *la grilla*[17]. (Interviewee 2, "The Neutral-Passive", 2020)

It is noticeable how two individuals with completely different life trajectories give contrasting answers to the very same question. Of course, the "*Enfant terrible*" and the "Neutral-Passive" belong to two different MGG batches and are at completely different

17 *La grilla* is an expression that is very unique to Mexican idiosyncrasy and is used to describe the world of politics, particularly partisan politics. It comes from the chirping sound that grasshoppers make by rubbing their legs and wings together.

stages of life when interviewed. And yet, both replies give a good hint of certain predispositions that are part of their identities. The "*Enfant terrible*" emphasises critical thinking right from the beginning when describing his identity; the "Neutral-Passive" stresses other, more basic (and conservative) descriptors (age, family, training and professional interests).

Let's go into more detail about the "Neutral-Passive"'s professional trajectory:

> my late father was a public servant and, therefore, ever since I was a kid I had the opportunity to join him while doing work visits around the state [of Puebla]…Saturday, Sunday, everyday….and I have no doubt that my calling, my interest [in politics] can be traced back to then….or rather, I would say, my inclination….In my last year of high school I undertook a vocational test and the results were clear: I was very focused towards the public sector….but my dad's influence definitely planted the seed.
>
> …ever since I studied at CIDE [Centre for Research and Teaching in Economics]…I remember I was interested in doing a political career…therefore, more than having specific [thematic] interests, I always intended to work for the government or rather to get involved with party politics.…I wrote my undergraduate thesis on the regional impacts of NAFTA after 10 years of being in place…at that time there were still questions whether NAFTA was beneficial or not – nowadays, I don't think there is a debate – …then, I made part of my social service at the Chamber of Deputies, in the area of public finances. (Interviewee 2: "The Neutral-Passive", 2020)

His professional path continued and the MGG appeared on the horizon:

> I got my undergraduate degree around 2005 or 2006. I studied two short diplomas, one on public policies for social development and one on project assessment.…I also started working towards a master's degree in Government and Economics, but I stopped my studies because I joined the MGG in 2007. I finished it afterwards, but I first completed the MGG.…To be honest, I had some international interests, but my focus was mainly on regional[18] politics, trade, migration and nothing else. MGG was an opportunity to broaden my horizon.…I was still at the Chamber of Deputies when I first found out about the MGG, even though I got the invitation through my contacts at CIDE, which I think was – or still is, I am not sure – one of MGG's partner institutions. We were [one of the earliest cohorts]; it was still a bit experimental. (Interviewee 2: "The Neutral-Passive", 2020)

Has the MGG made a difference in the life of the "Neutral-Passive Participant"?

> MGG has indeed had an impact in many ways. Professionally, it was more a short-term thing but that does not mean it was not significant, and, personally, there was an impact that will last throughout my life.…I always intended to engage in public life and party politics since I was a little kid. However, there was a course in the MGG that was taught over two weeks together with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs…and it was there where I met a very high-level Mexican diplomat who asked me to work with her [at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs] once I completed the MGG; thus, there was a clear impact because I went back to Mexico and I pretty much had a clear job

18 The interviewee uses the term "regional" but at this stage he is not referring to regional politics understood from a global perspective, but to local and subnational politics from a national perspective.

> opportunity. She was the Sherpa on behalf of Mexico for the dialogue between the G-8 and the G-5. For me, this opportunity was an important platform in many ways.…However, I was not there for a long time. Less than a year afterwards, I got another job offer and I decided to make a jump [and leave my job at the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs]. I remember that people at InWEnt kept asking me, "why did you leave the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs?"...maybe I was the best example of what they wanted to achieve [through the MGG] …but I explained to them [that I was more interested in doing a political career]. (Interviewee 2: "The Neutral-Passive", 2020)

Does the "Neutral-Passive Participant" agree with the discursive pillars of the MGG? Does he feel represented by or attached to the MGG we-identity?

> I changed my way of seeing many things and became acquainted with other cultural perspectives. I got a global outlook that I did not have before….[regarding sustainable development] I have never been a specialist, so the MGG increased my awareness of how important this topic is. I do remember that there were a few things that changed my own paradigm. For example, [before the MGG] I believed in the myth that the solution to environmental challenges would come mainly through technological changes and I remember that some MGG colleagues convinced me that technology was not enough.…I realised that our levels of energy consumption are a luxury.…Regarding global governance, I was a believer in the importance of regional and multilateral agreements, even when this means sacrificing a bit of each country's sovereignty.…so the MGG complemented my academic training in this respect.…Regarding international cooperation, I realised the importance of always looking for these kinds of opportunities…
>
> …until today, we keep in touch through WhatsApp, 85 or 90 per cent of us are still in touch. We write to each other very frequently.…To be honest, it's been 13 years since I was part of the MGG, and at least during the first eight years I was very much focused in the political dynamics at the local level, here in Puebla, and I did not participate very much with the Mexican MGG network. So, I keep in touch with people from my cohort, but I have hardly ever participated in the meetings or conferences that are organised by the network.…[And yet] I do feel certain identification to the MGG…there is gratitude, pride and a sense of belonging. (Interviewee 2: "The Neutral-Passive", 2020)

5.3 The true believer

To a certain extent, this kind of person constitutes the ideal participant from the MGG perspective. True believers have a strong background in political science and/or international relations, and they are interested in actively engaging in arenas related to global governance, sustainable development and/or international cooperation. Unlike the *enfant terrible* or the neutral-passive participant, their engagement at the meso level of international cooperation is determined much more by their convictions, rather than by their individual interests. They might be critical of certain aspects of the MGG and the discursive streams that nourish the programme, but their criticism is far less radical than that of the *enfant terrible*. Of course, they will also take advantage of new career opportunities, no matter where these arise, but they are also more willing to use any opportunity to tackle social and economic problems with a global perspective in mind. True believers feel a strong affiliation to MGG's we-identity and collective frame.

This is our "True-Believer" interviewee's answer to the first question, "who are you?":

> the first thing that comes to my mind is that I am a dreamer, a person who wants people in this world to live better, who has always focused in social projects and this sort of thing.…I am a person that loves her country and, you won't believe it but, the more I travel, the more I realise that even though Mexico may have many problems, it also has many good things to offer.…There are many things that should be improved, but there are many other things that are very good and we [Mexicans] do not even notice. I am not sure whether I would consider myself a citizen of the world because I feel very Mexican, but I also feel very comfortable whenever I travel abroad.…I would say that this is one of the reasons why I applied to be part of the MGG, because I like to live in a country for a little bit longer, at least four weeks, so that I can get an idea of people's behaviour, cultural values, their public transport.…I had lived in Norway and, therefore, when I applied to the MGG, I also wanted to understand how Germans live.…More recently, I have also been in China and Japan. Already in my undergraduate studies I was interested in comparative politics, both in terms of learning and cooperation. The question is: what is it that you do differently that works for you? And the other way around: what is it that I do differently that works for me?...I am 45 years old, I was part of MGG3 and I was born in Mexico City. (Interviewee 3: "The True Believer", 2020)

Again, right from the beginning, when the interviewee is asked about her identity, she emphasises social transformation, social projects, multiculturalism, as well as international and cosmopolitan concerns, much more than the "*Enfant terrible*" or the "Neutral-Passive" participant. Furthermore, the consistency throughout different stages of her life is remarkable:

> [I have been interested in social problems] ever since I was a little girl. Since I was an only child, I remember that school was very important for me. It was the main means I had for socialising, so education was always important for me. I remember some of my games as a child: I used to sit all my dolls and teddy bears together to teach them a class. I remember that the whole thing was very important for me; I wanted to teach them quality classes.…I was a small brat – four or five years old – and I always wanted to play the teacher.…I intuitively knew that education was vital for people to advance in life.…Let me share with you that my grandparents were farmers, and they came from a very poor area in Mexico. I knew that they were able to lift themselves from such conditions thanks to education…so, together with my desire to help others, all of these ideas were present ever since I was very young.
>
> …once I had to choose a career, I remember that I was doubting between international relations and marine biology. I liked both of these alternatives very much. So, I took a vocational test and the result was that I had aptitudes and I was equally prepared for both of them.…I eventually decided upon studying IR – you are going to laugh when you hear the reasons – because I saw one famous movie featuring Cantinflas,[19] *Su excelencia*, where he speaks about the importance of solidarity and cooperation among different nations.…I realised it was exactly what I wanted to do.…I considered the

19 Mario Moreno "Cantinflas" (1911-1993) was a famous Mexican comedian, mainly known by his candid white humour. His career lasted between the so called "golden period" of Mexican cinema in the 1940s and 1950s until his last movies were released in the 1980s. *Su excelencia* (1967) is indeed one of his most famous movies.

> other choice, marine biology, because I believed that future food sources would eventually come from the sea, so I wanted to do research on how to use ocean resources to feed people; but even in such case, I was driven by social concerns.…This is something that has always been present in my life, given my family background. (Interviewee 3: "The True Believer", 2020)

In this context, one may also question how the interviewee's life trajectory intersected with the MGG and whether and how the programme represented a change in her life:

> I heard about the MGG through CIDE because back then it was a partner institution…and I was very lucky that they chose me to join the programme, even though I was not that active in CIDE anymore. I guess the fact that I had been working on social projects and I was interested in education and fighting poverty played as factors in my favour…
>
> …[the MGG] was very important. Among other things, it helped me to get a job.…Given my own professional trajectory and my learning experience during the MGG, I became the expert in sustainable development at my office, once I returned to Mexico [to work at the Mexican Ministry of Social Development]….In any case, the main problem was that there were few links to international issues in the areas where I was working or perhaps my boss showed little interest…still, there was an important impact at the personal level. (Interviewee 3: "The True Believer", 2020)

Does "The True Believer" agree with the discursive pillars of the MGG? Does she feel represented by or attached to the MGG we-identity?

> I became even more aware of many things, including the role of my own country in the international arena; I also changed certain prejudices about Germany.…I am very grateful.…I got a more global panorama and an outward looking view, even though I am always thinking in ways to apply this knowledge in Mexico.…Some of the things that I once dreamed of became clearer thanks to the MGG…
>
> …I do feel part of the MGG Network and I sometimes regret that I cannot take part in many of the activities that they organise…at the very beginning [after graduating] I was very involved in training courses and these kinds of things, but little by little it became more difficult. However, I do want to take part and I do feel part of it. If you ask me, I wish I could have a stronger presence.…But I do feel part of the network. I always try to attend the events, whatever it takes, even if I need to get days off at my office. (Interviewee 3: "The True Believer", 2020)

5.4 A continuous and broader spectrum

It may be argued that the sample that was used for the purposes of this paper is too small and that undertaking more narrative interviews would lead to finding other characters and building additional participant types and descriptions. There are three replies to this possible criticism. First, the three types that have been proposed were constructed *ex post* based on the interviews, but also on other sources of information, including the author's own experience as a participant/observer in the MGG.

Second, doing more interviews and trying to construct more detailed categories would lead to the extreme case of turning each individual into a type of their own. In this respect, there

is nothing wrong with using a bit of sociological imagination to come up with a few generalisations that might be useful to reflect upon the overall MGG Programme and network. Third, and closely related to the last argument, the proposed types should not be taken as definite and rigid "three-sizes-fit-all". They are rather vertices that delineate the borders of a much larger spectrum, one which is not discrete but continuous. In other words, it is unlikely that the other participants will fit perfectly into one of the three proposed types, but it is also unlikely that they will be too far away from them.

To support this claim, it is worth sharing the evidence from a fourth interview. In this case, we find a participant that is somewhere between the true believer and the neutral-passive. The following text is a transcription of her answer to the very first question, "who are you?":

> Oh, my! Who am I? I am a very crazy person. I am a sort of adventurer, someone who has no fears – although fear sometimes appears somewhere there….I am very passionate about environmental issues.…I think that is who I am, basically. (Interviewee 4: "The In-Between Type")

Notice that Interviewee 4 offers the most straightforward answer to the first question which was consistently asked to all informants. However, a lot of meaning is packed in these few words. This includes a sense of independence and autonomy that is not completely abstract, theoretical or philosophical, but that is quickly accompanied by a concrete issue: the environment. In other words, choosing a development preoccupation as part of the individual identity resembles "The True Believer" and/or "The Neutral-Passive" much more than the case of the "*Enfant terrible*".

The following account offers a glimpse of her personal trajectory, which provides further details on the interviewee's family background, origins, socioeconomic mobility (similar to the case of "The True Believer") and professional interests, all of which are linked together:

> I was recently reflecting upon why I have such interest in environmental issues and it is precisely because of that [my family background and my early experiences since childhood]….as you know, water is very scarce in Monterrey and we depend on this resource for everything.…My dad always has had ranches and I have always liked that. Later in life I went to study in Mexico City, but I was always longing to go back to the *pueblo*[20]….I developed a sort of *ciudad-pueblo* [urban-rural] duality.…[My parents taught us] things that might now be very fashionable, but that were common sense back in those days, such as caring for things, not consuming very much, reusing clothes, the kinds of ideas that make sense to me because I always experienced them first-hand.…You don't need to go to university to know those things. They all know it in the *pueblo*….So, when I started working at SEMARNAT [Mexico's Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources] and I started working on the issue of sustainable consumption, it was not that alien to me.…I think that is the answer. It all comes from my experiences as a little girl…and then afterwards, when I began my professional career, I started following this path…

20 In the Latin American context, the word *pueblo* can have different meanings, including a political understanding of this word as the people of a country or a nation. However, in this context, it refers to a small rural town or settlement.

> …I am part of the first generation [in my family] that studied [a professional career], including my cousins. That is why we had ample margin to study whatever we chose. Thus, [when I was very little], I wanted to become a veterinarian, and I used to join my dad to work in his ranches, but I did not like it when an animal was killed. My dad used to tell me, 'you need to kill it, so that you look at the inside' and I said, 'no, thank you, I can't'.…So, when I had to choose a career to study, I failed – a bit on purpose – the exam to become an agrarian engineer...
>
> I was a bit lost…and I eventually decided to study law [because my mom always wanted to be a lawyer but she did not have the chance to study], but then changed to psychology in which I had always been interested [and I have always found paranormal phenomena fascinating and love the X-Files TV series and the main character is a psychologist]….So, I graduated and started working as a psychology expert in the criminal investigation unit. I liked that work, but things got ugly [because of the crime and violence situation in Mexico] and I had to drop out…afterwards, my dad helped me to get a new job and I started working with a Senator….One thing led to another and I ended up working in PEMEX [Mexico's state-owned oil company], in FIDE [Financial Trust for Promoting Energy Efficiency] and finally in SEMARNAT. (Interviewee 4: "The In-Between Type")

Eventually, a somehow sinuous path became clearer and the interviewee went back to work on environmental issues, her main interest since early years:

> My job at FIDE [between 2009 and 2011] focused on approving the proposals for energy-saving projects that were looking for financial support for up to a three-year period.…It was then that I started working on international projects because nobody else, except for me and my boss, spoke English.…When the Conference of the Parties (COP) in Cancun was coming, we started to receive information about the whole process and I was the one in charge.…Then, my boss was offered another job in SEMARNAT and she asked me to join her as part of her new team at SEMARNAT's Directorship for Sustainable Industry. (Interviewee 4: "The In-Between Type")

And the MGG appeared on the horizon, not as a first choice, but definitely as an attractive alternative in a moment of slight professional uncertainty:

> [While in SEMARNAT] I nurtured a very good relationship with GIZ. They used to send me all the calls and openings, among others, the invitation to be part of the MGG. I filled in the application and completed the process. My boss and mentor left her post in 2015 and, therefore, I did not fit anymore with the new team in SEMARNAT.…So, I started to look for a new job. By June, there was confirmation that I had been accepted to the MGG, but there was also a chance to become the general manager of an international trade company.…I asked myself: what should I do? Of course, had I gotten the job as general manager, I would not have joined the MGG.…But in the end, it happened the other way around. They did not offer the job to me, so I joined the MGG.…It was a very nice experience, even though it was different to other editions of the programme. (Interviewee 4: "The In-Between Type")

Has the MGG made any difference for the interviewee? As the interviewee explains, it did have an impact even though that impact should be understood in the context of a broader professional trajectory:

> I actually did not know, but all the work I had done [in SEMARNAT] on sustainable consumption and production, together with the German Cooperation and with the British Embassy was very relevant [in the context of the MGG]. I realised, while I was in the MGG, that some international meetings that I had joined before had actually been part of the opening working groups for Agenda 2030.…So, I am not an international relations expert, but it was just by luck that I ended up working on these kinds of issues and, to date, my work [on international aspects of environmental issues] continues in that direction.…For me, everything that I am doing right now starts with the MGG…this is true, even though the job that I got right after the MGG was offered to me due more to my previous experience in planning and management activities than to the MGG itself.
>
> If you asked me what impact the MGG has had on me…I would say that it is very important that they take you out of your ordinary context [to reflect upon all these things].…I do not know about other batches, but I remember that we used to finish the MGG sessions and we would spend hours talking about all the things that we have discussed [in the MGG Academy]. I remember that there was a very open atmosphere, even at the personal level.…It was good to be exposed to all these topics. Of course, there were many issues that were included as part of the programme, but I am not really an expert, such as fighting poverty. (Interviewee 4: "The In-Between Type")

What about the discursive pillars of the MGG? What about the MGG we-identity? By exploring these topics it is possible to find a mix of traits between the true believer and the neutral-passive. There is a strong conviction regarding the importance of certain topics (particularly sustainable development) and on strengthening a sense of collective belonging, but this is met with a bit more pragmatism than in the case of "The True Believer" analysed earlier:

> I am able to explain and talk about sustainable development because I have worked on the topic very much. I am also familiar with international cooperation because I have also done a lot in that direction. That is what I was doing during the five years I worked at SEMARNAT: sustainable development and international cooperation.…Regarding global governance [understood as a set of arrangements to tackle global challenges through more horizontal cooperation], I do think that the concept is important, but our batch was not very successful in grasping it. If we [the members of my batch] had all been in a boat, we would all be drowned by now.…We did not learn to talk among us [during the MGG Academy].…Still, I am convinced that there are many professional opportunities of which I have taken advantage more easily mainly due to the fact that the topic [global governance] was covered as part of the MGG.…Even if it is just implicitly, not very consciously, I do apply such notion…
>
> I participate in MGG activities very often, particularly in those that are organised in Mexico. I tried to be there all the time…regarding the we-identity, I do not know exactly what that means, but I do feel a sense of belonging to the MGG. In any case, I still feel that networking efforts in the MGG could be much better, particularly in the case of the Mexican MGG Network.…If we think that getting together once in a while is enough, we are wrong, it is actually not enough. We do not really know each other. I am very active because there are interesting opportunities here and there, but I wish there was more than just that. (Interviewee 4: "The In-Between Type")

6 Discussion and general conclusions

There is hardly any doubt that the MGG Programme represents a transformative experience for most participants in one way or another. Most documents, independent assessments and individual accounts attest to this fact. However, there are a few issues that are worth exploring, such as the shape and direction of individual changes and whether the MGG is framed in a way that participants "buy in" and are willing to devote time, thought and effort to work in the meso level of international politics and cooperation or not. Among other things, this endeavour requires analysis of how well the MGG collective frame and we-identity, both of which feed from concrete discursive streams (sustainable development, global governance, international cooperation) and agendas (e.g., Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, and the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement), speak to individual identities, which are shaped by life trajectories.

To tackle the previous issues, we have taken an innovative, methodological approach based on oral history methodologies. Thematic life stories were collected to understand how the MGG fits within broader and longer-term life trajectories and to get an idea of whether and how individuals feel comfortable with the we-identity and with the MGG's overall collective action frame.

Based on analysis of the testimonies, we have identified three types of MGG participants: (1) the *enfant terrible*, (2) the neutral-passive, and (3) the true believer. The interview excerpts presented above offer an idea of how informants string together stories that are relatively consistent throughout different stages of their lives, including the time they spent in the MGG. Of course, a closer look at the testimonies would reveal many contradictions, but this is part of how subjective experiences are usually recounted by informants. This is inevitable and does not affect the validity of their accounts.

It is also important to keep in mind that the three types are not discrete and exhaustive categories that encompass all possibilities. They are rather buoys or flags that mark the borders of a broader geography of personalities, identities and ways to string life trajectories together. More interviews might suggest cases that depart in different degrees from the proposed types, but it is likely that most participants are located somewhere along the spectrum of these three possibilities.

Thus, what have we learned? For a start, life trajectories are relatively difficult to modify and even though identities are continuously changing, they are also shaped by the former. As we suggested in Section 3, the answer to the question "who is this or that person?" depends to a great extent on the whats and the whys throughout their life.

In this respect, MGG's we-identity and collective frame are familiar and flexible enough to attract a broad and diverse set of professionals from different countries and backgrounds. Many people with training in political science or international relations and/or who are acquainted with development challenges would in principle agree that international cooperation is about achieving good or acceptable solutions for all parties, if not contributing to the global common good. MGG's we-identity and collective action frame may even work to nourish a certain emotional connection to the MGG's three pillars depending on the concrete circumstances of each individual. And yet, the participants'

longer-term commitment to the MGG Network will depend greatly on how these two elements fit within his or her broader path, both before and after joining the programme.

In the case of the *enfant terrible* types, their attitude is not necessarily openly confrontational. However, the key to understanding their behaviour is that their participation depends much more on individual interests and perceived professional opportunities than on convictions and true aspirations to work in favour of MGG's discursive pillars. It is an attitude that may be summarised as follows: they take whatever is useful and then, if opportunity allows, they will try to stay on their original professional path. This was the case of Interviewee 1.

Neutral-passive participants are willing to enhance their own transformational vocations and broaden their own outlook on global issues. If opportunities arise, they will take them temporarily, but they very often walk on paths that depart from international cooperation efforts. They are willing to air some criticisms, but they won't target the core assumptions of MGG. An example is Interviewee 2.

Finally, in the case of true believers, there is a sound overlap between the collective frame of the network, the we-identity and their own personal trajectories and identities. They will take advantage of any opportunity to participate and contribute inside (and outside) the network to global governance and sustainable development debates. This was the case of Interviewees 3 and 4 (although the latter might also have some traits in common with "The Neutral-Passive Participant").

Going back to the conceptual discussion on identity, it is important to mention that there is a long and extensive debate between academics who prefer a more sociological approach and those that prefer a more anthropological and "new social movements" perspective. Without getting into too much detail, the former see identity more as a precondition for collective action; that is, they consider it as a given that is difficult to modify and that should be in place *before* an individual engages in any group effort that strategically pursues certain goals. The latter see identity as something that is continuously in flux and constantly under construction. They claim that identity is actually built *through* action or, echoing Rancière (1992), they argue that an individual gets a political identity and becomes a political subject *through* participation rather than *before* participating.

As argued elsewhere, these two approaches are not necessarily incompatible (Domínguez, 2015b). There is no doubt that identities are built *through* action but each time the individual meets with a new decisive scenario (like being part of the MGG), he or she carries baggage that shapes a *given* identity at that particular moment. This means, as argued in this discussion paper, that even though identities are the result of a participant's life story and accumulation of life experiences, identities are in constant flux. In any case, it is just that such flux is like water constantly moving through a relatively fixed riverbed.

These last considerations are vital to understanding the possible consequences of our analysis for the MGG case study. The suggestion is not that individual identities do not change at all when participants join the MGG. Rather, the suggestion is that they can only change to a certain degree. If we imagine a continuum that goes from strong scepticism and criticism at one end (*enfant terrible*), to full enthusiasm at the other (true believer), and healthy distance in the middle (neutral-passive), it is possible to see how different types of participants always take advantage and get something out of the MGG Programme in a way

that the distance between their beliefs and the MGG's pillars is always shortened. However, the distance is much longer and sinuous in the case of the *enfant terrible* than in the other two cases and vice versa.

This mix of various types of participants, with different kinds of involvement and commitment to the MGG, does not necessarily speak of a training programme that is ineffective and does not suggest that selection processes are deficient. On the contrary, the diversity of participants in terms of age, culture, professional paths and general backgrounds constitutes a big asset for the MGG Network. Imagine, for example, a world in which all MGG participants belonged to the *enfant terrible* type. Nobody would agree with each other, everybody would keep deconstructing each other, discussions on global governance would be fully substituted by discussions on power distributions and shifts, the three pillars would be openly questioned, Agenda 2030 would be thrown out of the window, and the sustainability of the network would be seriously compromised in the longer term.

But on the other hand, in a world in which all MGG participants were true believers, participants would have different points of view on specific questions but agree on many fundamental issues, with few critical stances towards certain international discourses or instruments (like Agenda 2030). Discussions at the MGG Academy would probably be less interesting. Everybody would be happy and cultural differences would not offer any "advantage for cooperation" (Brigg, 2014) and mutual learning.

The three types of participants contribute significantly to the richness of the MGG. The true believer tends to highlight the positive aspects of certain concepts, such as sustainable development and international cooperation. The neutral-passive tends to draw links between the MGG pillars and other spheres, such as local politics or national interests. The *enfant terrible* fulfils an important role while he is participating actively in the MGG galaxy because his critical views, no matter how radical, offer different perspectives that can be taken into account by true believers or neutral-passive participants. Moreover, if he finds incentives that echo his very own personal interests, if he is equipped with the right tools and if his efforts are channelled properly, the *enfant terrible* might come up with some of the most interesting, creative, and high-impact initiatives, nourishing and adding real value to the MGG Network. As Termeer & Koppenjan (1997, p. 84) argue, "only a confrontation with other perceptions can create the opportunity for change".

To think of MGG participants as a broad universe that is divided into three types is only a schematic and conceptual way to organise the evidence after looking at it through the lens of oral history. However, this schematic view resonates with the data presented in other discussion papers. Fues (2018), for example, confirms that "the programme has consistently achieved the intended alumni share of 25 to 30 per cent in all activities". In this respect, does it make sense to think that one third of the alumni actively participating on average could actually respond to a mix of many true believers, a few neutral-passives, and just one or two *enfant terrible* types showing up each time? Of course, many factors explain the level of participation in MGG conferences and activities, from personal agendas to logistical obstacles, among other things. However, mathematically speaking, the numbers seem coherent with the division suggested in this discussion paper.

Thinking into the future, there is no doubt that the MGG Network will create more opportunities for global cooperation among alumni, partner institutions, MGG friends and

short-term allies. The potential to realise the long-term vision of a system of knowledge-cooperation could also be within reach. However, realising that vision will require consolidating a network that is stronger and that continues to turn a diverse set of perceptions, identities and sociocultural configurations into valuable assets.

In this respect, analysing the network through the lens of oral history has shown different ways in which individual life trajectories intersect with the MGG. It is up to the DIE team and partner institutions to reflect on ways to continuously improve the programme so that the MGG frame and narrative resonate within different life trajectories and vice-versa, so that individual identities feel comfortable, contribute to building a collective sense of belonging and are willing to participate and promote the pillars and ideals behind the MGG.

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