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World Water Forums, Knowledge Production and the Imagined "Global Water Community"

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Abstract: The World Water Forums (WWFs), organized every three years by a host country and the World Water Council (WWC), gather a large number of diverse stakeholders and address multiple water issues. Various global knowledge networks intersect at the forums and shape the knowledge that is being produced. The article examines the (re)production of knowledge at WWFs and first analyses the extent and nature of the inclusiveness claimed by the forums. It then shows how the idea of a "global water community" is weakened by the contested legitimacy of the WWC and partly defeated by systemic sociological factors, active management of the status quo, and organized dissent.

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1   Introduction

There is considerable power in structured ways of seeing (Hajer, 1995)

Since the Second World War, growing problems, such as access to water and sanitation services, water quality degradation, or the social and environmental impacts of large-scale water infrastructure, have become ubiquitous globally. These challenges have spurred numerous "Global Water Initiatives" (Varady et Iles-Shih, 2009), including the formation of professional societies, the rise of intergovernmental organizations, and the hosting of large-scale water conferences (Biswas and Tortajada, 2009; Gleick and Lane, 2005; Varady et al., 2008). The Mar del Plata UN Conference on water in 1977 is seen as having been a major benchmark, along with the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin and the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro—both held in 1992. The Stockholm Water Week (since 1993) and other professional meetings, including UN initiatives (UN-Water, WWAP), have further fueled international exchange and the emergence of an epistemic expert community around water problems (Conca, 2006).

The idea of a World Water Council "by which water specialists in various constituencies, such as governments, international bodies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector bodies, could co-operate" was first floated in the Dublin declaration (IRC, 1992). During the VIII World Water Congress held in Cairo in 1994 by the International Water Resource Association (IWRA), its then president, Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, was appointed head of an Interim Founding Committee/World Water Council (Coulomb, 2016). A meeting in Montreal produced the "Montreal Initiative"—a report detailing the missions, objectives, and funding modalities of a council tasked with "promot[ing] awareness about critical water issues at all levels, including the highest decision-making level" (WWC, 1995). In 1996, Abu-Zeid nominated René Coulomb of France and Aly Shady of Canada as vice-presidents; the 10 constituent organizations voted to set up a headquarters in Marseille and the World Water Council was legally established. The same year, the Global Water Partnership (GWP) was founded to coordinate the various water-related, technical-assistance programs sponsored by the UNDP and the World Bank and to foster the principles of Integrated Water Resource Management (Abu-Zeid and Lum, 1997).

Initially declaring itself "the international water policy think tank," the WWC was charged with organizing World Water Forums (WWFs) to convene "participants from all levels and areas, including politics, multilateral institutions, academia, civil society, and the private sector, among others" (WWC, 2021a). Nine forums have been held so far: in Marrakesh (1997), The Hague (2000), Kyoto (2003), Mexico (2006), Istanbul (2009), Marseille (2012), Daegu (2015), Brasilia (2018), and Dakar in 2022. WWFs include a set of thematic sessions and various parallel regional and political "processes."

The WWC follows three imperatives, "bringing people together, exploring, and discussing" (WWC, 2013), and is arguably doing an original if not unique job in convening a variety of decision-makers and politicians in addition to water experts. It also aims to "deepen knowledge and exchanges around critical thematic issues" (WWC, 2013), "create new synergies among stakeholders that lead to innovative solutions," "foster political will and commitment," "position water at the top of the global political agenda" (website), and "build bridges" between actors.

The objectives sound inherently good and desirable, as if concentrating expertise and fostering interaction were tantamount to producing universal and uncontroversial knowledge and policies. This is reinforced by the use of vocabulary suggesting unity and broad consensus: the WWF "imposes itself as the key meeting place for the *Water Family*," "WWC members represent all horizons of the *global water community*" (website), while the "Water Council acts as a strategic vector to unify and give a

strong voice to the *water community*," because "the voice of water is often not heard" (WWC, 2013) (emphasis added).

Yet, knowledge has long been shown to be imbued with power rather than neutral (Foucault, 1980; Turnhout). Indeed, other WWC/WWF objectives include "generating political influence and mobilizing political action" (WWC, 2019), as well as "provid[ing] advice and relevant information to institutions and decision-makers on the development and implementation of policies and strategies for sustainable water resource management." This prompts questions as to what "change" is being catalyzed, what "solutions" are being found and promoted, what "knowledge" is being exchanged, what "advice" is being "provided to decision-makers", and what "water agenda" is being "advanced," to use expressions commonly found across the WWC's website and strategy documents.

Here, we understand knowledge production not just as a science project but also as "a political project, a project in ordering the world" (Miller and Wyborn, 2020), and the *qualities* of knowledge not to be intrinsic properties but, rather, "determined in context and shaped by the processes of interaction involved" in its production (Turnhout et al., 2019). We focus on two complementary facets of knowledge production by the WWC and its events (the WWFs) that constitute its *raison d'être* and the bulk of its activity. First, we examine the inclusiveness of the WWFs as a prerequisite of the effective hybridization or co-production of knowledge. Are WWFs really inclusive? Do they "deliberately include people, things, ideas, etc. from all sections of society, points of view, etc." (Oxford Dictionary, 2021)? Or are they a kind of "Water Davos," with barely a nod to civil society representation? What water knowledge is (re)produced at WWFs, and what mechanisms enhance or impede hybridization? Second, we look at the constitution of the WWC and how it impinges on the nature and legitimacy of the knowledge produced by the WWC/WWFs (Cash et al., 2002). If water is "politics," as commonly stated, it is important to examine how WWFs contribute to the (re)production of particular knowledge and worldviews and to locate power within these seemingly consensus-building water conferences.

This article is based on research conducted throughout 2021 that included a literature study, a review of WWFs and the WWC, semi-structured interviews with 14 water experts with inside knowledge of the WWC (most are former officials, governors, or members) with a duration of 1-3 hours, and the collation of WWF programs into a database of sessions held from Kyoto (3rd) to Brasilia (8th). The 3985 sessions recorded were classified by title, process, topic/sub-topic, and coordinator/convener. Quotes were anonymized and sources referred to by a number.

We start by providing some theoretical background on the production of global knowledge (Section 2) and then examine "who talks about what" at the WWFs (Section 3). Section 4 explores the WWFs' structural dimension of inclusiveness, while Section 6 shows how the WWC's disputed legitimacy and internal governance weaken its claim to inclusiveness. Last, drawing on Bourdieu and Hajer, Section 6 opens a wider discussion of how WWFs enact an imagined "global water community," the direct and indirect mechanisms that limit inclusion, and the eventual irreconcilability of the roles of gatekeepers and global conveners.

2   Knowledge networks and the production of knowledge

Scholars often point to the emergence of new forms of authority at regional and global levels that challenge, or exist alongside, nation-state processes (Stone, 2008). Some (e.g. Pahl-Wostl et al., 2008) make the case for global water governance, since the cross-scale and cross-sectoral linkages manifest in issues such as climate change, food production/shortages, or biodiversity loss pose global challenges. Conca (2006) also sees global governance as constituted by "governing acts," such as policy framing, standard setting, resource mobilization, and the formation of a "body of official knowledge" that are partly global.

Scholarship has long explored the relationship between power and ideas/knowledge (Foucault, 1980; Béland, 2010; Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016) and pointed to the centrality of knowledge producers

such as the World Bank (Mehta, 2001; Nay, 2014). More recently, it has documented and analyzed the role of transnational networks in policy, emphasizing the importance of the production and dissemination of ideas, concepts, and knowledge in the policy process that they often seek to influence. The literature offers a variety of network concepts, such as "epistemic community," "policy community," "transnational advocacy network" (Stone, 2002), transnational "discourse coalitions" (Hajer, 1995), and "global public policy network" that tend to come under the more general term of "global knowledge networks" (GKNs) (Stone, 2004). Knowledge actors typically include development banks or agencies, foundations, think tanks, experts and research institutions, professional associations, UN bodies, NGOs, and even corporations, consultancy firms, and pressure groups/lobbies. The boundaries of a particular GKN, and between the different types, are often fuzzy, and GKNs may overlap or intersect. While all, to a varying extent, seek to influence policy, they differ in their membership, axiological premises, and degree of institutionalization.

There is insufficient space here to examine the different types of GKN in detail, but certain key aspects should be noted. Networks can achieve more than individual organizations in terms of media attention, fundraising, knowledge dissemination, legitimacy building, norm spreading, and transforming specific narratives into common wisdom (Stone, 2002, 2004). Hence, their discursive power and ability to influence which knowledge is selected, made dominant and sometimes, hegemonic and/or institutionalized. Goldman (2007) states that transnational policy networks "have converged to create what they describe as a 'global consensus' on water."

Knowledge actors and networks can coalesce as a "discourse coalition," sharing "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (Hajer, 1995). The extent to which knowledge production and dissemination affect discourses and decision-making is poorly understood (Daviter, 2015). The mechanisms through which knowledge "creeps" into the policy process needs to be analyzed over a time span of 5-10 years or more (Weiss, 1993). Indeed, how transnational, epistemic communities, advocacy and discourse coalitions, and lobby groups are instrumental in shaping knowledge production, framing the agenda, and influencing policy processes largely remains—in the water domain—unchartered territory. Notable exceptions include work by Conca (2006) and Goldman (2007), and that of Bukowski (2017) on Spain/Portugal and Meijerink (2005) on Dutch coastal flooding policy, although not transnational in scope. Cognate fields of research include policy transfers (Mukhtarov, 2021) and policy entrepreneurship (Huitema and Meijerink, 2017).

WWFs could be seen as events where different types of knowledge mingle, global knowledge networks intersect, and social learning happens as a result. Sustainability science and the governance literature have promoted the value of "integrating" worldviews and promoting inclusiveness (Lemos et al., 2018). Yet, this normative aspiration has been criticized as too instrumental and as obfuscating "the inevitable power differences and political conflict in and among scientists, communities, and others with an interest in local or global outcomes" (Miller and Wyborn, 2020). STS/feminist critiques have been suspicious of "integration" and dominant forms of knowledge, calling for hybridized knowledge, for creating *coordinations* (Mol, 1999), and recognizing the plurality of ontologies (Jasanoff, 2004). Whether hybridization is achieved by inclusiveness at WWFs is uncertain, because participation in networks is often "informally restricted and regulated through boundary drawing discourses by the network to exclude or devalue indigenous or protest knowledge that does not conform to technoscientific criteria" (Stone, 2004). More generally, transnational networks may create "a boundary drawing discourse that defines who and what is to be considered inside and outside the community […]. The specific vocabulary and jargon, the speech and meeting rituals etc. create possibilities for the professionals who master them" (Krause Hansen et al., 2002: 111 in Stone, 2004).

3   World Water Forums: a diversity of actors and topics

The inventory of the conveners/co-ordinators of all sessions (thematic, regional, side-events, processes) for WWF3 to WWF8 yielded 1030 actors for a total of 3985 sessions. As the WWFs have sought to increase the number of coordinators, we have arbitrarily taken only the first two into account whenever there were more than two. The 1030 session coordinators were then grouped into 15 categories and further pooled into five main classes (inspired by those used by the WCC to organize membership). Together with their relative contribution, these are: *International* (UN, development banks, international initiatives, etc.) (29%), *Academic* (research, universities, associations, think tanks) (27%), *Government* (governmental or public bodies, bilateral cooperation agencies, etc.) (18%), *NGOs* (national and international NGOs, foundations) (16%), and *Business* (corporations, business associations) (11%). As expected, with the exception of WWF7 in Daegu, the government category is strongly skewed towards bodies belonging to the host country. There have been some moderate shifts in these categories over time, particularly with regard to the weight of UN bodies (stronger between WWF5 and WWF7) and a decrease in government bodies from WWF5 onwards.

The top five session coordinators were IWA, UN-IHP, UNESCO, GWP, and the World Bank, each totaling between 23 and 35 sessions. If we take the top ten session coordinators of each of the five main themes, we observe significant dominance by international bodies (25 sessions, including 15 headed by the UN and 7 by development banks), international NGOS (IUCN, Wetlands International, WWF, Action contre la Faim [ACF], etc.), government bodies and others, including GWP, INBO, IWA, ICID, and SUEZ. It is striking that the core of the agenda is managed by national and international organizations, a few professional associations and think tanks, and large green NGOs, which receive substantial corporate or public funding.

Similar categorization was carried out for the session topics. Over one third (37%) of the thematic sessions fell in the *Governance* category. Next, the *Resource & Technology* category attracted 25% of the sessions, while *Social* (18%), *Economy* (14%), and *Environment* (6%) had a smaller share of sessions. The proportions proved to be relatively stable from WWF3 to WWF8, with some variation for *Resource & Technology* (28% in Daegu but only 18% in Marseille).

Topics were also grouped by water-use category. While 58% of the sessions were general in scope (not linked to a particular use), 22% were related to the WASH sector against only 6% to agriculture (although this may also have been addressed in "general" sessions), 4% for industry and transportation, 3% for environmental services, 3% for recreational/spiritual use, and 2% for energy. The pre-eminence of WASH reflects the importance of this issue globally, but also, perhaps, the history of the WWC as initially linked to the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council. Overall, there is a preference for sessions with broad headings that allow diverse contributions.

Finally, we investigated the relationship between actors (coordinators) and topics (Figure 2). We found that the five categories of actor are relatively well distributed across our five main topics (the exceptions including no corporate actors involved in sessions on environmental issues and little on social issues, and NGOs rarely involved in issues related to water as a resource or technology).

Figure 1: Relationship between session coordinators and topics (WWF3 to WWF8)
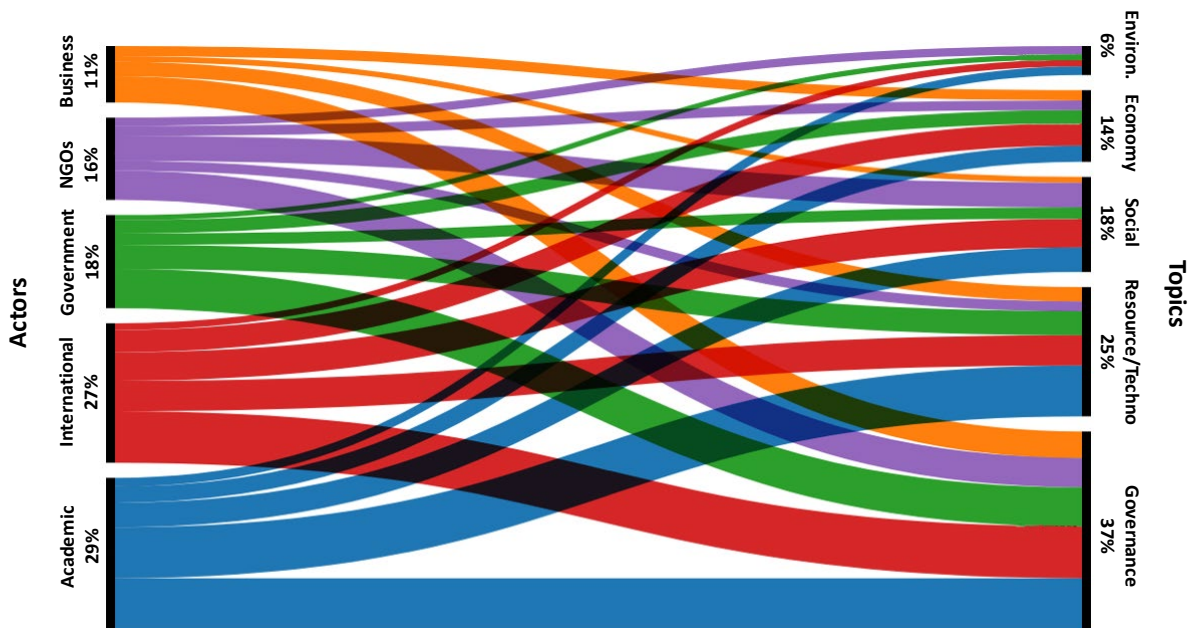
4 WWFs, inclusiveness and the hybridization of knowledge

The diversity of WWF participants and themes suggests broad inclusiveness, but further qualitative investigation is needed into how the programs are designed and who actually participates. In this section, we first review the actors' strategies and decision to be involved in the WWF. We then focus on the preparatory process in which the WWFs and their content are shaped. Finally, we look at civil society involvement both in the forums and outside, through alternative initiatives.

4.1 Why actors participate

The WWFs' degree of success in terms of inclusiveness is primarily influenced by the agendas of those in attendance and what pushes them to participate. As mentioned earlier, the forums' networking opportunities are the principal motivation for water professionals to take part (our interviews; Newton, 2014). One interviewee explained that when "you attend two or three forums, you know the principal organizations in the sector. For my work, it has been a great springboard because I built an enormous address book" (2). "A great number of people go to the WWF. For us it is a means to meet partners and establish contacts with the global water community because we are all assembled at the same time in the same place" (14). As expressed by one participant, "it's great; *everyone* will be there!" (our emphasis). Another saw the WWF "a bit like a commercial fair that is of interest to those with money to spend." But there is also a "Darwinian aspect" (7) to the process, whereby water actors need to continuously prove their relevance and strengthen their image, in particular vis-à-vis donors or potential competitors. "There is a kind of pressure to be there despite all the criticism" (11).

A second motivation is the belief that "the heart of the forum is advocacy; it is about advancing water agendas" (8). Some actors get involved in the forums and/or the preparatory process to ensure that their point is prominent and heard (14). However, only a minority of the interviewees mentioned the main motivation to learn or broaden their knowledge.

There are also disincentives to participation. When delegates assess the return on their investment, "there is a kind of post-forum blues. People are tired. What a waste of energy for something where you can't tell the difference between before and after." The forum in Korea, for example, was very disappointing, because "it was closer to a trade fair, with a hyper-technological dimension, green-

washing all over the place" (12). For some, however, it is important "to have a certain patience and tenacity in international processes because, somewhere along the line, from one event to the other, the messages end up seeping into international discourse" (12). Thus, strategic considerations, such as advocacy opportunities, media visibility or funding, play a significant role in the decision to take part.

4.2   The preparatory process

The structure and content of the forum in general, and the thematic sessions in particular, are the result of a two-year preparatory process (5) that is "as important as the forum itself" (3). Indeed, two years in advance of a forum, a kick-off meeting takes place in which the previous forum is reviewed. The attendees (mostly WWC members) are invited to propose priority themes for inclusion in the next forum (12), and here, and in subsequent meetings, the organizing committee selects the main themes and session coordinators (1). The latter "define the general orientations at their level, supervise the work" (French Water Partnership, 2018). Each session has several coordinators so as to mix the areas of expertise and promote exchange (5). Those wishing to be coordinators answer calls for applications (12). "Governors are called upon to draw on their circle of friends to feed possible sessions or discussions, papers, and themes" (5). Organizations unable to attend can still participate through online consultations (3). One source felt that the process "should be a moment of dialogue between stakeholders who have knowledge and expertise, but not only them" (4), suggesting that effort is needed to avoid the dominance of expert input. However, "there are still arrangements to ensure that people who are going to fund the forum, such as development banks, are present" (12).

The preparatory process is supervised by an International Steering Committee (ISC) composed of members from the host country (50%) and the WWC (50%) (2). The commissions responsible for each process include at least three members from the host country and three from the WWC (10). Depending on the host country, there is a "learning process" to go through, as some countries "have never experienced multi-stakeholder processes" (5). "The role of the WWC has grown with each forum, and, little by little, it has become a working partner in these processes with the hosts" (4).

The city and country that host (and finance) the forum have a central role in its organization and content; for example, South Korea proposed a "Science & Technology Process" for the forum in Daegu. Local politics can make things messy—disagreements between the mayor of Mexico City and the Mexican president, between Istanbul and Ankara, between Paris (the ministry) and Marseille (5), and between the various host cities in Korea. There are also language barriers and cultural aspects: "Japan is a country where everything must be under control."

Some actors "make sure they are always present at all stages [of the process] because it is precisely in these preparatory meetings that the themes to be discussed will be selected, hence the importance of being present as far upstream as possible, so that the issues that interest us are well represented" (3). During a preparatory meeting in Monterrey, Mexico in 2005, 150 sessions had to be selected out of the 550 registered. The organizing committee had already completed the first screening and eliminated sessions that were "i) too technical ii) too local iii) [and had a] low capacity to convene," and quotas had been set up for NGO-led sessions (Lui, 2008).[1] The ministerial or official declarations are important, and thus so is contributing to their drafting: "If there are 10, 20, or 30 heads of state, it gives a whole new political dimension to the event. So we must not miss the boat in terms of advocacy" (14). For others, it is a matter of "influencing the Dakar WWF to influence the 2023 UN conference [planned in New York]" (14). Haas' (2002) observation that "Governments generally closely follow the preparatory activities [of the UN conference] in order to assure that they are not confronted with any unpleasant political surprises at the actual conferences" has some wider relevance here. It is also

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[1] Participants of the meeting were allowed to review those eliminated and bring them back for reconsideration. A representative of the Freshwater Action Network brought back several NGO presentations, including the Sarasvati Research Centre, Lokayan and the South Asian Network on Rivers and People. Rescuing these sessions was difficult because there was a quota of five NGO sessions for the 4th Forum (Lui, 2008, based on Morley, 2005).

during the preparatory process that key documents presented to the forum are prepared. This is a major way for dominant global actors to influence the content of the debate (more on this later).

The preparatory phase should allow civil society an opportunity to highlight and defend their causes. Yet, while, in principle, everyone can participate, in practice there are important nuances (Turnhout et al., 2020; Stone, 2008). The question of funding is crucial: an organization wishing to take part in the thematic preparations must "ensure that it is backed with funding" (8). It must also have representatives with the time and ability to articulate, in English (or French), a discourse compatible with the process. As so few organizations have the resources to participate fully, a selection mechanism automatically operates. One solution for NGOs is to come together as platforms or coalitions, such as the Freshwater Action Network and The Butterfly Effect, which is involved in "prepar[ing] messages from NGOs from different continents based on regional consultations" (5).

4.3 What space for civil society?

Despite NGOs being present and active in the preparatory process, they do not represent all civil society concerns. Moreover, their level of influence has varied over the years. In contrast to the Marrakesh inaugural forum, limited to "three solid days of speech in plenary" (Lane, 2009), in The Hague, "the Dutch Government had ensured that every conceivable water-related subject was aired and all viewpoints welcomed […] The main debating points were on the role of the private sector, on the politics of dams, and on balancing the economic and the social value of water" (ibid.). The Kyoto Forum did not allow these debates to be revisited, but opposition from the social justice movement mainly took the form of slogan shouting (ibid.), in particular against the "Camdessus report" on financing.

The Mexico Forum included the Citizen's Water House—"an all-inclusive space for frank and respectful debate between all water stakeholders, in particular civil society groups" (WWC, 2006a), where initiatives such as Maud Barlow's Blue Planet Project or Spain's *Nueva Cultura del Agua* foundation could be heard. Coordinated by the International Secretariat for Water and a few other actors (3), this space aimed to enhance civil society participation, as well as hosting the International Water and Film Event. Yet its limited profile is suggested by the fact that the 192-page final report published at the end of the 5th Forum in Istanbul devoted only half a page to it, with the mention that the conference room had 75 seats (WWC, 2009).

Directly accused by the president of the United Nations General Assembly (D'Escoto Brockman, 2009) of being "profoundly influenced by private water companies" and failing to reflect the dominant view against water privatization, the WWC took steps to overhaul its preparatory process en route to the Marseille Forum of 2012, substantially involving civil society (Subramaniam, 2018; Baillat, 2013). 3500 representatives of NGOs and civil society are said to have participated in the 6th Forum, including The Butterfly Effect, a coalition of 90 NGOs, which delivered a clear message about the implementation of the right to water (Baillat, 2013). The forum included a new process titled "Grassroots/Citizenship" aimed at "rooting the 6th World Water Forum in local, national, regional, and international realities, and supporting citizens' solutions" (World Water Forum, 2012). Subsequent forums in Korea and Brazil took this forward, naming it the "Citizen Forum Process."

Over the course of the WWFs, a number of practices or principles have become institutionalized. Regarding the inclusion of civil society, for example, "at first you had to push the door a little to be able to enter and now it has become something normal. We can no longer afford not to do it. [Initially] the major national and international policymakers did not see the use of such a diversity of actors" (5). The WWC now requires applicants to include a chapter on civil society engagement (5).

The organizers usually subsidize the participation of some smaller actors who may not be able to afford to attend. Following the forum in The Hague, and in a bid to address the bias towards the private sector that then made up half of the Council's membership, the WWC launched the (modest) "Grassroots initiative." Recruiting six grass-root NGOs active on water and gender issues by granting a year's free

membership was an important response to the criticism regarding inclusiveness that had so threatened the image and identity that the WWC sought for the WWF. In Marseille, "eventually, it was the forum that invited NGOs by paying for the trips to set up an AWF [Alternative Water Forum]. There was a deal that they would still come to the forum" (12).

Yet, there may be a gap between plan and reality. Dubbed "the forum of disappointments" by the Coalition Eau (2015), the "7th World Water Forum [in Korea] initially stated its intention to involve civil society, notably by organizing a Citizens' Forum and financial support for partners from the South. [But] the Citizens' Forum was a total failure: located in the city of Gyeongbuk, while the heart of the forum was in Daegu, it remained hopelessly empty all week" (ibid). In addition, "financial support was limited and difficult to access, which did nothing to facilitate real civil society participation." Likewise, the Butterfly Effect coalition "deplored the failure of the support mechanisms jeopardizing inclusive participation."

The next forum, in Brasilia, "made efforts to mark its openness to civil society by balancing the representation of different actors in each session, organizing a Citizens' Forum, which proved to be very dynamic (100,000 visitors according to the organizers), and, finally, providing financial support to allow the attendance of civil society organizations" (Coalition Eau, 2018; PSEAU, 2018). However, the sponsorship system proved to be "very limited and […] largely inadequate. On the one hand, the sponsorship criteria (focusing on foreign and non-OECD countries) were not applied at the time of selection. On the other, about 10% of those selected never received a plane ticket or visa."

4.4   Dissenters and Alternative Water Forums

Organizations that choose not to participate in the WWF may opt to contribute to or support a parallel event: the Alternative Water Forum (AWF). The first of these, the "People's Water Forum," was held in Florence, Italy to coincide with the Kyoto Forum in 2003. According to one interviewee, "the framework of the alternative forums is much more flexible than that of the official forums, and very enriching debates take place" (3).

Two types of actor attend these parallel events (1, 11, 12, and 14). Firstly, there are the organizations that participate only in the AWF, for example the NGOs Food and Water Watch and International Rivers. And secondly, there are those that attend the alternative forum in addition to the official event. Another interviewee explains the difference between "grassroots associations—those that are citizen-oriented, alternative, and anti-neoliberal—and NGOs. The latter are often more humanitarian and [work] in several countries, such as the ACF and the Red Cross. They work with the foundations of large corporations or receive funding from the AFD [Agence Française de Développement], so they are in fact 'included'" (9).

Maud Barlow's Council of Canadians, an NGO that was present at the second and third WWFs, no longer wishes to attend the official forum, illustrating the dilemma faced by some organizations. One interviewee explained: "Either I completely break away, I am not in the forum, and I do the AWF [Alternative Water Forum]; it is a minority of NGOs; or I go to the forum but also go to the AWF because it gives me another kind of media visibility. […] Basically, if something is called 'alternative', the press are interested in it" (12). As Hajer (1995) commented, regarding the environmental movement, dissenters are "haunted by the dilemma of whether to argue on the terms set by the government [or dominant actors] or to insist on their own mode of expression. In the latter case, of course, they run the risk of losing their direct influence and therefore they often barter their expressive freedom for influence on concrete policy-making."

Since its prestige and legitimacy are in part predicated upon its inclusiveness, the WWF would probably prefer there was no alternative event, as its existence only serves to highlight the bias and non-inclusiveness of the official forum. It would rather have the dissenting views expressed in person at the WWF. One interviewee even mentioned that the WWC was "willing to pay for protesters to attend the WWF" (4), but some stakeholders were reported to have declined incentives to advocate at the

official forum on principle (2). As mentioned earlier, attendance at the AWF is partly a strategic calculation (enhanced visibility) and partly a political position (protest at WWF). Some see this as refusing dialogue (6) or consider the AWF to be a bad strategy, as it represents objection to the WWF as a whole rather than certain participants (13).

Host countries perceive and receive AWFs and actors with dissenting visions in different ways. For example, during the 2nd forum in The Hague, activists took over the premises to shout slogans or chain themselves to chairs (7). The protests were not suppressed and were mentioned in the official final report (WWC, 2000). Conversely, during the Mexico forum, a source noticed "an army of cops with truncheons around the forum" (8), while the Istanbul forum had "a very police-like atmosphere" (12). Holding an AWF was difficult in South Korea, "a locked-up [*bouclé*] country where it is hard to imagine an AWF" (9). The Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU), which fights for the preservation of public water services in Korea, is fiercely opposed to Veolia, whom it accuses of using "the corporate WWF to cement its interests in the region" (Subramaniam, 2018). Its final declaration was not publicized and went largely unnoticed (Globalization Monitor, 2015).

In Brasilia, an alternative forum "brought together more than 7000 people from various environmental and social movements, academics and representatives of indigenous communities. Numerous sessions, workshops, and events were organized around the theme 'Water is a right, not a commodity'" (PSEAU, 2018). It was held in the form of plenary conferences, cultural activities, and a film festival, and produced an anti-capitalist final declaration stating that, "the Forum and the Council are linked to the large transnational corporations and seek to serve their interests exclusively, to the detriment of the people and nature."

5   The WWC and knowledge production

The WWC website describes the World Water Forum as "the world's largest event on water," providing "a unique platform where the water community and key decision makers can collaborate and make long-term progress on global water challenges."[2] By positioning itself as the "water world's" must-attend global event, the WWC is working to strengthen the forum's legitimacy. But this is undermined by various factors linked to the structure and history of the WWC/WWF.

5.1   A missing link with the United Nations?

Rather than being held under the auspices of the United Nations, the WWFs are organized by a French association—the WWC—in conjunction with a host country. This can have advantages, as noted earlier. According to one of our interviewees, the UN does not manage to coordinate all water-related issues, unlike the WWF, and this was one of the reasons for its creation in 1996 (8). Biswas (2004) also refers to "calls for the WWC to do what the UN was unable to do further to the disappointing realization that water had been largely neglected during Rio's Earth Summit in 1992."

However, without the aegis of the UN, the value of the WWF's outcomes is diminished, particularly the ministerial declarations. There is a feeling that they have limited value and legitimacy compared to a UN resolution, particularly as they do not include commitments or indicate which countries are signing them (14).

These limitations are real and significant, and they are reinforced by attitudes within the UN itself: "Some UN agencies, not all, but there are some, who feel that, because the forum has always been accompanied by a ministerial process, it was not valid, because it was not an intergovernmental agency behind the initiative" (5). The atmosphere of competition sometimes leads to the WWFs being undermined by being asked to achieve the impossible. There are also cultural and geopolitical

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[2] https://www.worldwatercouncil.org/en/world-event

dimensions. "The UN system is an Anglophone system. In their minds, the WWC is a French council" (8). "From the point of view of the UN, they almost have the impression that they are addressing a French actor. They prefer to address Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), which historically speaks to them." However, this statement can be qualified: UN bodies are not only members of the WWC but also the most frequent session coordinators, as mentioned above; the WWC has been granted UN observer status, and the next forum is officially recognized as a preparatory milestone for the United Nations Water Conference in 2023 (14). For the WWC and the WWF, these points are extremely important in terms of their legitimacy on the international scene (14).

5.2   Private sector influence?

Opponents of the WWF and WWC often underline the influence of the major water corporations. Indeed, Suez is one of the three "founding members" of the WWC, with René Coulomb, a Suez executive, having been its first vice-president (Abu-Zeid et al., 1998). Activist Maude Barlow notes that "the World Water Forum is convened by big business lobby organizations like the Global Water Partnership, the World Bank, and the leading for-profit water corporations on the planet. […] While governments are present, they are not in charge" (Patterson, 2015). For Subramanian (2018), "the WWC has direct links to two of the world's largest water corporations, Suez and Veolia. The president of the WWC is also president of a company owned by Veolia and a subsidiary of Suez." Finally, Lane (2009) lamented that at the Hague forum, "the co-host World Water Council's main plenary sessions and the official publications favored a right-wing agenda of privatization, economic valuation of water, and the power of the global market." When Marseille was selected to host the WWF6, at a time when the WWC's President Loïc Fauchon was Director of the Société des Eaux de Marseille (SEEM), a subsidiary of the Veolia Group, it only stoked the controversy around the link between the WWC and the private sector, damaging the legitimacy of the former.

However, this perception may be exaggerated. Several of our interviewees—for once unanimous and some with inside knowledge of the WWC—said they had observed no private sector influence on the WWC or the WWF (2, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 12). "I don't believe who believes this; it's very far from being true; it's bordering on conspiracy. They [the private sector] don't even want to hear about [the WWF]." Another pointed out that they do not need "the council or the forum to find markets" (14). But private companies exert their influence on the WWF through different channels, as we will discuss in section 7, and since the expectation that the privatization of water services would be a bonanza partly failed to materialize, it is also likely that lobbying was less of a priority in later forums.

The WWF's image can be further impacted by the sponsors of the event. At WWF4 in Mexico City, for example, two donors caused controversy: Coca-Cola FEMSA and The Coca-Cola Company. According to the NGO India Resource Center, their support was a "whitewashing" operation (Goska, 2006). Other WWFs have been sponsored by questionable actors, such as in Brasilia, where one finds PETROBRAS, along with Nestlé and Crystal Brands & Products, which is a subsidiary of The Coca-Cola Company in Brazil.

More broadly, the WWC is partly a victim of its business model. According to one interviewee, "when a country organizes a WWF, it has to pay the WWC as if it were a kind of patent to have the name and the right to use it" (9). According to a Senegalese newspaper, the cost of the 2022 Dakar forum was expected to reach 21 million euros, with Senegal contributing 6.3 million (Dieng, 2019b). It had reportedly been discussed that donors, rather than Senegal, would finance the forum. The fact that developing countries are paying for an organization from one of the most developed countries damages the image of both the WWF and the WWC (9).

## 5.3   Does the WWC's membership represent the "water community"?

The legitimacy of the WWC and WWFs is weakened by inadequate representation in the former's membership. Indeed, the list of WWC members in 2020 includes only 56 countries with a total of 367

members (WWC, 2020). Ultimately, there are very few members and countries compared to WWC's ambition to be an international platform (9). Moreover, countries such as Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Norway have no representation in the WWC.

France is the top country in terms of membership in the WWC. While this can be partly explained by history and the location of the WWC's headquarters, it strengthens the alleged link between this country and the WWC. One source indicated that the WWC "is a body perceived as rather Franco-French" (14), while another said that in the WWC's bodies it is necessary to speak French in order to understand what is taking place (13). "The council is not France! When people tell me it's too French I don't take it as a compliment! [...] It's still very Marseillais. It's a bit of a cross between the old team at the town hall and the WWC team."

The members of the WWC are divided into five distinct colleges, broadly "Intergovernmental Institutions," "Governmental and Public Sector-Supported Organizations," "Commercial Organizations," "Scientific", and "Civil Society Organizations." The WWC's membership has long suffered from an historical, private-sector skewedness. As indicated by Figure 2, College 3 (commercial organizations) made up 51% of the total membership in 2000, but this has now declined to 22% to the benefit of NGOs (College 4) and secondarily of academic actors. Some critiques suggest that this may reflect a degree of strategic action. While College 4 is supposed to include "non-profit NGOs that use, learn, train, inform, and advocate for the protection and development of the common public good" (WWC, 2020b), one interviewee explained that this college "is a nonsense" and "there are very few NGOs" (11). An examination of its membership confirms the presence of unexpected bedfellows, e.g. the Turkish Water Institute (SUEN), which barely qualifies as an NGO, the Professional Federation of Water Operators, clearly linked to the private sector, and even a hybrid platform such as the French Water Partnership (12).

Figure 2: Evolution of WWC membership, by college (Source: WWC Activity reports, various dates)
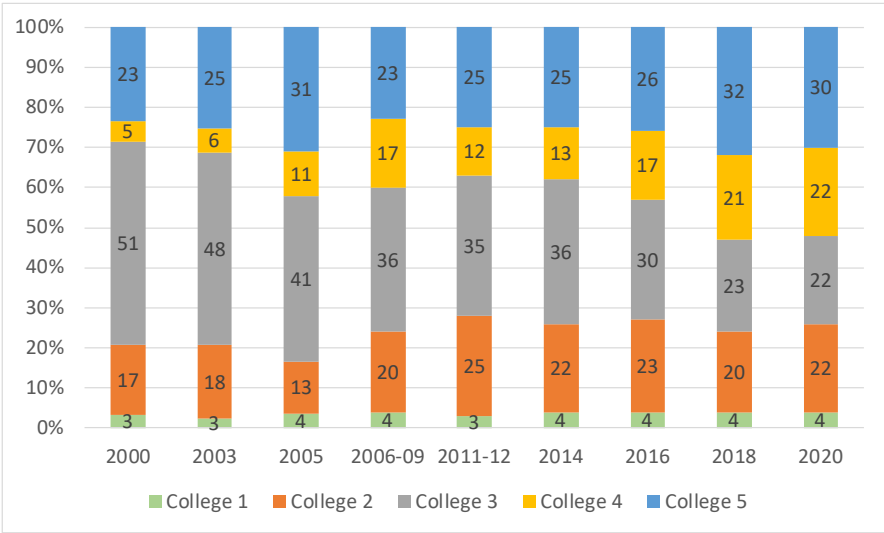
Why do organizations become members of the WWC? It may be about advocacy (enhancing legitimacy in the preparatory process), raising their profile, and networking at large. But it is co-opting to form coalitions that clearly drives the majority of registrations. The eight countries that have already hosted a forum are included in the 15 most represented in the WWC's membership and total almost half the members. The waves of country-based applications observed in the run-up to a WWF corroborates statements that countries wishing to host a forum register members to gain votes in elections for important positions (10).

While we cannot discount the possibility that Turkish Ecetur Ece Tourism Construction Trade and Shop Operating Co., the Korea Institute of Construction, Egypt's Library of Alexandria, or French Saint Gobain PAM felt an urge to help solve the world's water problems when applying for WWC membership, it is also likely that they have been pawns in a wider political-cum-electoral game. Conversely, annual membership fees may discourage applications by small actors: fees vary between 315€ and over 3000€, depending on the college, the organization's annual budget, and the country of origin's GDP for College 2.

5.4   The board of governors and the governance of the WWC

WWC members can participate in general assemblies and in the election of the Board of Governors. Just like membership, this board is divided into five colleges which are allocated a number of governor seats proportional to the number of members in each college (WWC, 2019). In total, 35 seats are allocated every three years during a general assembly where members are invited to vote for up to 35 candidates belonging to their college or otherwise (2).

A WWC rule limits the number of governors per country to one per college. France dominates the current Board of Governors with five governors, while five other nations—four of which are former forum organizers—have three governor seats, and ten others only one seat. There are only 16 countries on the Board of Governors, 12 of which are among the 15 countries with the most members, confirming the close link between members and governors. A much-criticized aspect of the composition of the board is the circumvention of the rule that the same person representing a given organization cannot be elected for two consecutive terms. "The Board of Governors is a bit like musical chairs. People wear a lot of caps; they belong to different organizations, and they play around with that to multiply their terms as governor" (2).[3]

How important is the Board of Governors in the WWC? Gaining influence on the board allows greater control over the decision-making processes regarding the choice of WWF host countries/cities and the election of the chair, and hence the orientation of the WWC and WWFs (Newton, 2014). Our evidence corroborates that cited by Newton (2014), who explains that, "there are issues with the voting procedures and the feeling that you can 'buy your seats'." The process is said to be "a real election campaign," (2) with actors and countries playing alliance games to form voting blocs (10, 12, and 13). "There is a country-based strategy for sure. There are alliances between countries. There are people who count the number of votes per country and who, with leaders of delegations of countries with a lot of votes, support each other [...]. It is very undemocratic, but that is how it works. By the time we vote for the governors the next president is on everyone's mind."

Beyond this collective strategic objective, being a governor can bring advantages to members or their organization. "It is an interesting network, very politically connected, where other networks are more technical or specific, i.e. thematically focused" (6). However, the WWC's governors' importance must be qualified. They have very little influence and can hardly change things (11, 12, and 14): "It is much more the board, or even the president alone with a few people around him, who decide alone" (12). Another source said that, "during the governors' meetings, nobody listens" (13); "we are there to listen to things and not really to have a debate. The agenda is set; there is nothing to say about the agenda; you can vaguely comment at the end, vaguely ask questions. You get the impression that there are always obstacles in the way to prevent it from happening, in fact, the debate" (5).

The strategic nature of co-opting members and electing governors means that they are not necessarily motivated to make the WWC move: "They are happy to be there; they are happy for things to be done; but they are somewhat passive administrators." As with many boards, meetings take place in environments that are not conducive to criticism. "The WWC gives me the impression that it is a place where people from very influential organizations get together and connect, and they are very happy

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[3] Some Turkish and French individuals, for example, have been governors three times, representing different organizations.

to get together for board meetings two or three times a year in very nice and pleasant hotels all over the world" (14).

6 Inclusion/exclusion and the reproduction of mainstream water science and policy

While not being a sufficient condition, the participation of a diversity of actors with differing values and visions is a sine qua non of the inclusiveness claimed by the WWFs. At face value, WWFs do convene people from all countries and quarters and embrace all manner of water-related issues. Some interviewees stress that the forums can be home to contradictory discourses on controversial issues—typically, dams, transboundary management, and water privatization—but the examples of heated debates reported or commented are actually scarce. The aforementioned notable—albeit measured—efforts made by the WWC to enhance inclusiveness have been weakened by three combined factors. First, inclusiveness is constrained by various social mechanisms of reproduction of prevailing water thinking. Second, it is actively restricted whenever it challenges the status quo in ways deemed undesirable. Third, it is disavowed by actors who choose to opt out and develop parallel advocacy initiatives.

Efforts towards inclusiveness are hampered by the resources required for involvement in the WWF's preparatory process (during which the agenda and roles are set): funds, time, language proficiency, and familiarity with international gatherings and their social codes, among others. This tends to skew participation towards powerful institutional or business actors. One source observed that, "while states and major experts sit comfortably at these big conferences, other actors do not" (3). The prevalence or dominance of some institutional water actors can be sensed from the three top session organizers for each of the five main themes: *Governance* (INBO, IWA, UNESCO), *Economy* (WWC, IWA, OECD), *Environment* (IUCN, Ramsar Convention, UNEP), *Resource/Technology* (FAO, IWA, ICID), and *Social* (UN-IHP, WHO, UNESCO). We observe a heavy bias towards UN agencies, professional organizations, and global green NGOs known to be fully compatible with the former. Interestingly, this bias is similar to that observed in the composition of the board of governors, and this since the establishment of the Council.[4] The imagined "water community" that presided over the advent of the WWF is therefore closest to an international global water establishment. It is this "community" that is tasked with drawing up policy and background papers prior to WWFs. Conference keynotes are also overwhelmingly limited to officials from the UN, development banks, ministers, or princes (of Orange, Japan, etc.).

Cross-fertilization remains hypothetical and propinquity stymies debate. "People talk to one another, but in reality you talk to people you already know and who are already convinced of what you say." Consanguinity generates sanitized debate that leaves a feeling of stagnation (10): "We have been hearing the same recommendations for 10 years, and you get the feeling that things are not moving forward" (2), while the WWFs are "forums which find it hard to think 'outside the water box'" (12).

Gleick and Lane (2005) confirm that global water conferences are often "dominated by a small group of regular participants, who push their own agendas [and are] biased towards support agencies and well-organized special interest groups from industrialized countries." As stated by one interviewee, the established "water world is a world that protects its assets and achievements. The problem is that you are in a system that thinks of itself as the center of the universe of water and therefore protects itself. They are not necessarily trying to tell themselves how to change things but rather wondering, 'how do we keep our power?'" (4).

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[4] The first board of governors was heavily biased towards international organizations (16), academia (5), NGOs (3), and state organizations (11), with only two private companies (Coulomb, 1997). It is also worth noting that the constitutive members of the WWC were the ICID, IWA, IWRA, CIHEAM, UNDP, UNESCO, WSSCC, WB, and IUCN—all international water actors.

Elite actors of this "water world" can be seen, after Hajer (1995), as a "discourse coalition." Hajer emphasizes in particular "the disciplinary force of discursive practices" structured by shared ways of seeing that are routinized to the point that people expect and find it natural that speakers use the same discursive framework and language. "Exclusive" power is revealed by the effectiveness of these frameworks in avoiding confrontation. Bourdieu (1992) also saw how dominant actors depoliticize debates and undermine contestation through "a discourse permeated by the simplicity and transparency of common sense, [...] a rhetoric of impartiality [...] and sustained by an ethos of propriety and decency, exemplified by the avoidance of the most violent polemical forms, by discretion, an avowed respect for adversaries, in short, everything which expresses the negation of political struggle as struggle." Elite actors promote "a particular depoliticized discourse that uses rational and scientific arguments to evoke universalized ideas of what is 'the best' solution" (Turnhout et al., 2020) and like to refer to the "global/international water community," using a positive word to suggest the existence of a broad consensus, thereby effectively negating diversity and dissent.

Likewise, Goldman (2007) refers to "these uniquely situated and well-funded transnational water policy networks" and their capacity to "saturate the marketplace of ideas on water policy in global civil society." They share the same *doxa*—that is, the experience by which "the natural and social world appears as self-evident" (Bourdieu, 1977: 164) and "the universe of possible discourse" is defined (ibid.: 167). By shaping behaviors "in accordance with pre-set ideas of what it means to be reasonable," elite actors are better "able to shape these [coproduction] processes to serve their interests" (Turnhout et al., 2020). They selectively operate a stabilization of knowledge around powerful narratives (for example, uncharged water will be wasted; state management is inefficient unlike the private sector; water management should be established at the watershed level; PPP is a creative way to encourage private investment in the water sector; drip irrigation saves water; water security cannot be achieved without investment in infrastructure, etc.). In 2003, Merrett (2003) noted the conformism of the Kyoto water forum, aptly dubbing it the "Kyoto water consensus"—a "waterish extension of the Washington consensus." In other words, the *doxa* and its attendant "authorized language" (Bourdieu, 1977) and the very *habitus* of these transnational networks, create distinctions and generate exclusion.

The role and influence of global water companies, however, remain unclear despite a widespread claim about their relationship with the WWC. Their relative numbers in terms of membership have decreased and become less meaningful. Even on the board of governors, where private companies have counted between 4 and 11 (out of 36), such numbers do not translate into proportional influence. A large percentage of these member companies (e.g. CTI Engineering, Japan; Ceylan ORHUN, Industrial Plants Engineering and Consulting Co. Inc., Turkey) are not necessarily staunch or active advocates of privatization. The influence of certain ideas favoring the private sector is more likely to be linked to their mainstreaming within the prevailing *doxa* (at least in the 2000-2010 period)—a process that has involved private lobbying and influence both within and far beyond the WWC.

To take one example, the private company Suez is active in networks and initiatives such as the CEO Water Mandate, UNESCO, CSR Europe, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, the European Roundtable of Industrialists, the European Services Forum, and the WWWC (Lui, 2008).[5] On the World Water Commission, which wrote The Hague's "Water Vision," was Jérôme Monod, a former Suez chair, and senior World Bank officials (Lui, 2008). Unsurprisingly, the "Vision" advocated "the commodification and privatization of water as the most effective and efficient way of addressing water scarcity" (Cosgrove and Rijsberman, 2000: 19). Likewise, it was Michel Camdessus, former head of the IMF, who wrote the report on financing issued in Tokyo. Background reports for Mexico's forum were undertaken by the World Bank, UN agencies,

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[5] Its former president Gérard Payen is involved in many organizations. According to his personal webpage, he was/is advisor on water to the UN General Secretary, president of the lobby group Aquafed, a director of the International Water Association, vice-president of ASTEE (the French association of public and private water professionals), a member of the board of the French Water Partnership, an administrator of the (French) Water Academy, and a member of the Academy of Technology. (www.thinktank-resources.com/en/nos-membres/gerard-payen/)

GWP, IWMI, etc. Thus it is important to keep in mind that the power of such mechanisms contributes to the wider (re)production of the *doxa* beyond the WWC and its membership, and also that it is the president and his bureau who are actually at the helm.

Secondly, while there are silent mechanisms supporting mainstream thinking and mechanically circumscribing "the universe of possible discourse," the preservation of the status quo sometimes requires direct action and determination. Interviewees referred to attempts to modify the governance of the WWC from within. The most repeated "incident" involved a (failed) initiative by Indian organizations. In 2018, "from one day to the other, [many] Indian NGOs applied for WWC membership" (8; Coronas, 2018). For some, "it was a very explicit intent to take power," and the judicial court of Marseille was going to rule in favor of the WWC which had decided to reject the applications (which some Western NGOs had joined). This proved to be inaccurate, however. The court declared itself unable to base a decision on foreign-language documents.[6] For others, the Indian organizations "fought a whole battle to try to democratize the governance of the WWC" (9), with a legitimate desire to rebalance it and make it more sensitive to a vision centered on civil society.

The role of gatekeeper of orthodoxy is reinforced by the filters applied to official declarations and reports. Conca (2006) notes that, "the social charter theme [in basic water rights] produced one of the liveliest and best-attended panel sessions at the Hague, although any mention of it was studiously avoided in the forum's official final report." The World Commission on Dams was not even mentioned in the report or in the declarations in Kyoto (or subsequent forums) (Baillat, 2013). Following the Brasilia forum, the French NGO platform PSEAU found "the political statements [to be] particularly disappointing in their lack of ambition. Their messages were at odds with the reality of a country where numerous associations have exposed problems of corruption, pollution of resources, and disregard for the rights of indigenous people in Brazil" (PSEAU, 2018). This highlights the misalignment between the actors involved in the production of official declarations and a civil society who feels its messages are ignored when they fail to align with those of the WWC and the host country.

Indeed, diversity can be unwelcome: in Korea, "they don't like protest too much. They had difficulty understanding what 'civil society' encompassed. They were a bit afraid of it" (3). One host country was reported to have refused to finance the participation of indigenous organizations in the preparatory phase. The heavy police presence in Mexico and Istanbul, with some protestors being deported, also conveyed a sense of siege rather than deliberation.

Active "maintenance" of the status quo may also include the sidestepping of a Turkish candidate to the presidency of the WWC, or the ignoring of direct criticism. According to Subramaniam (2018), for example, "although the fifth WWF's official program heralded 'more diverse participation mechanisms,' the WWC refused to allow the President of the UN General Assembly a public audience. President Miguel d'Escoto had been an outspoken critic of water privatization."

Thirdly and finally, the elusive goal of inclusiveness is thwarted by dissenters who choose alternative advocacy channels, as discussed above. Though not deserting the WWF, corporate actors also sponsor their own events (Singapore Water Week, World Water Congress, etc.), flagship publications (e.g. McKinsey's *Charting our Water Future*), think tanks (e.g. 2030 Water Resources Group), media (e.g. Ooska News), etc. More strategically, they partner with UN bodies (CEO Water Mandate) and integrate proliferating GPPNs dubbed "alliances," "partnerships," "centers," "consortia," and "initiatives" with mixed membership: The Resilience Shift, the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA), Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), Alliance for Water Stewardship, etc.

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[6] One could ask why the registration of 35 Turkish construction companies (with limited links to water) in the early 2000s was deemed acceptable while the registration of as many Indian NGOs a few years later was not.

7   Conclusion

Despite the proliferation of water megaconferences, the WWFs remain unique by their size and the diversity of actors and topics they feature. Their overall cost-benefit balance may be unclear, but they give way to intense flag-waving, networking, and collaboration. Yet, the forums remain heavily dominated by international organizations, professional associations and research institutes, development banks, and a few think tanks and global NGOs. They form a discourse coalition with a set of visions and approaches that tends to be managerial, state- and/or private-sector centered, capital and technology oriented, in favor of market mechanisms, and agnostic to power and social relations. This shapes the type of knowledge that is being (re)produced at the WWFs.

The WWC's efforts to enhance the WWFs' inclusiveness appeared to be undermined by insuperable contradictions. On the one hand, the WWFs are part and parcel of the mechanisms through which orthodoxy is produced and reproduced, and reflect the *considerable power that lies in structured ways of seeing* (Hajer, 1995). On the other, the council finds itself appealing for pluralism, while the forums only provide space to sanctioned knowledges that can coexist or be reconciled, failing to engage with more radical political or ontological divides. The contradiction between the roles of gatekeeper and global convener assumed by the main actors/networks involved in organizing the forums explains why the perhaps genuine calls for broader participation are paralleled with direct action to control the structure and membership of the WWC, sanitize official declarations, and keep dissenters at bay. Favoring control while ignoring or sidelining politics and contestation only serves to create a flimsy consensus and an imagined "global water community" that are bound to be endlessly challenged by alternative forums, social protest, and other expressions of dissent. The WWF can be seen as part of a wider choreography in which the "global water community" is enacted, its authorized knowledge legitimized and the "universe of possible discourse" reinstated, limiting the inclusiveness that can be claimed or achieved.

8   Competing interests statement

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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