

## TITLE

- Making climate change relevant in the boardroom

## RESEARCHER/S

- Anthropologists, human geographers, sociologists
- Organizational and business studies researchers
- Climate scientists

## ABSTRACT, INTELLECTUAL MERIT, BROAD IMPACT

In the last years, there is been an increase attention to the role of corporation in global climate governance. It's becoming much more frequent to hear companies declare commitment to contribute to Paris Agreement and "help sustainable development". Many stakeholders have questioned the veracity of the commitment, accusing the organizations of greenwashing. But both the corporate rhetoric and its detractors take for granted that the companies have a single intention and semantic coherence in their position on the climate emergency. This research takes a step back and seeks to analyze how the relevance of the climate crisis is enacted within the boardroom and throughout the organization. Using the case study of the World Economic Forum's Climate Governance Initiative (CGI), we analyze how the multistakeholder initiative employs different "expert" knowledge and practices to foster "awareness" and train non-executive directors (NED) on climate governance decision-making. The research is based on a multisited ethnography on the regional chapters of the Americas where the CGI is implemented, as well as virtual interviews and focus groups with participants in Europe and Asia. We also draw from participant observation inside of the companies where NEDs in the Americas are supposed to push the CGI Principles. The research seeks to contribute to the understanding of corporate elites and their role in decision making in the face of the climate crisis. Rather than taking their omnipresence, or lack of care, for granted, we hope to contribute to an understanding of the specific practices, knowledge, materialities and relationships that make it possible for climate emergency to have a seat in the boardroom. Understanding the extent, and enactment, of corporate power, and its relationship to scientific production on the climate crisis can help to imagine other forms of political action to motivate more radical change.

## • OVERVIEW / RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is body of literature focused on corporate governance, but we know little about the people who is part of decision-making processes. In the context of climate governance, there seems to be only two options: companies are "being responsible" or doing "greenwashing". However, we identify that initiatives like the World Economic Forum's Climate Governance Initiative (CGI) express that there are varying levels of concern and involvement with the climate crisis within the same organizations. The premise of the initiative is that non-executive directors influence corporate decision making, and that if they are sensitized and trained on climate change, then they can make decisions that push an agenda aligned with the Paris agreement. This premise has several points that are worth analyzing through critical research.

Theoretical questions:

- How can we analyze the power enacted in corporate elite decision-making, without reifying it in a totalizing way (or should we reify it)?
- How to generate a critical analysis of corporate power, considering the complexity, diversity, and internal inequality within and between organizations?
- How are climate change imaginaries, and their relevance, interconnected in decision making?

Empirical questions:

- How is the relevance of the climate crisis enacted within the CGI, boardroom and throughout the organization?
- What is the role, if any, of scientific knowledge about climate in the CGI?
- How does the training sessions and activities relate to imaginaries about sustainability and climate change?
- How do the different geopolitical positions of GCI chapters and companies reconfigure the relevance, decision making, and imaginaries around the climate crisis?

The study mainly focuses on two dimensions: the practices involved in making the CGI chapters possible, the imaginaries about climate change that emerge within this context, and how they relate to decision-making in the companies where the NED are involved. The main unit of analysis will be the CGI chapters; however, we hope to gain access to some of the participating companies. We will generate field diaries, recordings and transcripts of interviews and focus groups, archive of media appearances of the WEF, CGI and participating companies, climate policy documents at a global and in the regional level where CGI operates.

The WEF is a multinational organization that includes companies from all over the world. In this sense, the research also aims to pay attention to the possible differences, without excluding possible similarities, than can emerge due to the singular histories and geopolitics of each region. More specifically, we also want to pay close attention to differences in the circulation of capital (e.g. Latin American companies whose main investors are from the U.S. or Europe), and the climate scientific knowledges (e.g. The role of a local university in contrast to “the science” used in the CGI training sessions).

This research is committed against climate inaction and denial, as well as the techno-scientific vision of a magic solution on the same modes of production-distribution. However, it seeks to engage with the corporate elite to identify how it is possible to maintain the status quo in the face of mounting evidence and lived experiences of the climate emergency (the political question of the research)

### **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

In the last years, there is been an increase attention to the role of corporation in global climate governance. It's becoming much more frequent to hear companies declare commitment to contribute to Paris Agreement and “help sustainable development”. Last year, 370 companies declared their commitment to “science-based targets” to reduce and mitigate emissions to limit warming to 1.5°.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

- Bartley, Tim  
2018 Transnational corporations and global governance. Annual Review of Sociology 44: 45-165
- Cefkin, Melissa  
2010 Ethnography and the corporate encounter: Reflections on research in and of corporations. Berghahn Books
- Lemos, Carmen and Agrawal, Arun  
2006 Environmental governance. Annual Review of Environment and Resources 31: 297-325
- Morck, Randall and Yeung, Bernard  
2009 Never Waste a Good Crisis: An Historical Perspective on Comparative Corporate Governance 1 145-179

### **METHODS AND DATA RESOURCES**

- The research will employ a multisited ethnography methodology. Taking in consideration the available resources, the participant observation will be carried out directly in the regional chapters in the Americas, where researchers from the research team are located: Chile, USA, and Canada. The objective is to participate in workshops and working sessions in each region.
- Through snowball sampling with the NEDs participating in the different chapters, we expect to have access to the companies in which they collaborate for interviews and focus groups.
- Video calls will be made to interview other participating NEDs in Europe and Asia in order to get a broader view to identify possible points of encounter and disagreement on the geopolitics of organizations such as WEF and expertise such as climate science.
- Interviews will be conducted with the organizers and leaders to implement the CGI working sessions. Permission will also be requested to shadow them as they go about their daily activities in their work with WEF.
- Documentary analysis in public media on WEF, CGI and participating companies in relation to their climate actions and socio-environmental impacts.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMES & DATA ANALYSIS**

- This research is based on Savransky's (2016) invitation to rethink the question of relevance, and to question how the relevance of the climate crisis emerges in scientific circuits, in corporate environments, and in the present study itself.
- It seeks to analyze the political anchored in the practices and imaginaries of the actors involved in the case study. By means of a material-semiotic enclosure, the emphasis will be placed on the material-affective-embodied relationships of being part of the initiative and of a corporate boardroom, together with the flows of knowledge, concerns and ethical-political ideas regarding the climate crisis, the role of business, etc. We draw from material-semiotics and practical ontologies (Gad.et.al, 2015; Law 2019).
- The research has a political concern following Spinoza's classic question: why people fight for their own enslavement. So, we also seek to consider the relationship between desire-bodies-ideas-action with Spinoza's ethics and political ontology (c.f. Deleuze 2005).

Deleuze, Gilles

2005 En medio de Spinoza. Translation by Equipo Editorial Cactus. Editorial Cactus, Buenos Aires.

Gad, Christopher, Bruun Jensen Casper y Brit Ross Winthereik

2015 Practical Ontology: Worlds in STS and Anthropology. NatureCulture 3:67-86.

Law, John

2019 Material Semiotics. <http://www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2019MaterialSemiotics.pdf>

Savransky, Martin

2016 The Adventure of Relevance: An Ethics of Social Inquiry. Palgrave Macmillan, London,

### **PLAN OF WORK**

### **CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- Disclosure of info from powerful organizations
- How to gain access to elite spaces
- How to maintain a critical inquiry without being threatening to our interlocutors.

VALIDITY AND EVALUATION
PREPARATION AND WORK THUS FAR
REFERENCES
DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN