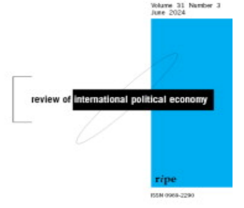

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Excluding through inclusion: managerial practices in the era of multistakeholder governance

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ABSTRACT

Managerial practices underpin most global policy agendas. Existing research shows how these practices have reshaped the public sector, facilitated the marketization of problems, and altered organizational structures. This article highlights that managerial practices are also a *central driver of political marginalization*. When incorporated into multistakeholder processes, managerial practices engender two exclusionary processes: the accommodation of dissent and the uniformization of political subjects. They do so by making consensus an organizational goal and by treating politics as a marketplace. Through an examination of the United Nations Food Systems Summit, the article shows how, within multistakeholder models, managerialism sidelines critical voices by invoking ideals of openness, spontaneity, and the absence of rule, rather than traditional principles of 'command and control'. Additionally, it unpacks the novel roles assumed by private consultancy firms, which are nowadays not only tasked with implementing weighty bureaucratic reforms but are also increasingly involved in 'optimizing' political struggles and shaping debates on how societies ought to be governed.

KEYWORDS

Multistakeholderism; managerialism; consultancies; privatization; global governance

Introduction

Over the past few decades, multistakeholder forms of governance have gained significant traction as a major alternative to traditional multilateralism (Gadinger & Scholte, 2023; Gleckman, 2018; Scholte, 2020; Pouliot & Thérien, 2023). Virtually all major global efforts to address global problems call for multistakeholder processes that bring together different groups with the aim of developing a common vision on how to solve governance problems. Be it in the field of health, internet, human rights, or education, it is often argued that, through their participatory mechanisms such as consultations, dialogues, or task-sharing, these collaborative arrangements make it possible to overcome the democratic 'deficits' and dysfunctionalities of traditional forms of decision-making.

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The past few decades have witnessed the incorporation of methods, models, and knowledge coming from the management field into the design and execution of the governance processes that regulate multistakeholder settings. There has been a merging of approaches, where the language and tools used for deliberation, consultation mechanisms and political engagement has become increasingly intertwined with performance measurement and results-driven strategies. An illustration of this is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, which calls for a global multistakeholder partnership that brings governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations (UN), and other actors into 'conversation' (UN, 2023). The idea is that, like private companies, the global agenda should move beyond top-down hierarchical perspectives in favor of adaptive and horizontal dialogues that encourage common visions, synergies, and learning.

Unpacking the entwinement between managerial knowledge and multistakeholder processes is crucial if we want to understand how contemporary governance works. Although International Political Economy (IPE) scholarship has examined the impact of managerialist-inspired policy models on different organizational settings such as International Organizations (IOs) (Seabrooke & Sending, 2020; Eckl & Hanrieder, 2022; Harrison, 2001; Best, 2014), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (Eagleton-Pierce, 2020), and state bureaucracies (Guillén, 1994; Momani, 2017), their effects on multistakeholder models have so far received little attention. We know that the integration of managerial ideas into organizations and global policy-making has come to shape the very ways in which governance is conducted, in particular sustaining trends towards the commodification and marketization of global agendas (Eagleton-Pierce & Knafo, 2020). However, this paper argues that more attention should be devoted to the *political effects* of managerialism, in particular, when it is deployed as the guiding principle behind participatory decision-making processes.

This paper argues that the influence of managerial ideas on multistakeholder processes has led to a situation where *political marginalization occurs through inclusion rather than deliberate acts of exclusion*. Two processes are at play: the accommodation of dissent and the uniformization of political subjects. The accommodation of dissent is visible when consensus becomes an institutional 'outcome' to be reached through a set of ordered procedures. I contend that this imperative to 'optimize' decision-making processes—a defining feature of managerial frames—contributes to eclipsing the socio-political dimensions of problems and instead prioritizes problem-solving questions that are less contentious. The *uniformization* of political subjects, for its part, can be identified when the application of managerial techniques conceives politics as a marketplace, or a set of self-regulated transactions between equal 'stakeholders' who compete for policy influence. This not only makes all agents seem equally empowered but also equally (ir)responsible. While few would disagree that including different perspectives in decision-making is desirable, managerially-infused collaborative processes promote a logic of equivalence that leads to 'disorganized irresponsibility' (Beck, 2018), where the potential negative consequences of actions become increasingly difficult to attribute to any specific actor.

The accommodation of dissent and the uniformization of political subjects share in common that they espouse a peculiar strand of managerialism, with an invocation of ideals of horizontality, absence of rule, spontaneity, and

un-hierarchical decision-making. This challenges assumptions that managerialism is a homogeneous phenomenon characterized by a tendency towards 'organizational control' (see also Eagleton-Pierce & Knafo, 2020). Although managerially-infused multistakeholder models may still advocate for a defense of 'efficiency', they paradoxically maneuver within a discourse which is often vague, fuzzy, and slippery. I argue that, within multistakeholder settings, managerialism does not demarcate neat boundaries and hierarchies between roles and processes. Rather, it operates as a socio-political practice that blurs roles and responsibilities, promoting 'collaboration', 'synergies', and a skeptical attitude towards oversight. This does not mean that aspects such as 'order' and 'discipline' are obliterated, as these dimensions are always present in managerially-infused processes. Rather, the point is to show that they may manifest in different forms, often concealed behind a discourse of inclusivity and flexibility. Of particular importance is the role of consultancy firms in propagating such ideals. Drawing on a burgeoning body of scholarship that has examined the role of consultancies in global decision-making (Eckl & Hanrieder, 2022; Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2016; Momani, 2017; Pouliot 2024; Seabrooke & Sending, 2020; Sturdy et al., 2015), this paper unpacks the elusive contours of their practices and activities within a novel governance domain.

In order to better understand how managerialism is a central driver of processes of political marginalization in global governance, the paper focuses on one of the most paradigmatic multistakeholder sites within the global food sector: the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (hereafter the UNFSS, or the summit). In examining how managerial logics have infiltrated participatory mechanisms in the domain of food, this paper offers an adjacent contribution to existing IPE work on food and agricultural systems (Clapp, 2019; Margulis, 2018; McKeon, 2014). It shows that concentrated power in this policy field is not solely shaped by macro dimensions such as trade or the financialization of food systems, but also by meso-level political practices where political struggles are the most visible.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section discusses existing literature and examines how the turn towards 'hybrid' and collaborative governance models is deeply rooted in managerial thought. The second section introduces the accommodation of dissent and the uniformization of political subjects to trace how managerialism can serveas a practice of political marginalization. The third section delves into the empirical material of the paper. After outlining the contentious origins of the UNFSS and the ensuing reactions, the paper proceeds to offer a detailed analysis of the summit's deliberation processes. Central to this examination is the role played by a private consultancy, whose work is heavily influenced by theories of 'Systems Leadership' originating from the business domain. I explore how dissent was *accommodated* within the summit, highlighting how the dialogues constrained deliberation to output-oriented questions around 'what works', thereby narrowing down the political substance of what was debated. The final section of the paper explains how the *uniformization* of political subjects came into play during the dialogues. Specifically, I explore how the dialogues were embedded in a market-like configuration that positioned different political actors as isolated 'stakeholders' tasked with self-managing their interactions. This process blurred the boundaries between duty-bearers, right-holders, and those to be held accountable. Governments shifted from assuming a dominant role to acting as 'stakeholders' who engage in

competition alongside corporations, a framework conducive to the introduction of market-based solutions.

The article relies on in-depth case study work. Through immersion in the details of the case, I explored how managerial reason permeated the operations of the dialogues. This was done through an extensive textual analysis of documents from the UNFSS, such as manuals of engagements, handbooks, dialogues summaries, as well as official reports by UN agencies, private consultancies, and papers published in business and management journals. I also conducted twenty semi-structured interviews between September 2021 and February 2023 with actors involved in both the organization and the proceedings of the UNFSS, such as members from the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), grassroots organizations, NGOs, academics, and officials from the UN and the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Collaborative governance and managerial reason

The global governance landscape is witnessing significant transformations in decision-making authority, with a shift towards hybrid and collaborative governance models (Andonova, 2017; Biersteker & Hall, 2002; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Esguerra et al., 2017; Gadinger & Scholte, 2023, 2023; Raymond & DeNardis, 2015). It is often argued that the transition towards these models has emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional public governance (Utting & Zammit, 2009; Scholte, 2020). The assumption is that, compared to state-centric forms of governance that rely on legislation, regulation, and traditional command, decentralized forms of governing strengthen the democratic quality and performance of policies (Bäckstrand et al., 2010). Initiatives such as the UN Global Compact, the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN), as well as Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) like COVAX, attest to the burgeoning importance of hybrid institutions and public-private collaboration in the contemporary global governance landscape.

While the shift towards hybrid governance models has facilitated the inclusion of more actors into decision-making, it has also served to perpetuate power hierarchies and asymmetries (Bartley, 2018; Breeman et al., 2015; Esguerra & van der Hel, 2021; Leander, 2011; Manahan & Kumar, 2021; McKeon, 2017; MSI Integrity, 2020; Radu et al., 2014; Taggart & Abraham, 2023). Corporations, philanthropies, and profit-driven entities typically advocate for such models where they can occupy a more prominent position into decision-making and where regulations are 'soft' and flexible (Manahan & Kumar, 2021; McKeon, 2017; MSI integrity, 2020).

The 'multistakeholderization' of governance has not unfolded uniformly. However, it has been consistently legitimized through a managerial rhetoric that discredits the public sector and its perceived inefficiencies (see Mazzucato, 2018). Hybrid models, PPPs and 'platforms' that advocate for the de-centralization of decision-making are often praised on the grounds of their alleged efficiency, performance, and cost-reduction (see Amoore, 2002; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Greenwood & Mir, 2019; Mazzucato, 2018; Moore & Joyce, 2020; Whiteside, 2020).

Managerial reason has, indeed, served as one of the primary intellectual underpinnings of the stakeholderization of governance. Scholars have shown how managerialism, in particular New Public Management, has reoriented the nature of the public sector and normalized governance configurations such as PPPs as the most

efficient mechanisms to tackle global problems (Eagleton-Pierce, 2020; Eagleton-Pierce & Knafo, 2020; Harrison, 2001; Whiteside, 2020). At its core, managerialism aims to introduce a corporate-style approach to governance (Seabrooke & Sending, 2020). Some even characterize PPPs as a 'new language' designed to cover older established procedures involving private organizations in the delivery of public services (Hodge & Greve, 2005). Sharma and Soederberg (2020), for example, examine the case of global risk management, which has been decisive in legitimizing the role of business as an active development agent, whilst depoliticizing larger social and environmental disruptions. Others have discussed the relationship between managerialism and hybrid governance models by showing how it has transformed the public sector into a commodity purchaser (Whiteside, 2020). In short, existing IPE scholarship has emphasized how the enmeshment between managerial logics and hybrid models has redefined the private-public nexus, reinforced the commodification of global agendas, and perpetuated the neoliberal order (Fougner, 2008; Sharma & Soederberg, 2020).

While we understand how managerialism has been a main driver of privatization and public sector transformations, the infiltration of managerial reason into participatory processes, like consultations, multistakeholder mechanisms, and dialogues, remains a relatively uncharted territory. Where IPE scholars have discussed themes associated to managerialism, they have tended to focus on broader concerns with neoliberalism, the role of consultants and managers, or the socio-economic dimensions of managerial reforms (Eagleton-Pierce & Knafo, 2020; Eckl & Hanrieder, 2022; Moore & Joyce, 2020; Seabrooke & Sending, 2020). This paper seeks to enrich these discussions by bringing into sharper focus the *political* effects of managerialism within meso-level processes of political deliberation and public engagement. In doing so, the paper makes novel dynamics of managerialism visible:

First, it examines managerialism as an exclusionary socio-political phenomenon that is increasingly *driving processes of marginalization*. I show that, in an era where governing unfolds through collaboration and inclusion, managerialism does not 'exclude' *via* hierarchies, control, and order. Instead, it leads to exclusionary dynamics while portraying itself as a mechanism for political pluralization and democratization. In fact, within multistakeholder arenas, managerial concepts are being employed not merely to carry out lengthy bureaucratic reforms, formulate 'best practices', or evaluate organizational processes. Instead, they are increasingly invoked to 'mediate' politics and everyday political conflicts. As a result, in today's global governance landscape, the contours of managerialism are fuzzier and more elusive. These findings add to a body of scholarship that has shed light on how the contours of managerialism are not rigid but in constant adaptation (Eagleton-Pierce, 2020; Eagleton-Pierce & Knafo, 2020; Moore & Joyce, 2020).

Second, in exploring the enmeshment between management ideas and multistakeholderism, the paper sharpens the analytical attention around those who are tied to the perpetuation of market-based frameworks, such as private consultancy firms, private mechanisms, and offspring organizations (Amoore, 2002; Eckl & Hanrieder, 2022; Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2016; Littoz-Monnet & Osorio Garate 2023; Seabrooke & Henriksen, 2017; Seabrooke & Sending, 2020; Van der Pijl, 2005). The focus here, however, is not on these actors and their narratives, but rather on the tools, practices, and instruments they deploy to shape political

struggles and 'manage' dissent and criticism in new ways, thus normalizing their expertise and activities in global arenas.

Stakeholder theory: from firms to the UN

While multistakeholder settings are nowadays embraced by governments, IOs, and the public sector more broadly, it is important to note that this approach to decision-making has its intellectual foundations in the business sector (Gleckman, 2018). Specifically, 'stakeholder' theory traces back to the strategic planning literature, originating from an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute in the early 1960s. Stemming from the work of Igor Ansoff and Robert Stewart, researchers argued that, in order to survive, firms needed to take into account the concerns of groups beyond shareholders, or 'stakeholders' (Freeman, 1984). Some years later, the American philosopher and business administration professor Edward Freeman, provided further analytical clarity to the stakeholder concept with the publication of his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Freeman, 1984). In his book, Freeman repurposed the stakeholder notion describing it as a 'deceptively simple one': he suggested that corporations have responsibilities to various groups in addition to stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, lenders, and society at large (Freeman, 1984). According to Freeman (1984), gone were the days when companies only had to worry about markets. Factors such as societal expectations, environmental impact, the emergence of new pressure groups such as consumer advocates, environmentalists, and the media became crucial elements for firms to consider (Freeman, 1984).

At the time when the concept of stakeholder was introduced, it was perceived as 'fearfully radical'. Prevailing theories suggested that businesses had no obligation towards society but should solely be accountable to stakeholders. In 1970, Milton Friedman published a highly influential article in the *New York Times* entitled 'The social responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits', in which he argued against the notion that businesses should have a 'social conscience'. Friedman dismissed stakeholder theory, describing it as 'pure and unadulterated socialism'. [1]

As the stakeholder concept started to gain prominence in the business sphere, significant shifts occurred in the 'management' style of firms, from top-down approaches to horizontal ones that would encourage un-hierarchical features, learning, and new forms of collaboration among multiple 'stakeholders'. Stakeholder theory posits that 'there is no clear center of power; rather, power is located in multiple stakeholders' (Kurland et al., 1996, p. 170). This had implications for firms' organizational structures, with a replacement of managerial monologues, or hierarchical modes of coordination, with tools that decentralized decision-making, such as dialogues or deliberation exercises (Freeman et al., 2010, p. 477). This also included a growing call for the use of collaborative decision-making mechanisms such as deliberative tools, consensus exercises, concertation-making mechanisms, roundtables, and dialogues (Swyngedouw, 2005).

Additionally, achieving results hinged not only on involving all stakeholders, but also on reaching a consensus which genuinely accounts for all interests (Pesqueux, 2009). In that sense, stakeholder theory largely echoes deliberative democratic ideals, as it suggests that more legitimate solutions are found in consensus-oriented approaches that favor deliberation among those affected by a collective decision

(Habermas, 1996; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).[2] Management scholars have recognized the theoretical indebtedness of multistakeholder models to deliberative democratic frameworks, suggesting that Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy appears to be the most well-equipped for dealing with 'networked' governance models and for addressing the current 'democratic deficit' (Bäckstrand et al., 2010; Bäckstrand & Kylsäter, 2014; Blühdorn, 2013; J. Brown & Tregidga, 2017; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

Since its inception as a progressive theory of the corporate world, the stakeholder model has gained traction in global governance circles, particularly within the UN context. The underlying idea is that, in order to solve complex societal problems more efficiently, public institutions need to mimic the ways businesses were able to adapt to new environments to remedy their problems. Just as early management theories posited that shareholders could not tackle existing challenges alone, proponents of multistakeholder governance assert that global problems are too complex to be tackled by a single actor, in particular states. Initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the UN Global Compact, where CEOs commit to upholding universal sustainability principles, serve as prime examples of how business rationales have permeated the UN system. Emphasizing the adoption of targets, metrics, and a quest for efficiency, such initiatives embody managerial reason, while touting the market as the most efficient mechanism for allocating social goods.

The accommodation of dissent and the uniformization of political subjects

Despite its emergence as a 'radical' theory, the versions of stakeholder theory that have gained greatest purchase in global arenas have been the most transactional, the most strategic, the most managerialist (Greenwood & Mir, 2019). Unlike 'command and control' managerial rationales typically associated with state-based rule, the governance structures and decision-making mechanisms that underpin contemporary global multistakeholder models invoke ideals of flexibility, spontaneity, and lack of control.

This is a transformation that carries out significant political consequences: I argue that this has resulted in critical voices being molded to fit 'what works' types of questions while subjectivities are being subsumed into a market rationality. When politics is treated as a marketplace, dissent is accommodated, and critical voices marginalized.

Accommodation of dissent

The incorporation of managerial knowledge into participatory arenas has led to the transformation of consensus from a normative political ideal to become a key organizational 'goal' to be reached. The idea promoted by global multistakeholder setups is that, by adhering to a sequence of standardized steps, different groups with conflicting views will eventually be able to transcend differences and arrive at a shared perspective. This 'win-win' view presupposes that politics can be optimized and sees dissensus as an obstacle, which, through the application of the right tools,

can be contained and finally surpassed (see Bowman & Stamp, 2011; Mouffe, 2013; Rancière, 2010). 'Stakeholders' may, for instance, be prompted to answer prognostic questions on topics related to the future, or the procedural modalities of governing, thus eliding potentially contentious issues that do not lend themselves to practical solutions. By channeling the focus towards achieving of a convergence of views, 'what works' and future-oriented questions are favored over broader debates about the meaning and content of the problems at hand. When a consensus becomes a managerial imperative, politics is reduced to problem-solving, a casting that brackets or eliminates politics, conflict, and deliberation about common values or ends (Brown, 2015).

Uniformization of political subjects

The incorporation of managerial ideas into stakeholder mechanisms anchors decision-making processes into a market rationality. This shift brings about significant implications, as it reshuffles social roles, subjectivities, and key political practices. Within managerially-infused stakeholder arenas, groups are treated as atomized entities categorized solely on the premise that they have a 'stake' in the problem at hand. As a result, the collective dimensions, or the socio-political context within which these subjectivities and relationships exist cease to be relevant attributes; instead, everyone assumes and acts under the role of an 'equal partner'. The emphasis shifts to adaptability, learning, spontaneity, and self-organization, with minimal oversight. As a result, relational dimensions become purely transactional, an idea modeled to mirror the imagery of a market as a blueprint for action (Leander, 2011; Shamir, 2008). Within multistakeholder configurations, governments are repositioned as one source of authority that compete for influence on par with private sources of authority. Private companies, for their part, are repositioned as political actors with moral responsibilities towards society. The uniformization of political subjects results in erasure of the power differentials that articulate relationships. It also results in the rearrangement of collectivities according to the image of the economic, a process well suited to the dissemination of neoliberal reason and thus, to preserving the status quo (Brown, 2015).

The stakeholderization of global food governance: the UN Food Systems Summit

A controversial genesis

In the realm of food governance, the 2021 United Nations Food System Summit stands out as a clear example of the move towards multistakeholderism. Doing justice to its inclusive spirit, the summit brought together key players from the fields of science, business, policy, health care, and academia, as well as farmers, indigenous people, youth organizations, and consumer groups, to address the most pressing issues facing food systems (Covic et al., 2021). Before delving into the concrete effects of the management underpinning of the summit, it is crucial to understand the genesis of the encounter, its controversial origins and some of the

reasons that led to its boycott by entities within the UN system, civil society, and academia.

In September 2021, the summit took place following a year-long process of preparatory work. It received the name 'United Nations Food Systems Summit' to mark a crucial step in the 'UN Decade of Action' toward achieving the SDGs (UN, 2021a). It was intended to represent a milestone in the implementation of food systems transformation. For that, the summit emphasized the need to diversify and deepen stakeholder engagement and include civil society and the private sector into decision-making (UNEP et al., 2023). It was announced that the summit would consist of a number of multistakeholder mechanisms such as 'Food Systems Dialogues', a 'Multistakeholder Advisory Committee', an 'Independent Scientific Group', a system-wide 'UN Task Force', and a 'Champions Network'. In essence, the setup of the summit exemplifies the paradigm of multi-stakeholder approaches: it brings together a multi-partite group of actors believed to represent the stakes in an issue, it develops procedures to ensure a 'balanced' view on the matter and, based on these conditions, it generates outcomes that promise to settle the issue in the long run (Hofmann, 2016).

The announcement of the UNFSS took many by surprise. The encounter contained a series of features which made it very different from its predecessors. In the past, summits had been convened by recognized intergovernmental bodies, such as the CFS, recognized as the leading intergovernmental platform for the global governance of food systems (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). The CFS's prominent position in food policy, was the result of a significant reform in 2008 largely led by food sovereignty movements who advocated for greater participation in global food governance (Guttal, 2021). This led to the establishment of the CFS's CSIPM, which, by bringing together small-scale producers, peasants, farmers, workers, and indigenous peoples, represented as an essential component of the reformed CFS (Guttal, 2021).

The UNFSS marked the first time that a food summit came as a unilateral initiative of the UN Secretary-General, who described it as a 'multistakeholder' process (UN, 2021b). As pointed out by one interviewee, 'normally a food summit is announced through technical agencies, member states accepting. Last year when the FAO General Assembly met, they did not even mention the UNFSS, and there was no official communication by member states'.[3] The choice of the venue also held symbolic significance. The UNFSS was held in New York and not in Rome, where most of the UN food agencies are based. Some contend that the summit emerged as part of the close relationships that the UN maintains with the WEF, which is one of the main promoters of multistakeholder governance and neoliberal frames (Elias, 2013; McMichael, 2021). Although the WEF played a pivotal role in convening the UNFSS, in particular, in structuring its dialogues, 'a big effort was made to not cite the WEF as a co-sponsor'.[4]

Social movements' response: between autonomy and participation

The fact that the UNFSS did not emerge from a multilateral negotiated process fueled strong criticism. Despite its advertising as a 'People's Summit', the global encounter elicited strong opposition from civil society, academia, and even from the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food (Anderl & Hißen, 2023; Anderson

et al., 2022; Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021; McMichael, 2021; Montenegro de Wit et al., 2021). More than 500 civil society organizations representing 300 million members, affiliated with CSIPM to the CFS, announced a boycott of the summit and held a counter-meeting, under the banner of the 'Autonomous Response to the UN Food Systems Summit'. One of their primary demands was to assert the authority of the CFS, the main inter-governmental platform in food policy, over the summit (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). In an official declaration, the group of civil society organizations claimed that 'instead of being grounded in human rights, the UNFSS is a multistakeholder forum in which all actors, whether governments, individuals, regional/international agencies, or business/corporation representatives are portrayed as equal participants' (CSIPM, 2021). The summit also elicited strong criticism from scientists, researchers, and faculty members from different parts of the world, who supported the boycott under the argument of the summit's 'lack of epistemic justice' (Agro Ecology Research Action Collective, 2021). The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food also echoed this view, noting that the summit appeared to be heavily skewed in favor of one type of approach to food systems, namely market-based solutions (UN, 2020).

Even though heralded as inclusive, the summit failed to ensure that all voices were heard. Compliant organizations, closely aligned with technical solutions to combat food insecurity, could better access the official summit and push their concerns forward (Montenegro de Wit et al., 2021). This situation posed challenges to grassroot networks which had to balance between participating in the summit at the risk of being co-opted, and the danger of exclusion if they opted not to participate. As noted by an interviewee: 'we thought if we endorsed their discourse and decided to be part of the summit, they will try to capture our discourse under the guise that they are super inclusive. But we also knew that not engaging could lead to further marginalization'.[5] These tensions show that protesters from grassroot organizations advanced were not claiming a simple formal inclusion in the summit but rather asserting a more profound 'right to politics',—a demand for presence in the realm of contested claims, action, and hence intervention (Jabri, 2012, p. 9).

Managing deliberation: the accommodation of dissent

Systems leadership theories and the summit dialogues

The core argument of this paper is that the summit's exclusionary outcomes were largely shaped by the fusion of managerial theories with the summit's key decision-making mechanisms. Two processes were at the core of these dynamics: the accommodation of dissent and the uniformization of political subjects. In order to examine how the accommodation of dissent and the uniformization of political subjects operated, I will focus on a principal avenue for public participation within the summit: The Summit Dialogues (hereafter the dialogues).

As the core tool for cross-sectoral involvement, the dialogues were a key participatory mechanism designed to offer key insights for decision-making (UN, 2021a).[6] They consisted of country-level, independent, and global dialogues with open themes and focus, and they were presented in the form of online webinars and town hall meetings. According to the UNFSS, a total of 1,864 people participated in the 17 Dialogues (UN, 2021c). The dialogues were portrayed as means to

democratize UN decision-making mechanisms in the domain of food and empower diverse voices. Principles of non-hierarchical democratic expression, horizontality, and flexibility were frequently cited as a rationale, with proponents arguing that involving stakeholders leads to more informed decision-making and better policy 'outcomes'.

The methodology for the summit's dialogues was designed in partnership between the summit's Secretariat and 'Skills, Systems, and Synergies for Sustainable Development' (4SD), a private consultancy that promotes the incorporation of 'systems leadership' theory into the UN system. This theory is described as a stakeholder-management strategy to foster 'systemic change' (Senge et al., 2015).[7] 4SD crafted the dialogues in accordance with a menu of system leadership managerial techniques that, if applied correctly, promised to transform food governance.

The inspiration for the dialogues' methodology can be traced back to a report co-authored by a group of business scholars from the Harvard Kennedy School's Corporate Responsibility Initiative, which included the founder of 4SD as a co-author. In the report, the authors reflect on some of the foundations of 'system leadership', portraying it as a 'radical departure from conventional hierarchical approaches to decision-making' (Dreier et al., 2019). At its core, systems leadership revolves around widespread action and innovation to achieve common purposes and collective action (Senge et al., 2015). Akin to managerial frameworks, system leadership directs thinking towards optimized organizational objectives, the procedural means for measuring goal attainment, and how such activity relates to wider strategic visions (Harrison, 2001).

At the core of systems leadership theories lies the idea that the best way for bringing about transformation is by involving stakeholders from various sectors to address problems that are too complex for any one group to solve alone. According to the proponents of the theory, when the principles of systems leadership are applied correctly, 'situations previously suffering from polarization and inertia become more open, and what were previously seen as intractable problems become perceived as opportunities for innovation' (Senge et al., 2015). Expanding upon these 'un-hierarchical' principles, systems leadership highlights the significance of collaboration, collective problem-solving, and the ability to work across different sectors (Dreier et al., 2019). Skills such as 'strategy development', 'program management', 'coalition building', and 'collaboration' thus become indispensable (Dreier et al., 2019).

System leadership has metamorphosed into a robust governance framework that nowadays underpins several global initiatives, both within and outside the UN.[8] As a notable example is the UN, where the Chief Executives Board has grounded system leadership principles into its key norms and standards with the introduction of the United Nations System Leadership Framework. According to the UN, the United Nations System Leadership Framework is not a mere tool for human resources management, but an important '*vehicle through which to foster broader cultural change within the organization* that is required to meet the challenges of the Global Development Agenda' (UN, 2017, emphasis added).[9]

Achieving consensus via standardized steps

With systems leadership management theories at the helm of their proceedings, the summit dialogues were guided by a plethora of standardized rules meticulously designed to facilitate discussions and enable participants to work towards a common view (UNFSS, 2021). As such, the overall framework of the dialogues conceived politics as a series of techniques aimed at optimizing politics *via* the achievement of consensus. Dissensus, in contrast, was viewed as a barrier to the cooperative potential of different stakeholders, or at best, as an 'avoidable' element that could be surpassed (Freeman, 1984).

The description of the dialogues, for example, underscores that 'good' discussion topics can prompt individuals to 'move beyond their current affiliations and preoccupations towards a common challenge' (UN, 2021c, p. 2). As highlighted by the official description of the Dialogues' methodology:

> The Food Systems Summit Dialogues enable a standardized approach for the convening, curation, and facilitation of purposeful and organized events that encourage a broad and diverse range of stakeholders to come together and share their experiences of food systems. Through Dialogue, people will consider how their roles impact on those of others and seek out ways to improve or transform food systems, so they are suitable both for people and the planet. They provide an inclusive and supportive venue for debate, collaboration, consensus-building, and shared commitment-making. (Food Systems Summit Dialogues, 2021b)

Just as consensus can be attained through appropriate techniques, dissensus can also be effectively managed or contained with the proper application of managerial tools. Notably, the dialogues constantly make references to creating a 'sense of urgency', which is a consensus-building technique that consists of exerting pressure on stakeholders to resolve conflict (UNEP et al., 2023).

Key to the deployment of the dialogues were checklists, procedures, toolkits, and interactive dashboards to 'guide' and 'facilitate' them. Dialogues' 'facilitators', for example, were encouraged to follow a document called the 'Step-by-step guide for convenors' and put 'outcomes' into a 'Facilitator Discussion Group Template' available with all materials of a 'Take Part Zone' (UNFSS, 2021a). Similarly, the consultancy in charge of the methodology of the dialogues, describes its work as strongly influenced by what they call the 'CLEAR' principle, which stands for 'convene and commit', 'look and learn', 'engage and energize', 'act with accountability', and 'review and revise' (Dreier et al., 2019). By adhering to these rules, stakeholder dialogues can lead to 'Aha!' moments. These 'Aha!' moments prompt stakeholders to shift away 'from exhorting or criticizing others for not solving the problem to recognizing a collective capacity and responsibility to solve it themselves' (Dreier et al., 2019, p.29). Furthermore, the CLEAR principle is meant to foster a sense of shared purpose among stakeholders, leading to 'that's our North Star', whereby stakeholders agree on a shared goal or aspirational vision which serves to 'guide and align their efforts'. Once there, stakeholders move towards a 'We'll find a way' moment where 'challenges inevitably emerge'. These challenges, according to the CLEAR principle, serve as powerful drivers of innovation and collaboration as well as to find new ways to solve problems jointly (Dreier et al., 2019).

A more in-depth analysis of the 'Reference Manual for Convenors', a standardized 'check-list' type of document that the consultancy designed to outline the

procedures for guiding the dialogues, reveals that a significant proportion of the questions posed centered around generating 'workable' and output-oriented results. The methodology of the dialogues underscores the importance of asking pre-established questions that can drive 'successful' outcomes, such as: 'Who will need to be involved? What actions might be needed? How will these actions come to fruition? What impact could these outcomes have throughout the whole food system? How could my organization support these changes? What are the tensions we have identified and how can we manage them?' (Food Systems Summit Dialogues, 2021b).

Additionally, according to the manual, dialogues should 'prompt questions, looking at what can be done now, in the next 3 years and beyond' (Food Systems Summit Dialogues, 2021c, p. 35). Immediate action is stressed, asking participants to 'act with urgency' and elaborate pathways to food systems transformation towards 2030. When defining discussion topics, for example, convenors are instructed to start with a future statement which briefly indicates how food systems will function in ten years' time. As indicated by the manual, convenors should make 'an ambitious projection of the future that provokes to think beyond the current situation and to imagine something that is altogether better' (Food Systems Summit Dialogues, 2021c, p. 59).

The procedures outlined by the Reference Manual thus reflect a reduced emphasis on dimensions that point to the socio- political or value-based elements of the problem at hand, and rather emphasize their efficiency and output-oriented dimensions. According to a summit participant, the output-oriented orientation of the dialogues distracted attention from the root causes of the food crisis: 'The dialogues were designed as if everything was starting from zero'.[10] This orientation overlooks the power imbalances that exist in society, as well as the barriers that marginalized groups might have in having their voices heard. Another interviewee pointed out that, instead of focusing on crucial dimensions such as the political economy of food, the dialogues' emphasis on 'reachable goals' led to a prioritization of 'problem-solving' questions:

> Everything was so romantic but what about the political nature of changes? How can we talk about 'food systems' transformation without referring to the past (…) Also how can they talk about peasants, when all the efforts were directed towards incentivizing global trade? There was no point in looking at the past, it was all about let's unite hands now.[11]

Civil society representatives expressed similar concerns about the way in which the dialogues de-historicized food. As a staff member of the CSIPM to the CFS noted, 'looking at what needs to be done in the future is important. However, when *prognostic* diagnoses come to be the dominant way of organizing knowledge, this can come at the expense of having an in-depth analysis of the origins of the problems that the summit is trying to address'.[12] Another interviewee echoed a similar perspective, emphasizing that actionable plans alone are inadequate if they do not account for how historical conditions influence actions:

> What is the point of having everyone together if everything was so ahistorical? There was no place to history, there was no acceptance that you need to take a historical view of why hunger exists and create dialogues with questions about the structures that perpetuate this.[13]

Similar dynamics occurred with regard to agroecology. Rather than engaging in discussions about the complex relationships between agriculture, the environment, and society, the emphasis was on how agroecology could work as a potential 'technofix' to solve the food crisis and improve productivity (Anderl & Hißen, 2023; Canfield, 2022; Montenegro de Wit et al., 2021). A former UN staff member noted that, although the concept of agroecology was included in the summit, it was entirely voided from its political content: 'The name of the game was to demonstrate that agroecology and technology are pretty much the same thing. It has been framed in a way that is very technology-friendly'.[14] Although the meaning of agroecology remains contested (Giraldo & Rosset, 2018), at the core of the concept lies a set of fundamental claims related to the right of people to define their own food and agricultural systems, a key component of food sovereignty principles (Jansen, 2015). In the words of a representative of the CSIPM to the CFS, 'we tried to say that the systemic angle should be important, but the discussions totally ignored it and also ignored the origins of agroecology, the way it is practiced and the different forms it takes'.[15] This view was echoed by a member of the civil society, who mentioned that the summit extracted 'components' of agroecology, without saying that, as a concept, it was linked to something 'political'.[16] For example, during the dialogues, there were discussions on how 'everyone should all unite efforts, but never a discussion on how to end the use of pesticides'.[17]

The emphasis on the procedural means for attaining a unanimous accord thus prioritized 'what works' and forward-looking questions, which are arguably less contentious. The dialogues implicated voices, but only to the extent that they conceived governing according to a set of 'problem-solving' procedures. With the primary goal of achieving a confluence of views, the summit's main participatory mechanism put into place what Young (2001) calls 'constrained alternatives', a vision which places a greater emphasis on 'usable' knowledge at the expense of an articulation of alternative viewpoints. Under this orientation, the more radical propositions for food systems transformation became an 'excess' or a 'noise' that needed to be surpassed.

An absence of hierarchies: the uniformization of political subjects

Apart from confining dissensus to the managerial aspects of governance, the dialogues also led to the uniformization of political subjects, preventing critical voices from being perceived as agents of political transformation, instead portraying them as problem-solvers. As previously mentioned, one of the key ideas of the managerial theories underpinning the dialogues is that each stakeholder has equal and sufficient power to shape outcomes. As outlined by the Harvard report which served as the basis for the dialogues' methodology, decision-making is 'by nature non-hierarchical' and any individual can have an 'outsized influence on the initiation and progress' (Dreier et al., 2019, p. 31). The idea that decision-making is inherently non-hierarchical resonates with the principle of spontaneity, indicating that decisions can emerge from various participants rather than being dictated by a rigid top-down structure. By recognizing that any individual can contribute to change in meaningful ways, it is argued that any process remains 'open' to adjustments (Dreier et al., 2019, p. 31).

A closer analysis of the 'roles' delineated by the dialogues' methodology reveals how political deliberation within the dialogues was permeated by a flat vision of society and managerial templates deriving from it. The manual for convenors established three core roles: 'Convenor', 'facilitator' and 'curator'. Each role came with a set of pre-established 'desirable skills and attributes that participants are expected to possess and demonstrate' (Food Systems Summit Dialogues, 2021a). For example, convenors were required to be 'entrepreneurial', 'connectors' able to 'spot collaborative opportunities', and 'able to make sense out of chaos'. Curators should possess 'charismatic' and 'empathetic' attributes, while facilitators need to excel as 'good mediators' capable of handling 'differences of perspectives with confidence and respect' (Food Systems Summit Dialogues, 2021a, p.20).[18] Similar to the role that 'managers' undertake within firms, convenors, facilitators, and curators were viewed as neutral brokers whose role is to accommodate competing stakeholder interests (Banerjee, 2008). These qualities not only mirror the entrepreneurial and individualistic ethos commonly found in management theories, but also reflect how the dialogues conceived 'politics' as a marketplace. It is very telling that these roles also emphasize individuals' capacities to steer change and direct the future, a core feature of managerial reason (Van der Pijl, 2005).

Another exemplification of the uniformization of political subjects is evident in the way participants in the summit were conceived as 'equal partners' and atomized stakeholders. A representative of the CSIPM to the CFS pointed out that the concept of 'multistakeholderism' is a 'fuzzy' notion that fails to distinguish between duty-bearers, right-holders, and those responsible for the current situation.[19] The interviewee specifically highlighted the ambiguity regarding the roles and responsibilities attributed to each 'stakeholder' in contributing to the ongoing food crisis. Instead of allowing for a system of differentiation, the dialogues uniformized the roles of corporations and indigenous peoples; states were also equalized and depicted as actors with a 'stake' in the problem.

More broadly, this process reflects a push to embed 'society' in the economic rationality of the market, which is largely premised on the diffusion of authority into multiple sources that equally consult, trade, and compete over influence (Shamir, 2008). According to a staff member of the UN, 'the methodology of the summit did not take into account existing power imbalances'.[20] Some participants such as indigenous people expressed their disagreement regarding their designation as 'stakeholders'. In the words of the President of the Assembly of Indigenous Peoples for Food Sovereignty, 'the indigenous peoples of the world do not want to be treated as stakeholders, we are the subjects of collective rights and not mere stakeholders… It is a denial of our collective existence' (UNFSS, 2021b). For others, the Dialogues functioned as a vehicle for diluting responsibility:

> The problem is when the UN puts everyone and each one's interest at the same level *vs* a system of differentiation that takes into account power relations. This is clearly an attempt to cancel certain visions, claims, and experiences. But this is so typical of multistakeholder visions which are so in vogue today. To me, this is at the very core of the problem and the weakening of the United Nations system.[21]

An interviewee who participated in the encounter also reflected on the ambivalence of some of the participatory channels of the summit: 'The layers were very confusing, that it was not clear, at what level do you engage, whose interests do

you represent, how do you know it will be meaningful, how our autonomy was going to be respected'. The interviewee added that:

> The confusion I think was deliberate, to create something so complicated that nobody understands. These dialogues, platforms, and online engagement tools, nobody understands, most of them did not have clear rules, they were also not clear how the results of these dialogues are reflected in the outcomes of the summit and what role the public sector would take'.[22]

Civil society representatives also expressed their doubts about the lack of acknowledgment of dimensions such as conflicts of interest. While various stakeholders were depicted as equals, powerful economic networks dominated both the discourse at the summit as well as the solutions that emerged (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021). For instance, within the summit's 'Action Track number 1′, significant contributions came from agri-businesses, philanthropists, pharmaceutical companies, and financial funds (UNFSS, 2021c). Bayer (2022), for instance, suggested addressing the food crisis with technological solutions, offering farmers access to advanced seeds through its vegetable seeds business. Similarly, the Gates Foundation pledged US $922 million in funding to combat global hunger and malnutrition through product-centric approaches like vitamin supplementation and food fortification (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2021). Despite this appearance of equality, power imbalances were not addressed. As one interviewee noted:

> We sent a letter, saying that power relations were non-existent. We asked them to include an action track on how to oppose corporate capture. There was a dialogue, but we had a totally different diagnosis and vision. They told us it was not possible to have an action track that really addressed issues of power. So, it was very difficult: we thought if we endorsed their discourse and decided to be part of the summit, they will try to capture our discourse under the guise that they are super inclusive.[23]

However, perspectives diverged among interviewees. While some viewed multistakeholderism as problematic, others described it as necessary. According to a staff member of the WEF, who referred to multistakeholderism as a 'philosophy', the prevailing 'belief' in today's global context is that 'all parties should have a seat at the table'. This is particularly true for the private sector, as companies have a 'responsibility to build a better society'.[24] According to another WEF representative:

> Building on the certainty that there are complex problems that require all actors' commitments, an effective way to convene the private sector's responsibility and to mobilize their commitments is to make them sit at the table and try to make the food agenda aligned with their market logic, with the purpose of ultimately mobilizing more resources and bringing more visibility.[25]

This perspective sharply contrasts with the viewpoint of the CSIPM to the CFS, which contended that governments should lead the summit.[26] Civil society representatives insisted on grounding the summit in multilateral principles to ensure accountability. In the words of an interviewee: 'We are not against the private sector participating in negotiations, but what we demand are clear mechanisms of accountability'.[27] Additionally, some also argued that the multistakeholder nature of the summit contributed to sidelining existing negotiation structures endowed with traditional sources of legitimacy, in particular, the CFS. The summit, conversely,

opted for an 'off the record' approach in which commitments and actions were voluntary and non-binding (Covic et al., 2021).

Despite the collaborative spirit embodied by the summit, it was unclear how any of its elaborate forms of participation—from the online discussion boards to the virtual dialogues, to the other events—actually fed to its outcomes (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021). Although the results of the summit promoted 'commitment to actions' and 'solutions clusters', no clear standards, regulatory tools, nor mechanisms of responsibility were brought forward. In the words of a UN staff member: 'The UNFSS was an attempt to bring everyone into a conversation, but it had many flaws, and it could have been better, a lot of voices were stronger than others'.[28]

In sum, the integration of system leadership frameworks into the summit's participatory mechanism led to a uniformization of political subjects whereby political actors were positioned as equal and isolated stakeholders. This approach championed market-like principles like spontaneity, adaptability, and horizontal interactions as the guiding forces shaping these relationships. However, this perspective disregarded the collective dimensions of these relationships, as well as the power imbalances that largely shape whose voice carries more weight.

Conclusion

To account for how political marginalization occurs within collaborative governance models such as multistakeholder initiatives, this paper examined the integration of managerial techniques into the design and operation of participatory mechanisms, which are ubiquitous in today's collaborative governance landscape.

Empirically, this paper focused on the multistakeholder dialogues held during the 2021 UNFSS. The paper showed that the managerial underpinnings of the summit led to the *accommodation* of dissent, as they promoted a goal-oriented approach to decision-making, mainly concerned with a menu of procedures to be followed to reach consensus. This shifted debates away from the political content of food towards its problem-solving dimensions. In doing so, the dialogues did not actively exclude critical voices, but instead value those that fit the programmatic modalities of governing. While alternatives to the dominant industrial agricultural model were discussed, they were mainly incorporated into the summit as 'technical' fixes to boost productivity. In other words, forms of disagreement were allowed but mainly with respect to the procedures, institutional adjustments, or the urgency of the agendas in question. Additionally, the paper showed that, through their design rooted in managerial ideas, the summit dialogues grounded deliberation processes in a market-inspired rationality. Ideals such as spontaneity, self-regulation, and non-hierarchy were constantly invoked. This configuration, which I called the *uniformization* of political subjectivities, subsumed diverse socio-political collectives in a market-like configuration, portraying them as atomized 'stakeholders' competing for influence. As a result, the private-public nexus was reshuffled, leading to a flat logic of equivalence where governments and businesses engage in decision-making on an equal footing. As the analysis has shown, this not only prevented an articulation of the socio-political contexts within which these relationships take shape, but also excluded viewpoints that were not amenable to market-based logics.

In exploring the entwinement between managerialism and multistakeholderism, this paper makes three key contributions to existing IPE scholarship: First, in analyzing the connections between managerial ideas and stakeholder-based approaches, my analysis sheds light on how managerialism acts as a key driver of political marginalization in inclusive arenas. Within multistakeholder settings, managerial ideas can be effectively invoked to stabilize dominant ways of knowing and acting upon problems. However, I showed that unlike in states or other organizations where managerialism reflects a more pervasive concern for 'order' and demarcation processes, managerialism within multistakeholder models unfolds through boundary-blurring mechanisms. In an era of greater politicization and pluralization, ideals of spontaneity, flexibility, democratization, and horizontality become central to the operations and success of managerial reason. Managerial knowledge is thus not mobilized as an instrument to instigate weighty organizational 'reforms' or to evaluate processes, but is rather used as a tool to subtly 'guide' debates on how societies ought to be. These shifting dynamics attest to the versatility of managerialism as well as to its enduring power (Eagleton-Pierce & Knafo, 2020; Hanlon, 2015; Moore & Joyce, 2020).

Second, this paper is highly relevant to an emerging strand of IPE scholarship which, in the context of the increased porosity of IOs boundaries (Hofmann et al., 2023) has examined the role of intermediaries and private consultancies in global politics (Eckl & Hanrieder, 2022; Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2016; Littoz-Monnet & Uribe, 2023; Momani, 2017; Pouliot 2024; Seabrooke & Sending, 2020; Sturdy et al., 2015). It adds to these accounts by unpacking how the role of consultancies has expanded into the realm of political deliberation and is, as a result, increasingly shaping political debates on how problems ought to be governed.

Third, as an adjacent contribution, the paper complements existing IPE work on food and agriculture (Clapp, 2019; Margulis, 2018; McKeon, 2014). It shows that the prioritization of market-based approaches in the field of food are not only determined by macro aspects such as the neoliberalization or financialization of food systems, but also can be shaped by the integration of procedures originally developed in the corporate world into key decision-making mechanisms. However, the in-depth case study of this paper is highly relevant beyond the realm of food policy, offering insights that could resonate with domains such as global health, education, and the environment. How is it possible that participatory channels devised to make governance more inclusive do not modify the underlying assumptions upon which the predominant responses to specific policy problems are based?

When politics is transformed into a manageable portfolio, the capacity for critique and contestation becomes constrained. On what grounds can citizens contest the work of consultancies that claim to be working on how to make governance more inclusive, or on how to reach political consensus? It is hard to dispute these types of claims, mainly as they seem impartial and dissociated from the political substance of the problems at hand. In an era where global decision-making operates through inclusion—and deliberation—there is a need to remain attentive to managerialism's *modus operandi* as well as to the role of 'experts' whose authority stems from their capacity to 'convene' stakeholder dialogues and 'orchestrate' debates on how society ought to be governed.

Notes

1. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/1970/09/13/archives/a-friedman-doctrine-the-social-responsibility-of-business-is-to.html,last. accessed 16 February 2024.
2. One defining feature of deliberative democracy is that individuals participating in democratic processes are amenable to changing their preferences as a result of the reflection induced by deliberation (Dryzek, 2002). This conception matches up to the stakeholder model's emphasis on achieving consensual outcomes.
3. Interview with member of the CSIPM to the CFS, September 13, 2020.
4. Interview with former UN staff member, October 20, 2021.
5. Interview with civil society representative, September 1, 2022.
6. The idea of incorporating a series of dialogues into the UNFSS originated from a prior initiative called 'Food Systems Dialogues' which was initiated in 2018 by five partners: EAT, Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), GAIN, The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the WEF. These partner organizations, which are known for their support of market-based solutions, came together to organize the precursor series of dialogues with the goal of achieving a 'common vision' through 'concerted efforts' (Food Systems Summit Dialogues, 2023).
7. Available at: https://4sdfoundation.orgm, last accessed 13 February 2024.
8. For instance, in 2016, the WEF established systems leadership as a core element of its global strategy. The forum has since then published several reports to refine the approach (Dreier et al., 2019).
9. The approach has also found practical applications in the development sector, with several consultancies and nonprofits advising governments and the UN on how to implement systems leadership through methods such as deliberation, scenario planning, alliance-building, and collaborative instruments.
10. Interview with representative form civil society, September 13, 2022.
11. Interview with NGO staff member, January 19, 2023.
12. Interview with representative from civil society, September 13, 2022.
13. Interview with representative from civil society, October 4, 2022.
14. Interview with former UN official, October 20, 2021.
15. Interview with member of the CSIPM to the CFS, September 12, 2022.
16. Interviews with civil society representatives, 2020-2023.
17. Interview with NGO staff member, January 17, 2023.
18. It is important to note that this approach also influenced a large share of the activities within the UNFSS. For example, Action Tracks solicited members and their stakeholders to submit 'ideas' for meeting SDGs, collecting over 1200 proposals. Then, consultants hired by the summit's scientific Group were brought into pre-screen to apply 'review criteria' to all proposals. This, according to attendants, kept participants distracted with meaningless activities (Molly et al., 2022).
19. Interview with representative from grassroots organization, November 23, 2021.
20. Ibid.
21. Interview with NGO staff member, January 19, 2023.
22. Interview with civil society representative, October 4, 2022.
23. Interview with civil society representative, September 1, 2022.
24. Interview with WEF staff member, December 6, 2022.
25. Interview with WEF staff member, November 2, 2021.
26. Interview with representative of grassroots organization, September 13, 2022.
27. Interview with NGO staff member, October 3, 2022.
28. Interview with UN official, January 17, 2023.

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