9 Assessing Transboundary Water Governance in the Rhine Basin through a Gender Lens

The International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine

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Introduction

> "*I've seen the [negotiations in the] '90s and there were all men with a tie and a suit, and everybody spoke in a very mechanical way, reading the speech. The atmosphere was cold and very, very formal. It changed because the world is changing, but also because of the influence of women*".
>
> *(7m, interview, 12 December 2019)*

The quote above reflects the experiences of someone who has observed the transboundary water governance processes in the Rhine for over three decades. It specifically details the dynamics in negotiations held over 25 years ago in the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR). It shows a glimpse of a time where negotiations over the Rhine were done differently, and a time when women were only present in the negotiations in supporting roles, such as secretaries and interpreters. In line with other people we interviewed, it shows how transboundary water governance has changed from a cold to a more amicable atmosphere; from women in supporting roles like secretaries and interpreters, to women being in the majority of leadership and scientific positions.

Although the ICPR as a River Basin Organisation (RBO) stands out with a majority of women in leading positions, gender has not been addressed in the many studies done on water governance and water cooperation in the Rhine basin (Becker et al. 2007; Dieperink 2000; Huntjens et al. 2017; Lagendijk 2016; Mostert 2009; Pfeiffer & Leentvaar 2013; Schiff 2017; Verweij 1999). The remarkable change in the number and roles of men and women in the ICPR over the past decades draws our attention to the gendered nature of the transboundary water governance in this RBO, and how this has influenced who has access to decision making and who is excluded, whether and how the rules of the game for men and women are different, and how this influences the interactions over transboundary waters in the Rhine. Analysing the ICPR through a

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gender lens invites us to go beyond analysing states, and to concentrate on those who make up the institutions through their experiences and everyday practices.

The aim of this descriptive single-case study is to identify how transboundary water governance in the Rhine, and specifically the ICPR, is socially constructed, how this creates barriers and opportunities for those who participate, as well as how individuals navigate these, with a specific focus on women's participation.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Organisational structures are not gender neutral, although they are often presented as such. Gender, the distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine, is an integral part of organisational and societal processes, although often invisible, and it shapes "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity" (Acker, 1990, p. 146; Acker, 1992, p. 565). The ideas on how women and men should behave, and that define relations of power and hierarchy between individuals, are socially constructed and culturally variable (Acker, 1992).

Oftentimes it is difficult to see how our social practices are gendered, or how they create advantages and disadvantages, as these are the processes that we are used to. They are more visible to those who fall outside of the norms, or are forced or nudged to change their behaviour to fit in. We apply the feminist theory of organisations of Acker (2012) who identifies four substructures that produce and perpetuate gendered assumptions and power relations, which guide our research on the oftentimes invisible gendered processes. The first substructure is called organising processes; these are concrete practical activities that make up an organisation, including job descriptions, wages, hierarchies, what the workplace looks like, as well as norms and rules on how to behave in the workplace. The second is organisation culture, which refers to beliefs about gender differences and (in)equality. The third, called interactions on the job, looks at how the relationships between people who work within the same organisation, or within the context of an RBO, can reinforce or create differences between men and women. The last substructure is called gendered identities, which are ideas of an individual about what it means to be a man or a woman, influenced by – and in turn influencing – their direct environment (ibid., p. 215).

These substructures are highly interrelated and mutually influence, enforce, and challenge gendered relations. For our research in the Rhine, we identify not only how these substructures perpetuate gendered assumptions and power relations, but also how they contribute to changing these assumptions and challenging power relations, especially as the number of men and women in the ICPR secretariat and the delegations has changed so significantly over the past 20 years.

Data for this chapter has been collected as part of a comparative analysis of gender and transboundary water governance in three different river basins, namely the Nile, Chu–Talas, and Rhine basins[1] and in the context of an MSc research (Mattur 2020). For this chapter, delegates from France, Germany, and the Netherlands who are part of the Strategy Group of the ICPR (five interviews) and people involved in the ICPR secretariat (four interviews) and interviews with members of Working Groups for context (two) were selected. The interviewees agreed to be anonymous. To provide a fuller understanding for the reader we have indicated the sex of the interviewees in the references to the interviews (m/f), followed by an identification number. In acknowledgement of the progress made in discussions on sex and gender, we feel it is important to note that we have not encountered people who transitioned or identified themselves other than male/female and therefore feel comfortable in using the m/f distinction. We will further reflect on this in the conclusion. Based on these interviews we do not claim a full understanding of gendered practices within the ICPR and ministries that send delegates. However, we aspire to contribute to a discussion on how gender plays a role in transboundary water governance in general, and particularly in the Rhine, with the insights provided.

We continue this chapter by providing background information about the ICPR, after which we discuss the four substructures, namely organising processes, organisation culture, interactions on the job, and gendered identities, in the context of the Strategy Group of the ICPR.

Introduction to the Case: the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine

The Rhine is one of the most important rivers in Europe. It provides drinking water, infrastructure for transport, energy, and opportunities for tourism (Tockner et al. 2009). The Rhine catchment area is about 170,000 km^2 connecting nine European countries, namely Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Liechtenstein, France, Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

The countries that share the Rhine river have a long history of cooperation and conflict over the use, quality, and quantity of its waters. Agreements on navigation date back to 1815, and in 1869 the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland agreed on the protection of the river's salmon population (Frijters & Leentvaar 2003). The pollution in the Rhine was quickly identified as an important contribution to the deterioration of the salmon population but did not fall within the scope of the agreement (ICPR 2020; Mostert 2009). To specifically address this issue, and to provide a platform for the riparian states to meet, discuss, and devise strategies to resolve the problems in the Rhine basin, the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine against Pollution (ICPRP) was created in 1950 with a secretariat in Koblenz, Germany. It was later renamed as International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) to acknowledge the other issues at stake in the river (Dieperink 2000; Ruchay 1995). It is important to note that this cooperation started soon after the Second World War, constituting a first rapprochement between the basin states who were at opposite sites during the war. In the early years, the ICPR focused mainly on data collection and analysis to invest in shared knowledge, baseline information, and the harmonisation of monitoring programmes and methods. A majority of the RBO's work remains directly or closely related to monitoring and analysing water quality and quantity. A sign of the good relations is the merger and joint exploitation of the monitoring stations by Germany and the Netherlands at the border between them at Bimmen (Germany) and Lobith (the Netherlands).

The legal framework for the ICPR was developed not only by the organisation itself through the Convention on the Protection of the Rhine, which serves as its legal basis. As all basin states, apart from Switzerland, are currently part of the European Union (EU), relevant European law is also part of this framework, including the European Water Framework Directive in 2000, and the Flood Directive after 2006 (Disco & Heezik 2014). Between Switzerland and the European Union specific bilateral agreements are made. Hence, the European directives have a harmonising effect that further facilitates cooperation in the basin.

Although agreements on water quality date back to 1869, little changed in improving the water quality of the Rhine, until the Sandoz incident in 1986. Due to a fire in a chemical factory in Switzerland, harmful pesticides were discharged into the river which killed fish and other organisms downstream, all the way to the Netherlands (Mielnik 2018). This resulted in enormous pressure from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governments in the basin to bring back the salmon in the Rhine. The joint problem created a unique window of opportunity for the ICPR to adopt an ambitious common strategy that addressed water quality and re-opening the salmon migration routes, mainly blocked by dams (ICPR 1987). Since then, the ICPR has made tremendous progress in maintaining the Rhine's water quality and salmon population through various programmes such as the Rhine Action Programme (1987), and the Action Plan on Floods, Rhine 2000, Rhine 2020, Salmon 2020, and Rhine 2040 (ICPR n.d.-a). The ICPR is proud of the progress made in terms of cooperation, as shown by the following quote on its website: "Today, international cooperation in environment and water protection is considered to be obvious" (ICPR n.d.-b).

Currently, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the European Union are the members of the ICPR. Belgium, Austria, and Liechtenstein along with intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations in the basin have an observer status. Italy has a nominal position as it does not use the Rhine's resources (ICPR 2020).

Currently, the ICPR is organised as depicted in Figure 9.1. The Plenary Assembly meets annually to prepare resolutions for ministers in charge of the Rhine (ICPR 2018). The Conference of Rhine Ministers is organised intermittently, with the last one hosted in 2020. During this Conference decisions are taken based on the resolutions prepared by the Plenary Assembly. The ICPR is supported by a Secretariat based in Koblenz, Germany, with currently

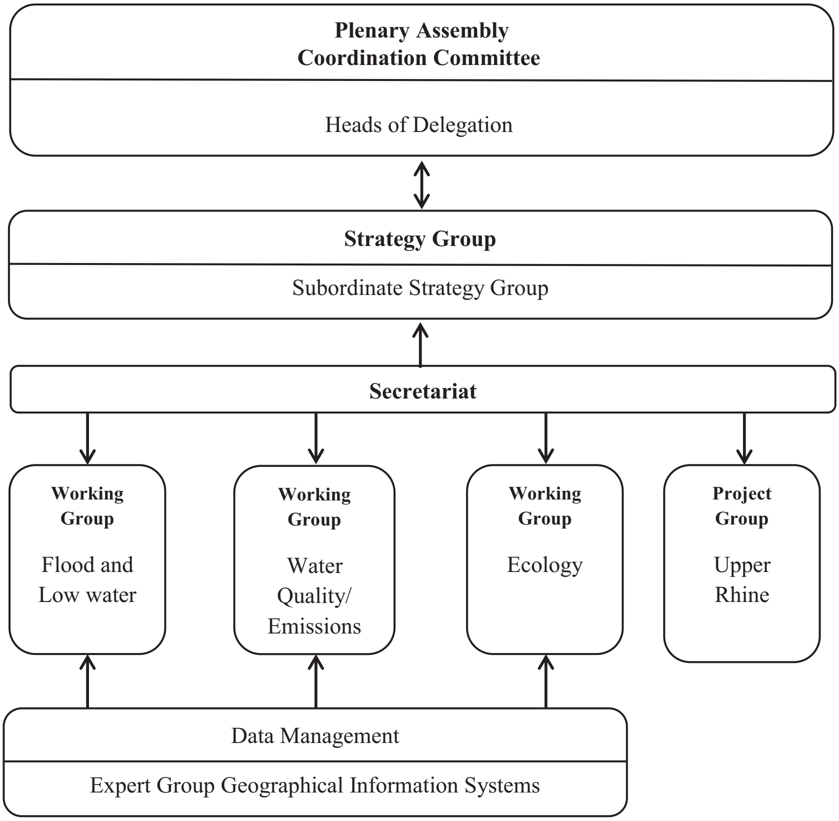
Plenary Assembly
Coordination Committee
Heads of Delegation
Strategy Group
Subordinate Strategy Group
Secretariat
Working Group
Flood and Low water
Working Group
Water Quality/ Emissions
Working Group
Ecology
Project Group
Upper Rhine
Data Management
Expert Group Geographical Information Systems

Figure 9.1 Structure of the ICPR (figure compiled by authors)

12 staff including secretaries, scientific assistants, translators, the Executive Secretary, as well as the Chair. The latter is appointed by the six member states on rotation. The Working Groups, supported by expert groups, deal with technical work, and provide input to the Strategy Group. The Strategy Group subsequently prepares decisions for discussion in the Plenary Assembly, the Coordination Committee of Rhine, and for the Conference of Ministers. The Strategy Group can be seen as the engine of the ICPR. Its delegates are civil servants with senior positions within the Ministries of Environment and Water and other related ministries in the Rhine basin countries. This group consists of a delegation of two to three people from each country, mostly appointed by Ministries of Environment, Water, and/or Foreign Affairs. In this chapter, we focus specifically on the Strategy Group and Secretariat of the ICPR.

Men were in majority in the Strategy Group, Plenary Assembly, and the working groups, but those who have been involved for more than two decades with the ICPR shared in the interviews that a change could be observed around

2005. Slowly, more women were included in the delegations, starting with the Netherlands, after which Germany, then France, and then Luxembourg followed. Switzerland remains the least gender-balanced delegation.

We continue our analysis by concentrating on Acker's (1992, 2012) four substructures to better understand how gender plays a role in the Strategy Group of the ICPR. We first discuss organising processes, after which we continue with organisation culture, interactions on the job, and gendered identities.

Organising Processes

Organising processes are practical activities that make up an organisation, including job descriptions, wages, hierarchies, what the workplace looks like, as well as norms and rules of how to behave at work (Acker 1992). Here we focus on the organising processes in the organisations that mandate people to the Strategy Group of the ICPR as these processes define who is involved in negotiations. Thereafter, we briefly discuss the process of selection of the Executive Secretary.

In the past, delegations were composed of a Head of Delegation and three or four experts (Disco & Heezik 2014; Ruchay 1995). Until the 1970s, the Heads of Delegation, delegates, and experts were all high-level civil servants (Disco & Heezik 2014). Presently, the delegations of the member states are made up of the delegates appointed to work in different organs in the ICPR, such as the Strategy Group or the different Working Groups. There is no limit to the number of people representing a member country, but each country has only one vote regardless of the number of delegates. Based on the interviews, we see that for those who are delegated to the Strategy Group, the organising processes within their home institution are of most influence (2f, interview, 24 January 2020; 9F, interview, 19 December 2019).

It is important to note that ICPR has no full-time delegates, as the delegates interviewed were only utilising 30 per cent of their time for the ICPR. Except for the Secretariat, the delegates in all the groups work in their respective national organisations. The work at the ICPR was therefore a contributing factor, but not a main factor, in the selection of the delegates. Except for one person who worked as Scientific Assistant for the Secretariat, all other interviewees were above 50 years of age, all were white Europeans with a university education. This is already a sign that there is a limitation in diversity, either in selection processes or of people available to do the job of negotiating on behalf of their country in the ICPR's Strategy Group. In the past, there was even less diversity with only male representatives in the ICPR bodies. This has changed in the past 20 years, as remembered by an interviewee:

> *I think the change came in, in Germany in 2005, with the female head of delegation, and at the same time in the Netherlands, and also France around that time.*
> (8f, interview, 13 December 2019)

Two interviewees who were interviewed at the same time reflect on the participation of men and women in the ICPR (6m and 7m, interview, 12 December 2019):

7m: "It was not slowly, it was quite quick. It's an accelerating process. Women are now at every level, every stage, interested in all sciences. They are coming up in research, development. I think there's no special place where you meet only men".
6m: "But I guess there are certain issues, like for example I'm working on floods, and there historically, but also still now, there are a bit more men, and in dikes too".
7m: "And chemicals, also men".
6m: "But like the biology group has more women. But it's changing".
7m: "We also have traditional roles, traditional groups".

Especially related to the composition of the Working Groups, interviewees indicate that the traditional roles of men in engineering and women in more integrated studies, such as biology, are clearly visible. The composition of the delegations in the Strategy Group is also affected by the fact that the job requirements in the water sector in general, and the ICPR specifically, have become more diverse. Interviewees mentioned that an engineering diploma is not an entry requirement for a job in the water sector in the Rhine basin countries anymore, as also expressed in the following quote:

> *Before it was building dams, building sluices, building wastewater treatment plants and everybody needed engineers, and they were men. And then ecology became more important, and the persons who had the expertise were women. So it was that all the countries had to employ biologists and the best biologists on the market were women.*
>
> (5m, interview, 23 January 2020)

This experience is supported by research, for instance by the European Commission (2019), that shows how some disciplines, such as environmental studies or law, are more popular with women than men in Western Europe. The changing job requirements consequently have a positive effect on the number of women in both the delegations, as well as in the Secretariat of the ICPR.

Another organising process that is strongly related to the work of the delegates is the regulations of the home institution – for how long a person can remain active in the same position and function. These rules differ per country, as illustrated below, and influence who is chosen as representative, in turn affecting the work done by the ICPR. In countries with little or no rotation of roles, delegates remain in the ICPR for a longer period and those who remain in the ICPR longer may also have more conservative views on how women and men should behave. The following two quotes exemplify this

> *The Dutch I think were the first; it was normal in The Netherlands, much more normal than in other countries. I think there are more changes in the staff, and they*

> *change their posts often. And this is also the case in France, but not in Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. And then it was more senior experts [who] are allowed to go to the international meetings.*
>
> (7m, interview, 12 December 2019)

> *I have to change jobs every seven years. So if my behaviour is not well, the next job will be down. It's very easy. [If a person] stays until the pension, then that makes the country not very flexible. That's why old behaviours can stay.*
>
> (1f, interview, 10 January 2020)

Gender quotas are also of influence, especially according to the Dutch and German interviewees. One female interviewee reflects:

> *Maybe I'm very lucky [...] because sometimes there was this that they said, we need a female now. And then I was around.*
>
> (1f, interview, 10 January 2020)

A male interviewee shares that a gender quota has had influence on his career as well:

> *Being a man restricted me two times getting a job. But this was not due to soft skills but due to regulations which said [that] if there are two equal qualifications, the woman had to be taken.*
>
> (5m, interview, 23 January 2020)

A final example of an organising process in the ICPR is the selection of the Executive Secretary. As shown in Figure 9.1, the ICPR's Strategy Group is supported by the Secretariat and chaired by the Executive Secretary. The Executive Secretary has a central role in the ICPR, such as preparing meetings and agendas, as well as engaging with the different delegations to prepare joint decisions. In the past it was agreed that the Executive Secretary was not proposed, but directly appointed by the Netherlands' delegation as a downstream country (8F, interview, 13 December 2019; 11m, interview, 19 May 2020). This resulted in Executive Secretaries being selected from a pool of Dutch water experts, that were, and are, predominantly male, and where most were educated as engineers. Currently this rule is no longer used, and the Dutch delegation can only propose the Executive Secretary and cannot appoint them directly – now included in ICPR's Rules of Procedure (ICPR 2018 Art.10, Para. 6). After these rules changed, the next Executive Secretary was a woman, appointed in 2015.

Organisation Culture

The next substructure we discuss is organisation culture, which refers to beliefs about gender difference, equality, and inequality within an organisation, and that are embedded in societal and cultural beliefs that differ per country, region, and social group (Acker 1992). The interviewees have made references to norms and culture with regard to the Ministry or organisation at which they work, as well as the culture within the ICPR. There are several telling references on expectations of the employees and what is needed to advance in an organisation, and how this impacts men and women differently. We discuss clashing expectations between professional and home life and the expected behaviours of self-promotion. Additionally, we explore beliefs about what constitutes a good team, as examples of chances for advancement for men and women can be different, or more equal, based on beliefs about gender differences.

Expectations of how to behave as a professional may clash with expectations of how to behave at home. The female interviewees with children indicate that when their children were young, they were the ones who were expected to take a more active role in caring for them. The male interviewees did not mention that such a dynamic had an influence on their careers. One female interviewee shares how she dealt with this:

> *So I worked four days and then I tried to do it so that people didn't notice. […] So I always tried to be, let's say, definitely reachable. So even if it was my day off, if the phone went, I took it. Because if you are known as the person who's never there, then the promotions won't be for you.*
>
> (1f, 1nterview, 10 January 2020)

Being asked about the number of men and women in high-level positions, three interviewees indicate that a main reason women are not in high-level positions is that there is a culture of women not standing up for themselves, while men are found to be more confident in self-promotion (4m, interview, 17 January 2020; 8f, interview, 13 December 2019; 9f, interview, 19 December 2019). An example:

> *We are perhaps too humble often, it's sort of the case for [many] applicants. But men think I could do it, I could do it. And we are more perhaps [like]: the other is better than me and so on.*
>
> (9f, interview, 19 December 2019)

A commonality in all the interviews was that the interviewees mentioned that they had not thought about gender consciously before, and that they did not experience it as being of influence on their work. Additionally, several interviewees stated that they do not see intrinsic differences between men and women delegates, especially in terms of work capacity. But as the interviews progressed and more questions probed into gendered ideas and behaviours, it became clear that gender does indeed have an influence and those ideas about what it entails to be a man or woman were different amongst the interviewees. For instance, a statement on equality and sameness of men and women was to be followed up by a list of how a man behaved in a feminine way, or a woman in a very masculine way, which emphasises differences.

Through these opposing behaviours the interviewees unconsciously conceded that there are differences between men and women which have unique outcomes in the ICPR and they shared their generalised ideas of masculine and feminine behaviours, beyond what they thought is socially acceptable. Another example is that in all interviews with women, the idea that there are no intrinsic differences between men and women was later contradicted, for instance through statements such as women are better negotiators than men as they are better listeners and more prone to look for opportunities for cooperation instead of having an adversarial approach that they perceive men to have. This relates strongly with gendered identities, which we discuss later on, again emphasising how the different substructures are interrelated and enforce each other.

The reflections on organisation culture show how subconscious biases exist that clearly influence the career prospects of -especially- women due to ideas of how men and women, as well as water professionals and diplomats should behave. For instance, several interviewees shared their personal opinion that women are less often selected for a position as they are generally less prone to self-promotion than their male counterparts. Within institutions these unconscious biases can be surpassed through quotas that help to counter the effects of these biases in hiring processes. These are in effect for those working within the Secretariat of the ICPR due to German labour law.

Interactions on the Job

Interactions on the job entail exchanges between individuals that can reinforce or create differences between men and women in the work environment (Acker 1992). With regard to this substructure, we have chosen to focus mainly on negotiations within the ICPR, as the interviewees have mainly reflected on interactions between men and women in this context.

As indicated before, the ICPR is proud of a long history of cooperation, and interviewees who have been part of the Strategy Group for over ten years share that they experience an atmosphere of cooperation (7m, interview, 12 December 2019; 8f, interview, 13 December 2019; 9f, interview, 19 December 2019). However, in the past, negotiation strategies were experienced as much more aggressive:

> *It's an easier atmosphere I think, but it's also the growing trust in the commission and it's more normal to work with the neighbours and other countries.*
>
> (8f, interview, 13 December 2019)

> *The focus of the ICPR is slowly changing. In the past, we had topics which were more of a conflict of sorts. For example, with salt from France or pollutants coming from the Swiss chemical industry. The topics could be a reason why people were knocking each other.*
>
> (7m, interview, 12 December 2019)

Thus, issues discussed in the Rhine basin are not as contested and securitised now as they were in the early stages of the ICPR. The history of cooperation has contributed to a level of trust in constructive outcomes as most members believe that, although some topics may be contentious and take time to be resolved, a resolution will be found over time (7m, interview, 12 December 2019; 8f, interview, 13 December 2019; 9f, interview, 19 December 2019). This provides the possibility for individuals to develop different negotiation styles: *"So there are discussions where I would not say people get a bit more rude, but very open"* (9f, interview, 19 December 2019)

Interestingly, those who indicate that the atmosphere is friendly and open have been part of the ICPR community for over ten years. Newcomers sometimes experience a different atmosphere in which they have the feeling they must earn their position to be taken seriously. For those delegations that change often, it is also more challenging to become part of this seemingly close-knit group. This also may be an advantage in negotiations, especially at times where the mandate of the home ministry goes against the wishes of the majority in the ICPR; from a more distanced position it may be easier to be firm. Those who mention they experienced challenges as newcomers to the ICPR were all women.

With regard to interaction on the job, it is interesting to note repeated references to so-called animal behaviour when it comes to describing the negotiation style of men, especially in the past.

> *In the past, there would be explosive people. People were shouting in conferences. Not aggressively, but just to focus or emphasise interest. It is what men in the past used, like a gorilla.*
>
> (7m, interview, 12 December 2019)

Currently, this aggressive behaviour is suggested to be rare, but still experienced as troubling:

> *This approach is really vanishing, you know. It's also a generation issue, you know younger men they do not have this behaviour. It's the older elephants, you know, which are dying out. Luckily? Yeah.*
>
> (9f, interview, 19 December 2019)

Several interviewees indicate that they believe that the presence of women helps to reduce aggressiveness in negotiations:

> *I think the presence of women helps to not let things escalate you know, which of course the risk is not so high that things are escalating, but you never know. And I think the presence of women helps that things are not getting too rude or too open.*
>
> (9f, interview, 19 December 2019)

Related to the interaction between men and women it is notable how all interviewees stress that gender balance is important for each delegation, and how they take this into account when constituting a team (1f, interview, 10 January 2020; 2f, interview, 24 January 2020; 8f, interview, 13 December 2019; 9f, interview, 19 December 2019; 10m, interview, 29 April 2020; 11m, interview, 19 May 2020). This is also supported by policies and quotas in different basin countries, as is discussed under the organising processes section. It shows how these different structures are closely interrelated.

In interactions on the job, there are notable differences between men and women in terms of experiencing interactions on the job. For instance, behaviour that is seen as aggressive and unacceptable by three female interviewees (1f, interview, 10 January 2020; 2f, interview, 24 January 2020; 8f, interview, 13 December 2019), is commended by a male interviewee who indicates that this behaviour is something that is part of the job: "*You have to play that role. You have to earn it*" (10m, interview, 29 April 2020)

Those who indicated experiencing differences between women and men which in turn impacted their behaviour were female interviewees, while most of the male interviewees did not experience any differences. This also results in different behaviour of men and women, also influencing their interactions:

> *You always have to choose 50–50, and you find women are the best. They are, not only in soft skills but in hard skills as well. Because maybe some of the male candidates rely on their authority of being male and they are not well prepared for these talks you ask them, what do you think? And then they tell, I really don't know what I should say? And women are well prepared.*
>
> (4m, interview, 17 January 2020)

Gendered Identities

Gendered identities are the ideas of individual/s about what it means to be a man or a woman. The interactions are influenced by the organisational culture and by individual characteristics, and they are socially constructed and culturally variable (Acker 1992). All interviewees shared that they try to facilitate a mix between men and women in their team, and state that they do not see general differences in capacities between people based on their gender. They say that in teams they aim for a balance and that individual personality matters the most, beyond being a man or a woman.

> *But trust, knowing each other, knowing why you react the way you react. That is much more important than – at least here in the Western European situation – whether that is brought forward by a man or a woman.*
>
> (10m, interview, 29 April 2020)

> *It doesn't really matter whether in the discussions itself whether you're a man or woman, no. It really depends on if you have the best background and the best arguments.*
>
> (8f, interview, 13 December 2019)

Female interviewees were especially open to sharing their perception on differences in behaviour between men and women when negotiation styles were discussed, as presented in the previous section. In other instances, both female and male interviewees refer only unconsciously to differing expectations for men and women, also resulting in contradicting statements during the interviews. An example of how subtle these expectations are is shared in the quote below.

> *But for example, I think another woman might have left the table when the [nationality] guy did what he did […] But because I'm me, and I'm quite strong, the opposite happens. I think: "I'll never let you win". That's what I think.*
>
> (1f, interview, 10 January 2020)

By analysing herself as a strong person, the interviewee also shares that she estimates that other female colleagues may not be able to withstand aggressive negotiating behaviour, expressing an underlying gendered idea generalising women to be weak; also portraying oneself as strong, differentiating from other women.

Another issue is that each of the female interviewees indicated they had the feeling that they had to work harder than the men to prove themselves as being capable of their job.

> *"I think you have to do, to work harder than men".*
>
> (8f, interview, 13 December 2019)

This illustrates how water diplomacy is still considered a masculine world, where for those who benefit most from the status quo it is difficult to discern power imbalances, as well as to recognise what it means to have less power.

Also, female interviewees expressed that they had to adapt their behaviours while working in the ICPR. One of the interviewees took an acting class to learn masculine traits to help her be taken seriously by her male colleagues:

> *If you want to negotiate in a male fashion, for example, you start to sit like this (casually with wide legs). You let the other one talk, you lower your voice, and you don't start to look for a compromise. You just look the other way. That's what I learned in acting class, because I thought if I want to survive in this world, I have to learn another way of acting? I don't like that. But I can use it.*
>
> (1f, interview, 10 January 2020)

This adaptation becomes necessary to meet gendered expectations of a woman as well as a diplomat. It can be an inconvenience and hinder the efficiency of the work of those who must adjust, but adaptation can also be used as a strategy to effectively navigate a gendered world, as shown above.

Conclusion

"When women enter politics, particularly in areas of foreign policy, they enter an already constructed masculine world where role expectations are defined in terms of adherence to preferred masculine attributes such as rationality, autonomy and power" (Tickner 2006, p. 39). This quote from Tickner represents the findings of this research well. Through the interviews with members of ICPR, it becomes clear that, even though women are in a majority in the Strategy Group, there are still different expectations from men and women that influence their professional lives. The male interviewees indicate that they do not experience any differences between their male and female colleagues, while women were able to pinpoint clear differences in their male colleagues' behaviours and interactions with them.

Although some of these experiences, especially the negative ones, are labelled as "a thing of the past" (8f, interview, 13 December 2019), the women in ICPR are still impacted by their legacy. This analysis shows that even in an RBO where women are equally represented, gender still plays a role in the complex power play between countries and individuals. Beyond an insight into how the ideas about how women and men should behave influence transboundary water governance in the Rhine basin, feminist theory of organisations, as operationalised through the four substructures identified by Acker (2012), provides useful guidance in researching how norms, values, national policies, and cultures within organisations affect interactions over water in an international platform.

Related to the substructure of organising processes, it is clear how important the concrete practical activities of the ministries that appoint the delegates are. These include the composition of the delegations influenced by quotas and durations of appointments, the changing job requirements in the water sector, and ideas about what a water professional needs to know. These practical activities differ between countries and change at different rates. The substructure of organisation culture refers to beliefs about gender differences, equality, and inequalities. It became apparent from the interviews that not only expectations related to a job, but also gendered expectations regarding private life, can be contradictory. Interactions on the job, the third substructure discussed, relate to interactions between people at work. In relation to work on the ICPR, interactions during negotiations were highlighted, in which especially women referred to animal behaviour when it comes to describing the negotiation styles of men. Especially in the past, a confrontational negotiation style was more accepted. Interestingly, the presence of women was identified as a factor that made this negotiation style less acceptable. The last substructure relates to gendered identities, which relate to the ideas of an individual about what it means to be a man or a woman. Although these ideas only became distinguishable through unconscious remarks of interviewees about differing expectations for men and women, it is clear that gendered identities do shape the activities of those who are active in the Strategy Group of the ICPR. For instance, there are strong ideas about the value of mixed delegations in terms of gender.

Interviewees mentioned several times that they had not thought about gender within the context of the ICPR, but that they found it valuable to reflect on and share their everyday practices. Through a discussion on these everyday dynamics, it was possible to connect in the interviews to the deeper reasoning, beliefs, and assumptions of the interviewees about what being a woman or a man entails or should entail. However, this requires a high level of reflexivity of both the interviewee and interviewer that is crucial for this type of interview-based research. We saw contradictions in the narratives of the interviews between socially desired answers given by the interviews, and ingrained ideas on how a man and woman should behave that were more unconsciously mentioned, and sometimes were the opposite of the socially desired answers. It reminded us of how challenging it is to analyse and study norms, values, and ideas about how the world, as well as norms and values, guide practices. To exemplify, we observed female interviewees who provided a generic testimonial that they do not see any differences between men and women, but then contradicted themselves with real life experience where their gender has influenced their experiences on the job; for instance, by juggling expectations of their tasks in their household and tasks on the job, or expressed through ideas that women are better listeners and negotiators, while also having to work harder than men to prove themselves worthy of the job.

This paints a picture of women being in two negotiations at the same time; first, representing their country and country's interests as a water professional and a delegate, and second, attempting to be heard and accepted irrespective of their gender. Some of the female interviewees indicated that this feels unfair – this tension between the expectations related to being a water professional working in a transboundary setting, as well as expectations related to being a woman. On the other hand, the male interviewees represented in the Strategy Group expressed they never experienced differences between men and women. Being part of the status quo makes it difficult to see how this situation affects those who are different from the norm. The contradictions that arise from the personal experiences as well as organisational structures provide opportunities for reflection, and possible avenues for more gender equality. Already, an established idea is that a delegation should be gender balanced, but our research also shows that it requires effort to truly provide a level playing field.

As authors, our different backgrounds have proven valuable in data collection and interpretation. One author grew up in the Netherlands and is familiar with the case study analysed in this chapter. The other author grew up in India and contributed an outsider's perspective. During the development of interview questions, the interviews, and the analysis, our different gendered experiences in personal and professional life were helpful in identifying and questioning the status quos; what was experienced as usual and normal by one was received as surprising or different, or even strange by the other. This collaboration greatly enriched our understanding of the case. On the other hand, it may be that female interviewees felt more at ease in sharing their experiences with a female interviewee than the men did, but it remains interesting and could also be a topic for further research.

This research provides an entry point in understanding the intersection of ideas of gender, water organisation, and diplomacy. Also, it provides a noteworthy case study from Western countries, where the geographical, social, cultural, and even individual customs and norms influence those working in an RBO. We hope for further research on comparative case studies, as well as those with different geographical, social, and cultural contexts, and see value in an intersectional approach that brings up questions on differences that stem from diverse gender and sexual identities as well as from race, class, and age in international water organisations.

Note

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