

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

The pluralization of expertise: The good, the glamorous, and the political

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Abstract

In the realm of global governance, the unique status and authority of expertise have traditionally been associated with its claims to rely on science and its often-associated qualities of ‘neutrality’, ‘impartiality’, and ‘objectivity’. Policymakers and technocratic experts have widely resorted to these attributes to render their knowledge credible and authoritative. While such claims to scientificity remain significant, we contend that contemporary global governance increasingly relies on alternative practices to confer knowledge its expert status. Global sites of governance are nowadays engaging in a broader set of practices of knowledge production and packaging, which include *participatory experiments*, *aesthetic performances*, *calls to the imagination*, and *repertoires of benevolence*. Such practices of knowledge pluralization have largely been seen as positive and unproblematic moves. Without contesting the need to pluralize expertise, we argue that such practices are not inherently democratizing, but part of an evolving technocratic repertoire of governing. Our introduction is structured around four sections: 1) a justification for the issue and contribution to the literature on expertise in International Relations; 2) the conditions of possibility or ‘context’ of the pluralization of expertise; 3) a discussion of novel practices of knowledge authorization and of their politics; and 4) an outline of our main contributions.

Keywords: aesthetics; global governance; participation; pluralization; politics of expertise; politics of knowledge

Introduction

Expertise, the knowledge considered as valid, relevant, and authoritative at a given time and place, is ubiquitous in global governance. Expert reports, indicators, policy scenarios, evaluations, and advice of all sorts are quintessential to global arts of governing and form the knowledge base for apprehending global problems. Existing scholarship in International Relations (IR) has now widely shown the roles that expertise can perform in global governance, either in terms of legitimizing global agendas, depoliticizing problems, justifying controversial courses of action, or neutralizing dissent.¹ Expertise, thus, holds a unique status in policymaking. It is not only instrumental to it but constitutes a mode of governing in itself.

¹Christina Boswell, *The Political Uses of Expert Knowledge: Immigration Policy and Social Research* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, *The Politics of Expertise in International Organizations: How International Bureaucracies Produce and Mobilize Knowledge* (Routledge, 2017); Anna Leander and Ole Wæver (eds), *Assembling Exclusive Expertise: Knowledge, Ignorance and Conflict Resolution in the Global South* (Routledge, 2019); Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise: Competing for Authority in Global Governance* (University of Michigan Press, 2015); and Jacqueline Best, *Governing Failure: Provisional Expertise and the Transformation of Global Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Given the omnipresence of expertise in global governance, the question of how knowledge comes to be seen as 'expert', and thus authoritative and relevant for the purpose of governing, is of crucial significance. Sociologically informed accounts of expertise have provided us with nuanced and insightful understandings of what makes a knowledge statement 'expert', bringing to light that expertise is an achievement that takes place in relation to others, whether in a specific field, community, or issue domain.² What counts as valid knowledge is thus bound to a specific context, its ideational logics, asymmetries, and the 'rules of the game'.³

In the context of global governance, the unique status of expertise has largely been associated with its claims to rely on science and its often-associated qualities of 'neutrality', 'impartiality', and 'objectivity'. Policymakers and technocratic experts widely resort to such claims in order to make their knowledge appear as sitting 'above politics and partisan squabbles'.⁴ Such views are also held in IR scholarship, where expertise is conceived as highly specialized knowledge, strongly associated with science and its methods. For Haas, the influence of 'epistemic communities', for example, is tied to their capacity to remain isolated from politics.⁵ It is the idea that expertise is a 'view from nowhere', relying on scientific methods and distant from potentially biased standpoints, that widely endows it with authority.⁶

While such claims are still ubiquitous in global governance fora, we argue, however, that they are increasingly supplemented, or even replaced, by other practices of knowledge authorization. In times that are increasingly perceived as uncertain, the limitations of the 'view from nowhere' paradoxically become more blatant.⁷ Diverse forms of social discontent have led to a contestation of the technocratic expert and its reliance on knowledge portrayed as impartial and ahistorical. Increasingly, policymakers and experts themselves tend to accept the fallibility of expertise.⁸ As activists, Indigenous groups, and representatives of specific groups increasingly attempt to make their own knowledge claims heard, governance processes have therefore incorporated such claims to endow knowledge produced in and for global governance with renewed legitimacy and authority. The legitimacy of knowledge is then claimed on the grounds that it includes a diversity and multiplicity of voices and perspectives through processes of inclusion and participation. At the same time, a number of 'crises', whether the COVID-19 pandemic, rising unemployment, or ongoing contestations of the multilateral order, have prompted a sense that global policymakers need to produce knowledge that is more timely, contextual, out-of-the-box, imaginative, or designed to 'do good' for humanity. In such circumstances, practices that grant knowledge its 'expert' status in global governance have become more plural and less reliant on science and its associated claims to objectivity and impartiality. Instead, global sites of governance increasingly rely on the inclusion of local knowledges, sensory experiences, appeals to the imagination, and moral frames. They increasingly deploy a broader set of practices of knowledge production and packaging, which include participatory experiments, aesthetic performances, or procedures through which knowledge is tested, verified, and put to use in global policymaking.

In this special issue, we therefore engage with this major shift in the politics of epistemic authority in global governance, *where knowledge is increasingly authorized through practices that extend beyond reason, calculation, and instrumental rationality*. While we do not contest that claims to

²Sending, *Politics of Expertise*.

³Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁴Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁵Peter M. Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic communities and international policy coordination', *International Organization*, 46:1 (1992), pp. 1–35.

⁶Sheila Jasanoff, 'Virtual, visible, and actionable: Data assemblages and the sightlines of justice', *Big Data and Society*, 4:2 (2017).

⁷Mathias Gross and Linsey McGoey, *Routledge International Handbook of Ignorance Studies* (Routledge, 2015); and Steve Rayner, 'Uncomfortable knowledge: The social construction of ignorance in science and environmental policy discourses', *Economy and Society*, 41:1 (2012), pp. 107–25.

⁸Best, *Governing Failure*.

scientificity and objectivity are still associated with the expert status of knowledge, we observe that an alternative set of practices increasingly supplements or even replaces the claims that are traditionally invoked to make certain forms of knowledge authoritative, and thus 'expert'.

This special issue *critically examines this turn towards the pluralization of expertise and its politics*. It does so, first, by revealing often unnoticed and mundane practices of knowledge authorization in *global governance fora*, bringing to the fore their distinct operating modes in making knowledge 'expert'. We explore how knowledge is made authoritative through practices centred around inclusion and participation, through knowledge aestheticization and embellishment, when knowledge is authorized through its seductive allure and design, or yet through claims that invoke the timely, benevolent, morally good, or yet creative, out-of-the-box and imaginative nature of knowledge. These practices consist of routine ways of doing in global arenas, which increasingly delineate what knowledge can be authorized and thus pass as expert and policy relevant. They relate to modes of producing and packaging knowledge but also function as governing practices. Authorizing specific forms of knowledge as expert is, indeed, intrinsically linked to the exercise of governing, as expertise not only defines how problems ought to be understood and tackled, but also makes governance possible.

Second, the special issue engages in an *in-depth discussion of the politics of such practices*. As these practices rely on claims that expertise is more plural, timely, benevolent, or imaginative, they are often viewed as inherently positive and unproblematic moves. However, without contesting the necessity of pluralizing expertise, we also observe that, as such practices become carefully orchestrated performances, they *too* become part of the global technocratic repertoire. We explore, thus, the *politics of these alternative practices of knowledge authorization* by asking the following questions: What happens when novel practices of knowledge authorization become an integral part of the global technocratic repertoire? In what kinds of politics are those forms of pluralization embedded? What are their political effects? Do we observe a new form of politics, where knowledge entices, lures, exerts normative force, or acts as a performance to propel political action? And what political effects does this have on the way global problems are apprehended, when science is no longer the primary basis for authorizing people to speak and knowledge to count? The articles of this special issue set out to address these questions, focusing on distinct practices of knowledge authorization in a diverse array of governance domains.

The remainder of this introductory article is structured as follows. First, we review different accounts that have addressed the roles of expertise in global fora. Second, we describe the conditions of possibility for the pluralization of expertise in global governance. We argue that this process has gone hand in hand with the contestation of the technocratic order and the elitism and exclusionary dynamics that underpin rule by experts. Third, we identify a novel repertoire of practices of knowledge authorization that operate beyond claims of reliance on science and its associated objectivity and impartiality: *making knowledge inclusive, timely, correct, benevolent, and creative, or aesthetic*. Finally, we outline the main contributions of this special issue to current academic discussions on how expertise is made, authorized, and contested in global governance.

Governing and expertise

Existing scholarship in IR and International Political Sociology (IPS) has widely engaged with the politics of expertise in global governance, shedding light on the relationship between epistemic structures, power, and authority in delineating what counts as expert knowledge.⁹

In IR and policy studies, the main assumption has long been that if science produces objective and valid knowledge, using such knowledge will also produce the right political

⁹Leander and Wæver (eds), *Assembling Exclusive Expertise*; Sending, *Politics of Expertise*; and Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, 'Exclusivity and circularity in the production of global governance expertise: The making of global mental health knowledge', *International Political Sociology*, 16:2 (2022), p. olab035.

decisions.¹⁰ The ‘rationality project’ indeed prevailed in debates amongst political scientists in the 1950s, when a group of scholars developed hopes that policymakers would advance better policy agendas and programmes if they used sound evidence in the formulation of their decisions.¹¹ From this perspective, the development of scientific knowledge is driven by the logic of science, seen as independent from the circumstances of time, place, and social conditions. If it is possible to understand reality by ‘getting down to the facts’, the application of science-based knowledge would seem, indeed, to be the best way to help solve policy problems. As a result, initial work on expertise was predominantly concerned with the way experts influence policy, based on the assumption that the scientific and the policy spheres are neatly separated and driven by different logics.

This perspective has also long prevailed in IR. Scholars in the field have argued that international decision-makers, who depend on science and technology for determining the risks and consequences associated with political action, seek expert information to understand problems and govern them. Experts are seen as neutral knowledge possessors who provide the ‘evidence-based’ solutions required for managing complex governance problems, such as climate change, pandemics, cybersecurity, or development, that demand technical expertise to be managed and solved.¹² This reliance on experts enables what Peter Haas has called ‘epistemic communities’ to provide information that favours or excludes different alternatives.¹³ This approach has stimulated a research programme that seeks to identify the scope conditions under which research influences policy, as well as the obstacles to a better flow of scientific research to policymaking.¹⁴ Not only does this perspective assume that knowledge and policy *are* distinct but also that they *should* be. In the hopes that policymakers advance better policy agendas and programmes, the focus is on enhancing the use of sound, objective, evidence in the formulation of their decisions. According to this view, also widely held in governmental spheres, expertise is isolated from the social and the political.

This perspective has been questioned by scholars working on the role of professionals, who have shown that expertise is simultaneously a resource to wage in struggles for authority over a given domain and an achievement that often emerges out of these very same disputes.¹⁵ While this body of scholarship owes a great deal to the literature on epistemic communities,¹⁶ it no longer assumes that it is objectivity, on its own, that grants knowledge its expert status. Instead, the fluid nexus between science and politics is captured through a discussion of phenomena such as ‘revolving doors’ between academia, bureaucracies, and the private sector, ‘professional cross-fertilization’ and ‘linked ecologies’ across different organizations.¹⁷ ‘Expertise’ is hence not necessarily defined by its degree of accuracy, but rather by the ability of its proponents to leverage different forms of resources in order to assert their interpretation and preferred courses of action as authoritative. This

¹⁰Nathan Caplan, ‘The two-communities theory and knowledge utilization’, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2:3 (1979), pp. 459–70.

¹¹Robert Edwards Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (Free Press of Glencoe, 1962); and Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹²Peter Haas and Casey Stevens, ‘Organized science, usable knowledge, and multilateral environmental governance’, in Rolf Lidskog and Goran Sundqvist (eds), *Governing the Air: The Dynamics of Science, Policy, and Citizen Interaction* (Routledge, 2011), pp. 125–61; and Ralf Brand and Andrew Karvonen, ‘The ecosystem of expertise: Complementary knowledges for sustainable development’, *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 3:1 (2007), pp. 21–31.

¹³Haas, ‘Introduction’.

¹⁴Amy Verdun, ‘The role of the Delors Committee in the creation of EMU: An epistemic community?’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6:2 (1999), pp. 308–28; Haas and Stevens, ‘Organized science, usable knowledge’; and Maia K. Davis Cross, ‘Rethinking epistemic communities twenty years later’, *Review of International Studies*, 39:1 (2013), pp. 137–60.

¹⁵Leonard Seabrooke and Eleni Tsingou, ‘Distinctions, affiliations, and professional knowledge in financial reform expert groups’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 21:3 (2014), pp. 389–407; Leonard Seabrooke and Lasse Folke Henriksen (eds), *Professional Networks in Transnational Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Eleni Tsingou, ‘Club governance and the making of global financial rules’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 22:2 (2015), pp. 225–56.

¹⁶Haas, ‘Introduction’.

¹⁷Leonard Seabrooke and Eleni Tsingou, ‘Revolving doors in international financial governance’, *Global Networks*, 21:2 (2021), pp. 294–319.

scholarship has provided us with an excellent understanding of how knowledge acquires expert status, pointing to power asymmetries, the exclusivity of professional communities, and their tendency to reproduce dominant power structures and forms of elitism.¹⁸ While political-economic considerations inform this literature, the scope of these analyses remains closely associated with the study of politics in relation to elite and professional struggles.

IPS scholarship has contributed to the study of the politics of expertise in significant ways by drawing attention to its 'micropolitics', that is, the practices and processes at the micro-scale through which knowledge becomes expert. In putting 'expertise' under the microscope, these accounts have examined the mundane elements that go into its making, and the relations, encounters, and interactions that facilitate its emergence.¹⁹ Inspired by scholars in Science and Technology Studies (STS), who have long acknowledged the socially constructed character of knowledge, such accounts have shown that 'facts' are not simply 'found' but arrived at through heterogeneous processes.²⁰

Mobilizing those sociological accounts of expertise, scholars in different sub-fields have shown that claims to be producing value-free truth claims in effect demarcate the boundaries between the 'partial' and the 'impartial', the 'proven' and the 'anecdotal',²¹ effectively enhancing the authority of some knowledge forms and delegitimizing others.²² For instance, by producing knowledge through systematic scientific techniques, and/or codified methods and procedures, global policy-makers endow it with an aura of accuracy and 'objectivity'. Policymakers indeed typically request that knowledge be grounded in specific procedures, sanctioned by a body of specialists, so that mere judgment, with all its gaps and idiosyncrasies, would seem to disappear.²³ Claims to scientificity and its associated qualities of objectivity and impartiality have thus played a fundamental role in the acquisition of expert status in contemporaneous governance.²⁴

The literature on the politics of quantification has also examined these questions in relation to the role of numbers and quantitative knowledge, which underpin the power of International Organizations (IOs) and governmental bodies due to their unique ability to convey an appearance of objectivity and methodological rigour.²⁵ Indicators, metrics, and rankings hold, indeed, a privileged epistemic status in global governance.²⁶ When IOs 'govern through numbers', they seemingly mitigate political bias and arbitrariness and present their activities as purely technical.²⁷ In global

¹⁸Seabrooke and Tsingou, 'Distinctions, affiliations, and professional knowledge'; and Littoz-Monnet, 'Exclusivity and circularity in the production'.

¹⁹Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International practices', *International Theory*, 3:1 (2011), pp. 1–36; and Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, 'Governance to governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, states, and power', *International Studies Quarterly*, 50:3 (2006), pp. 651–72.

²⁰Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

²¹Sheila Jasanoff, 'The practices of objectivity in regulatory science', in Charles Camic, Neil Gross, and Michèle Lamont (eds), *Social Knowledge in the Making* (The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 306–28; and Thomas F. Gieryn, 'Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: Strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists', *American Sociological Review*, 48:6 (1983), pp. 781–95.

²²Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, 'Expert knowledge as a strategic resource: International bureaucrats and the shaping of bioethical standards', *International Studies Quarterly*, 61:3 (2017), pp. 584–95; Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World*; Haas, 'Introduction'; and Sending, *Politics of Expertise*.

²³Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 7.

²⁴Steven Epstein, 'The construction of lay expertise: AIDS activism and the forging of credibility in the reform of clinical trials', *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, 20:4 (1995), pp. 408–37; and Gil Eyal, 'For a sociology of expertise: the social origins of the autism epidemic', *American Journal of Sociology*, 118:4 (2013), pp. 863–907.

²⁵Wendy Espeland and Mitchell L. Stevens, 'A sociology of quantification', *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 49:3 (2008), pp. 401–36; and Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

²⁶André Broome and Joel Quirk, 'Governing the world at a distance: The practice of global benchmarking', *Review of International Studies*, 41:5 (2015), pp. 819–41; and Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

²⁷Ian Hacking, *The Timing of Chance* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 2011); and Alain Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning* (Harvard University Press, 1998).

health, global recommendations based on global metrics about mortality or morbidity are said to be based on ‘the best available evidence’, itself portrayed as impartial.²⁸ Existing insights have problematized such claims, showing that numbers are produced through situated decisions about what to measure and how to measure it. Such choices embed normative assumptions, institutional priorities, and power dynamics. Far from eliminating politics, governing through numbers in fact privileges technocratic forms of governance and certain forms of expertise.

Other forms of knowledge, seen as mirroring reality without any kind of distortion, have been shown to perform similar roles. For example, the authority wielded by economic knowledge and its techniques, such as cost-benefit forms of analysis, or accounting, is also rooted in the discipline’s ‘denegation of politics.’²⁹ Economists’ capacity to produce some of the most influential beliefs that shape how problems are understood and governed stems largely from their use of specialized vocabularies and formalized models.³⁰ Economists themselves contribute to producing the special *aura* of their knowledge by presenting it as capable of producing value-free truth claims. Nobel Prize laureate Robert Shiller stated in an interview that ‘The Nobel Prize is designed to reward those who do not play tricks for attention, and who, in their sincere *pursuit of the truth*, might otherwise be slighted.’³¹

Existing accounts on the politics of expertise in global governance have extensively illuminated that IOs and global policymakers at large largely resort to certain forms of knowledge associated with an *aura* of scientificity, objectivity, and impartiality, in order to govern, as well as the politics associated with such claims, foregrounding the situated and partial nature of knowledge, even when associated with scientific methods and seemingly objective evidence.³² Scholars have shown how numbers, economic models and their associated tools – or other forms of expertise associated with science – are embedded in specific understandings, theories, and assumptions about the social world.³³ Those accounts have thus largely brought into view the political and social processes through which certain forms of knowledge are made expert and secure authority.

At the same time, however, this critique has to some extent *obscured the way IOs and other sites of governance increasingly authorize knowledge otherwise than through claims to science and objectivity*. Even in global technocratic fora, where such claims remain significant, we observe a pluralization of practices of knowledge authorization, where knowledge is made expert and relevant through claims that have nothing to do with their degree of scientific accuracy or their reliance on supposedly objective forms of evidence. We therefore start, here, a much-needed discussion in IR on how expertise is made, authorized, and contested in global governance, beyond traditional claims to scientific objectivity.

Contesting and Pluralizing Expertise

The pluralization of expertise has occurred in a context in which traditional forms of expertise have been facing increasing scrutiny and ‘politicization’. Civil society has challenged the dominance of a ‘technocratic order’ where decisions are made by a small group of specialists,

²⁸ Annabelle Littoz-Monnet and Juanita Uribe, ‘Methods regimes in global governance: The politics of evidence-making in global health’, *International Political Sociology*, 17:2 (2023), p. olad005.

²⁹ Christian Schmidt-Wellenburg and Frédéric Lebaron, ‘There is no such thing as “the Economy”. Economic phenomena analysed from a field-theoretical perspective’, *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 43:3 (2018), pp. 7–38.

³⁰ Jens Maesse, Stephan Pühringer, Thierry Rossier, and Pierre Benz, *Power and Influence of Economists: Contributions to the Social Studies of Economics* (Routledge, 2023), p. 5.

³¹ Robert J. Shiller, ‘Is Economics a Science?’, *The Guardian* (6 November 2013), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2013/nov/06/is-economics-a-science-robert-shiller>, accessed 3 February 2026.

³² Jasanoff, ‘Practices of objectivity’.

³³ Sally Engle Merry, ‘Measuring the world: Indicators, human rights, and global governance’, *Current Anthropology*, 52:S3 (2011), pp. 83–95; Kevin Davis, Angelina Fisher, Benedict Kingsbury, and Sally Engle Merry (eds), *Governance by Indicators: Global Power through Classification and Rankings* (Oxford University Press, 2012); and Teru Tatu Juhana Erkkilä, B. Guy Peters, and Ossi Julius Piironen, ‘Politics of comparative quantification: The case of governance metrics’, *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 18:4 (2016), pp. 319–28.

pushing for greater transparency in how decisions are made.³⁴ Already back in the 1980s, for example, the environmental risks and lack of transparency of scientific experiments in the nuclear field cast serious doubts on the idea of science's 'infallibility'.³⁵ Similarly, in the medical field, patient advocacy groups and movements have increasingly pushed back against the exclusive authority of doctors – the quintessential expert figure – and have called for experiential knowledge and lived experience to play a greater role in decision-making.³⁶ What STS scholars have referred to as 'contextualised science', or attempts to further embed scientific knowledge in society, is therefore part of the growing politicization of rule by experts.³⁷ More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the limits of scientific expertise and the authority of traditional experts as the sole arbiters of political discussions. Having the 'right numbers' was not seen as sufficient any longer; decisions about which experts to include in discussions, which adequate measures and courses of action to implement, and what treatments to prioritize sparked intense political and societal debates that went beyond 'technical' claims. Together, these critiques have voiced the epistemic injustice underpinning dominant knowledge systems and challenged the traditional boundaries that separate 'experts' from 'non-experts'.³⁸

Responses to what some see as a 'crisis' of expertise have been diverse.³⁹ IOs and public institutions have, on the one hand, opted for attempts to reassert the grounds of expert authority through a discourse that emphasizes that policies are based on facts, data, and effective calculations.⁴⁰ However, on the other hand, it has also become clear that responses to such demands have not only been limited to a simple defence of objectivity and technical rationality. IOs and other sites of governance have also attempted to pluralize the knowledge included in decision-making processes, through the recognition of voices once considered 'non-expert' as 'expert' in their own right, but also through other practices of knowledge authorization, that do not only speak to 'reason' but also to the imagination, the senses, or yet moral imperatives.⁴¹ IOs and other governors have, in this respect, increasingly 'marketized' the knowledge they mobilize, engaging with the business of knowledge packaging, which involves the use of techniques that resort to seduction, persuasion, and sometimes deception in processes of knowledge design. Moves to make knowledge more 'attractive' in multiple ways also need to be considered as part and parcel of broader changes in the political economy of knowledge, where private actors increasingly participate in global governance in all sorts of capacities – funders whom IOs must convince, providers of knowledge, and knowledge 'designers' who provide IOs with seductive visualizations and marketing strategies for their expertise. The pluralization, marketization, and aestheticization of knowledge are thus inseparable from this broader political economy, where the authority of expertise is shaped by the allocation of resources, institutional pressures, and the frames of reference of private actors.⁴²

Existing research has not ignored such attempts to pluralize global expertise. Works from various strands of critical scholarship have inquired into the effects of including heterogeneous forms of knowledge into decision-making, mostly through the prism of debates around co-optation and

³⁴ Alan Irwin and Brian Wynne, *Misunderstanding Science? The public Reconstruction of Science and Technology* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Eyal, 'For a sociology of expertise'.

³⁵ Gil Eyal and Thomas Medvetz, *The Oxford Handbook of Expertise and Democratic Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

³⁶ Epstein, 'Construction of lay expertise'.

³⁷ Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott, and Martin Trow, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (SAGE, 1994), p. 50.

³⁸ Eyal and Medvetz, *Oxford Handbook of Expertise*.

³⁹ Gil Eyal, *The Crisis of Expertise* (Polity Press, 2019); and Harry Collins and Robert Evans, *Rethinking Expertise* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ Sara E. Davies and Sophie Harman, 'WHO and COVID-19: Stress testing the boundary of science and politics', *International Relations*, 40:1 (2026), pp. 53–73.

⁴¹ Eyal and Medvetz, *Oxford Handbook of Expertise*.

⁴² Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, Leandro Montes Ruiz, and Juanita Uribe, 'Bringing the economic back! Thinking about the politics of expertise within and beyond the social', *International Political Sociology* (forthcoming), {<https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olag018>}.

the capture of dissent, and the often-tokenistic nature of some of these fora.⁴³ We know that processes of inclusion often operate simultaneously through exclusion, as institutional inertias and power asymmetries often render critical voices inaudible or tame them through consensus-building exercises.⁴⁴ We also know that as they enter global *fora*, alternative knowledges tend to be formatted in a certain way, so that they become 'global' knowledges of a distinct form, that resemble neither the initial knowledge forms of their proponents nor typical technocratic forms of expertise.⁴⁵ From such perspectives, such exercises have made it possible to shield given courses of action from criticism or persuade given audiences. Scholars have also examined the politics of making knowledge more engaging and aesthetic.⁴⁶ Here, the focus has been on how questions of representation not only effectively illustrate certain ideas or facts, but in themselves construct and frame policy problems and solutions.⁴⁷ In addressing these questions, existing research has shown that diverse forms of aestheticization produce certain understandings and political effects.

While we build on these accounts, we launch a novel discussion by shedding light, first, on how some of these initiatives *act as practices of knowledge authorization, where a fundamentally different form of epistemic politics is at play, and references to science, reason, or objectivity are increasingly replaced, or supplemented, by entirely novel claims and practices to make knowledge authoritative*. Second, we also show how such practices have become *an integral part of the technocratic repertoire of knowledge production and expertise*, rather than merely ad hoc additions in exceptional circumstances. Third, we also explore the *breadth and diversity of such practices of knowledge authorization across a wide range of global governance sites*. While participatory mechanisms are central, they are only one element in the 'toolkit' of global governance sites, which have engaged with multiple, sometimes overlapping and mutually reinforcing practices of knowledge aestheticization and embellishment (where knowledge is authorized through its seductive allure and design), as well as practices of making knowledge timely, benevolent, morally good, or yet creative, out-of-the-box, and imaginative.

⁴³Laura Montesinos Coleman, 'The making of docile dissent: Neoliberalization and resistance in Colombia and beyond', *International Political Sociology*, 7:2 (2013), pp. 170–87; Megan Alexandra Dersnah, 'United Nations gender experts and the push to focus on conflict-related sexual violence', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 2:1 (2019), pp. 41–56; Jana Hönke, 'Transnational clientelism, global (resource) governance, and the disciplining of dissent', *International Political Sociology*, 12:2 (2018), pp. 109–24; Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Faranak Miraftab, 'Invited and Invented spaces of participation: Neoliberal citizenship and feminists' expanded notion of politics', *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies*, 1:3 (2004), available at: <https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/wagadu/vol1/iss1/3>, accessed 3 February 2026.

⁴⁴Dersnah, 'United Nations gender experts'; Kristin Edquist, 'EU mental health governance and citizen participation: A global governmentality perspective', *Health Economics, Policy and Law*, 16:1 (2021), pp. 38–50; Kristina Lanz, Elisabeth Prügl, and Jean-David Gerber, 'The poverty of neoliberalized feminism: Gender equality in a "best practice" large-scale land investment in Ghana', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47:3 (2020), pp. 525–43; Norah McKeon, '"One does not sell the land upon which the people walk": Land grabbing, transnational rural social movements, and global governance', *Globalizations*, 10:1 (2013), pp. 105–22; and Juanita Uribe, 'Excluding through inclusion: Managerial practices in the era of multistakeholder governance', *Review of International Political Economy*, 31:6 (2024), pp. 1686–1709.

⁴⁵Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, 'Political-epistemic disciplining in global governance: Producing "global" Indigenous knowledge', *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming).

⁴⁶William L. Allen, Justyna Bandola-Gill, and Sotiria Grek, 'Next slide please: The politics of visualization during COVID-19 press briefings', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31:3 (2024), pp. 729–55; Justyna Bandola-Gill, Sotiria Grek, and Matteo Ronzani, 'Beyond winners and losers: Ranking visualizations as alignment devices in global public policy', *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 74 (2016), pp. 27–52; Charlotte Dahin, 'Exploring visual representations by the UNHCR of the experiences of resettled Syrian refugees in Canada', *Visual Studies*, 38:3–4 (2023), pp. 582–93; and Alice Massari, *Visual Securitization: Humanitarian Representations and Migration Governance* (Springer Nature, 2021).

⁴⁷Dahin, 'Exploring visual representations'; Saida Hodžić, 'Ascertaining deadly harms: Aesthetics and politics of global evidence', *Cultural Anthropology*, 28:1 (2013), pp. 86–109; Fuyuki Kurasawa, 'The sentimentalist paradox: On the normative and visual foundations of humanitarianism', *Journal of Global Ethics*, 9:2 (2013), pp. 201–14; and Massari, *Visual Securitization*.

Making knowledge expert ‘otherwise’

In this section, we identify a repertoire of practices of knowledge authorization located beyond claims of reliance on science and its associated objectivity and impartiality. Such practices might refer to ways of making knowledge, or simply of packaging it. For instance, including diverse knowledge claims might be a practice of knowledge-making where different actors and/or viewpoints are integrated in the process of knowledge production, or it might refer to a practice of framing knowledge as inclusive (packaging). Moreover, practices of knowledge authorization can be overlapping and interacting. They can, on the one hand, interact and be strongly entangled with one another. They can also, additionally, interact with knowledge practices that centre on the production of objective, neutral, impartial, and/or quantified knowledge, when knowledge is authorized through distinct, seemingly competing practices, but which may in fact work to reinforce one another in authorizing certain forms of knowledge.

Making knowledge inclusive and ‘democratic’

IOs and other governors increasingly authorize knowledge through practices that focus on including diverse groups and their associated knowledges into their production. As global ways of governing have been criticized for being undemocratic, elitist, and exclusive, IOs have tried to open up to a diversity of participants, who are consulted as experts, scientists, representatives of civil society movements, social movements, and local communities, or yet as commercial and industry stakeholders – a move which has been more controversial. For knowledge to be seen as authoritative and legitimate, there is therefore an increasing emphasis on creating structures that allow for the *inclusion of diverse actors and communities* beyond the usual ‘technocratic experts’. This tends to be done in contexts where specific groups are concerned with global programmes, as with discussions on Indigenous rights, mental health, gender violence, or youth panels. In such domains, knowledge becomes endowed with a veneer of authority precisely because of having integrated these situated perspectives, and not in spite of it.⁴⁸

This dynamic is particularly visible in IOs’ attempts to pluralize expertise by including claims arising from vulnerable communities in the ‘Global South’ in ways that move beyond the anecdotal or testimonial. As Rocha de Siqueira (this issue) examines through her case study of Brazil, the 2030 Agenda’s turn to ‘localization’ stages participation and pluralism while translating territory-based knowledges into standardized, audit-friendly formats that leave the technocratic core of Sustainable Development Goals’s expertise fundamentally unchanged. At the same time, she shows that epistemological challenges do emerge on the ground, where territory-based data practices rooted in care and lived experience produce forms of knowledge that exceed what technocratic templates can absorb. Such efforts to turn the ‘strong objectivity’ of partial perspective into legible outputs must thus be enacted and performed.⁴⁹ A related dynamic can be observed in the field of environmental governance. As Esguerra (this issue) shows, the rise of ‘transformative expertise’ within institutions, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and its sister organization the IPBES, signals a shift away from a model that authorizes knowledge by emphasizing its evidence-based nature and the scientific consensus around it, towards a more plural, solution-oriented form of expertise. Transformative expertise indeed mobilizes a repertoire of authorization practices that refer to diverse, multi-scalar participation, transdisciplinarity, and solution-oriented knowledge, which compete with

⁴⁸Jenna Sapiano, Gina Heathcote, Jacqui True, and Karin Aggestam, “‘I wouldn’t want to be a gender expert’: Gender experts in peace mediation”, *International Negotiation*, 28:2 (2022), pp. 201–28; Edquist, ‘EU mental health’; and Brian Li Han Wong, Whitney Gray, and Louise Holly, ‘The future of health governance needs youth voices at the forefront’, *The Lancet*, 398:10312 (2021), pp. 1669–70.

⁴⁹Sandra Harding, ‘Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is “strong objectivity”?’, *The Centennial Review*, 36:3 (1992), pp. 437–70.

the well-established repertoire of 'global environmentalism' and its reliance on the objectivity of science.

Efforts to make knowledge inclusive are, however, not only about who gets to speak, but also about how the authority of that knowledge is structured and stabilized. As Beaumont and Sending (this issue) argue in their contribution, even when numbers or performance indicators are portrayed as more 'inclusive', through claims to transparency and democratization, they continue to serve as governance technologies that privilege modes of technocratic expertise. When indicators are subjected to expert critique, challenged by alternative measures, or called into question through manipulation, this tension is foregrounded; yet, even as these processes put particular indicators under strain, they leave the broader authority of indicator-based governance largely intact.

Making knowledge timely

With the proliferation of crisis or emergency governance,⁵⁰ knowledge that can be framed as timely gains increasing authority and is likely to be accepted as expert. When knowledge is 'made available within a time frame appropriate to the policymaking process,'⁵¹ it tends to be perceived as relevant for ongoing discussions and issues. The perceived 'timeliness' of knowledge can thus enhance its status, independently of whether such knowledge is the most 'impartial', 'scientific', or reliable. Additionally, if knowledge addresses issues perceived to be *urgent*, this can also enhance its expert status.

But neither the timeliness nor the 'urgency' of knowledge objects is a given; both need to be actively produced and asserted. During crises or emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, presenting knowledge as timely was crucial to demonstrating its relevance.⁵² Similarly, in the work to improve the UN's efforts during humanitarian crises, the timeliness of knowledge has been framed as a central criterion.⁵³ In exploring the proliferation of Rapid Response Mechanisms across IOs, Eijking (this issue) shows that in moments constructed as times of crisis, 'a timeliness-based form of expert authority, conveyed as a shortcut to evidence-based policy' and its association with objectivity, emerges. Demands for such types of expertise grant a 'premium on speed' to those knowledge forms that can deliver decisiveness, while disincentivizing diversity and protracted forms of deliberation. This, he argues, often leads to disruptive epistemic shifts, where response coordination and data collection processes reliant on significant technological capabilities are prioritized over accredited expertise and contextual familiarity. These shifts in turn exacerbate IO's epistemic dependence on the corporate actors providing the technological infrastructures at the heart of such responses. The perceived timeliness of knowledge thus operates effectively as a practice of knowledge authorization in circumstances widely perceived as urgent. Specific (political) claims create such urgency, by defining problems as severe, yet governable and best addressed immediately. As policymakers, regulators, experts, activists, or the media reiterate the urgency

⁵⁰Peter Adey, Ben Anderson, and Stephen Graham, 'Introduction: Governing emergencies: Beyond exceptionality', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 32:2 (2015), pp. 3–17; and Monika Heupel, Matthias Koenig-Archibugi, Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, Markus Patberg, Astrid Séville, Jens Steffek, and Jonathan White, 'Emergency politics after globalization', *International Studies Review*, 23:4 (2021), pp. 1959–87.

⁵¹Simo Sarkki, Jari Niemelä, Rob Tinch, Sybille van den Hove, Allan Watt, and Juliette Young, 'Balancing credibility, relevance and legitimacy: A critical assessment of trade-offs in science-policy interfaces', *Science and Public Policy*, 41:2 (2014), pp. 194–206 (p. 200).

⁵²Timon Forster and Mirko Heinzel, 'Reacting, fast and slow: How world leaders shaped government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28:8 (2021), pp. 1299–320; and Sabine Kuhlmann, Mikael Hellström, Ulf Ramberg, and Renate Reiter, 'Tracing divergence in crisis governance: Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in France, Germany and Sweden compared', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 87:3 (2021), pp. 556–75 (p. 566).

⁵³Daniel Stauffacher, 'Strengthening Crisis Information Management' (17 October 2011), available at: <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/strengthening-crisis-information-management>, accessed 3 February 2026.

of certain issues, as well as the need to act and decide swiftly,⁵⁴ ‘timely’ knowledge comes to the forefront of political debates and action.⁵⁵

Making knowledge correct

Practices of knowledge authorization also increasingly consist of enacting processes that endow knowledge with ‘procedural’ or ‘methodological’ correctness. Here, knowledge is considered ‘expert’ when produced or assembled through specific rules, techniques, or methods that do not necessarily align with traditional scientific methods.⁵⁶ Instead, such practices consist of formalities, or ‘rituals of verification’, which make knowledge acceptable. Such procedures can authorize knowledge when they are widely adhered to, either consciously or simply when they are naturalized and seen as ‘normal’.

Those procedures might consist of the internal routines of an organization on how to produce and legitimize advice, such as ‘deciding on methods, formulations of recommendations, and issuing press statements’.⁵⁷ Existing research has pointed to the function of having ‘proper rules of procedures for, for example, expert reviews and stakeholder participation’,⁵⁸ within organizations but also across governance fora. Such procedural steps can be manifold: following specific methods of knowledge production, processing knowledge through some sort of tick-the-box procedures, having it verified by ‘independent’ knowledge checkers, or having followed specific maps of execution.

For instance, evidence in global health is validated through a pre-specified evidence scale, which ranks knowledge on the basis of ‘the procedures and study design used for its production’.⁵⁹ There is indeed, in global governance, a proliferation of specialists who act as knowledge verifiers, whether the ‘methodologists’ of global health, or the risk assessors of global finance.⁶⁰ Organizations have also developed detailed and step-by-step frameworks for stakeholder consultations, such as the Social Innovation Lab Guide developed by the Rockefeller Foundation,⁶¹ or the ‘Manual for Convenors’ developed by a private consultancy firm for UN summits.⁶² Such ‘procedures’ are not necessarily associated with highly formalized and conventional knowledge-making practices; they can also embrace forms that often unsettle conventional methodological practices, as Pantzerhielm (this issue) shows in the context of the use of foresight methods by IOs. While the participation of certain groups in decision-making processes is an authorizing practice in itself, as discussed above, including certain participants also endows knowledge with ‘correctness’, for it is seen as a procedural step, which must be passed. It is the correct following of such procedures which, in itself, becomes a practice of knowledge authorization. As argued by Esguerra (this issue), the proceduralization of global expertise organizations (such as the IPCC) is often a response to criticism and an attempt to render them more ‘robust’.

⁵⁴Jack L. Amoureux, ‘Is faster better? Political and ethical framings of pace and space’, *International Theory*, 12:2 (2020), pp. 163–88; and Elaine Scarry, *Thinking in an Emergency* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2012).

⁵⁵Ulla Rosenström and Jari Lyytimäki, ‘The role of indicators in improving timeliness of international environmental reports’, *European Environment*, 16:1 (2006), pp. 32–44.

⁵⁶Porter, *Trust in Numbers*.

⁵⁷A. Jung, Rebecca Korinek, and Holger Straßheim, ‘Embedded expertise: A conceptual framework for reconstructing knowledge orders, their transformation and local specificities’, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 27:4 (2014), pp. 398–419 (p. 413).

⁵⁸Silke Beck and Martin Mahony, ‘The IPCC and the new map of science and politics’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 9:6 (2018), p. e547.

⁵⁹Litton-Monnet and Uribe, ‘Methods regimes in global governance’, p. 3.

⁶⁰Litton-Monnet and Uribe, ‘Methods regimes in global governance’; and Karin Knorr Cetina, ‘Culture in global knowledge societies: Knowledge cultures and epistemic cultures’, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 32:4 (2007), pp. 361–75.

⁶¹Frances Westley, Sam Laban, Cheryl Rose, Katharine McGowan, Kirsten Robinson, Ola Tjornbo, and Mark Tovey, *Social Innovation Labs Guide* (2015), available at: {<https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/resource/social-innovation-lab-guide/>}, accessed 3 February 2026.

⁶²Uribe, ‘Excluding through inclusion’.

Making knowledge benevolent or morally good

Fashioning knowledge as morally good also plays a crucial role in authorizing knowledge.⁶³ IOs, as well as philanthropists, consultants, or NGOs, often claim that they produce knowledge that will solve the problems of humanity and which, as such, is morally good. In practice, these claims make proposed ideas not just a good alternative among others, but ‘the right thing to do’, imperative and unavoidable. Sometimes, proceduralism and morality can even be part and parcel of similar knowledge-making processes.⁶⁴ For instance, the rise of Randomized Controlled Trials in development design has been described as the fostering of a ‘thought community’ that not only promises ‘good’ and ‘ethical’ solutions, but also ‘proven’ interventions that can maximize impact for the many.⁶⁵ In such circumstances, we observe the combination of appeals to objectivity, with claims to broader ethical, moral, and normative commitments. In such cases, critics are not just seen as having doubts or waging legitimate dissent, but rather as preventing progress and the welfare of people in need.

In some domains, such as human rights, making knowledge benevolent is more clearly framed by IOs and their expert networks as a clear break with earlier forms of technocratic authority. Jaramillo Ruiz and Uribe (this issue) caution, however, that even such moves can carry what they call ‘epistemic inertia’. Through their analysis of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, they show how the turn away from technocracy towards a more benevolent and plural expert repertoire grounded in moral claims can still reproduce dominant (neo)liberal assumptions about dignity, inclusion, and which lives count as ‘fully’ human. In doing so, they highlight the need to historicize and interrogate the normative content of expertise in moments of pluralization.

Similarly, in global governance, multistakeholder platforms and coalitions seeking to attract private donors and wider societal involvement tend to justify their knowledge claims as ethical, benevolent, or morally good.⁶⁶ These coalitions typically use moral arguments, framing their claims in terms of ‘win-win’ solutions that reconcile high financial profits with improvements in social welfare, and even the ‘saving of lives.’⁶⁷ Looking into the trajectory of psychedelic substances from stigmatized drugs to biomedical promises in global arenas, Montes Ruiz shows how a diverse series of actors work through this emerging governance domain by means of proposing interventions that must not just be proven as efficacious, but also as ‘benevolent’ in character, and hence desirable and urgent. In proving such ‘high minded’ aspirations, proponents of all types, often profit-oriented, adopt the discursive and performative repertoires of activists and advocates, insulating themselves from critique and cementing their own role in this space, crowding out more radical alternatives. While some of the political effects of benevolent claims have been discussed,⁶⁸ we show here that the practices by which certain forms of knowledge are authorized do not only rely on being cast as objective and reliable but also as ‘good’, impactful, and therefore more worthy of attention and actionability than competing alternatives.

⁶³Linsey McGoe and Daniel Thiel, ‘Charismatic violence and the sanctification of the super-rich’, *Economy and Society*, 47:1 (2018), pp. 111–34.

⁶⁴Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation* (Harvard University Press, 2019).

⁶⁵Kevin P. Donovan, ‘The rise of the randomistas: On the experimental turn in international aid’, *Economy and Society*, 47:1 (2018), pp. 27–58.

⁶⁶Juanita Uribe, ‘The moral economy of global priorities: Fusing profit and public duty in malnutrition governance’, *Review of International Political Economy* (2026), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2026.2615410>}.

⁶⁷Annabelle Littoz-Monnet and Ximena Osorio Garate, ‘Knowledge politics in global governance: Philanthropists’ knowledge-making practices in global health’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 31:2 (2023), pp. 755–80.

⁶⁸Anne-Emanuelle Birn, ‘Philanthrocapitalism, past and present: The Rockefeller Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and the setting(s) of the international/global health agenda’, *Hypothesis*, 12:1 (2014); and McGoe and Thiel, ‘Charismatic violence and the sanctification’ pp. 1–27.

Making knowledge aesthetic, creative, imaginative

Representing and visualizing does not simply convey data or knowledge facts neutrally: it becomes in itself a way of authorizing knowledge through seduction, persuasion, or lure. Recognizing the limits of studying expertise merely through its verbal and textual practices, a recent body of scholarship has turned its focus to the role of the visual, aesthetic, and affective component of knowledge.⁶⁹ Capturing the aesthetic components of knowledge requires a sensibility to the significance of visual language, affects, charts, or digital devices. Questions of form, tone, appropriateness, and representation become central considerations to make data ‘speak’.⁷⁰

Certain forms of visualization may serve specific purposes. They can, for instance, enable policymakers to align policy interests, broker evidence among policy communities, and construct the nature of the policy problems to be addressed.⁷¹ In the humanitarian sector, visualizations convey to publics or donors the good and the importance of humanitarian work in relation to faraway ‘beneficiaries’.⁷² Similarly, in the domain of security, the enactment of ‘threats’, ‘enemies’, and ‘victims’ to fear and tackle relies on similar practices of translation and affective appeals that seek to authorize knowledge and courses of action.⁷³ When it comes to dissemination, form may indeed itself be its own political project or aspiration, alongside or even independently of ‘content’.⁷⁴ This is particularly relevant in the context of SDGs governance and the UN, where maps, interactive dashboards, and inclusive tools are being increasingly mobilized to validate knowledge as expert.⁷⁵ IOs are progressively turning to marketing firms, designers, and private consultancies with specialized knowledge in cognitive science and interface design, among others, so that practices of visual knowledge embellishment become central.⁷⁶ In her examination of foresight, Pantzerheim (this issue) shows that foresight expertise is an ‘activist, utopian and aesthetic counter-project’ to ‘scientific’ predictive Cold War futurology. Foresight expertise is authorized through claims to novelty, eclecticism and pluralism, in ways that strongly diverge from traditional forms of authorization based on scientific objectivity. Historically, IOs as political institutions and IR as a discipline were much more closely intertwined with futures studies and foresight than is commonly assumed or remembered. Against this backdrop, the current circulation and cultivation of foresight in IOs must thus be viewed as a rediscovery and rearticulation, rather than a sudden eruption of new truths and insights. Such claims to novelty, however, obscure the longer origins of foresight. Pantzerhielm

⁶⁹Jonathan Luke Austin and Anna Leander, ‘Designing-with/in world politics: Manifestos for an international political design’, *Political Anthropological Research on International Social Sciences*, 2:1 (2021), pp. 83–154; Bandola-Gill, Grek, and Ronzani, ‘Beyond winners and losers’; and Donatella Della Ratta, ‘Art as expertise? Creative expression in Syrian Conflict Resolution’, in Anna Leander and Ole Wæver (eds), *Assembling Exclusive Expertise* (2019), pp. 189–212.

⁷⁰Vincanne Adams, ‘Establishing proof: Translating “science” and the State in Tibetan medicine’, in Margaret Lock and Charles Leslie (eds), *New Horizons in Medical Anthropology* (Routledge, 2003), pp. 214–234; Bentley B. Allan, ‘Producing the climate: States, scientists, and the constitution of global governance objects’, *International Organization*, 71:1 (2017), pp. 131–62; Hodžić, ‘Ascertaining deadly harms’; and Anna Leander, ‘The politics of whitelisting: Regulatory work and topologies in commercial security’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 34:1 (2016), pp. 48–66.

⁷¹Allen, Bandola-Gill, and Grek, ‘Next slide please’; and Sotiria Grek, ‘Governing by numbers: The PISA “effect” in Europe’, *Journal of Education Policy*, 24:1 (2009), pp. 23–37.

⁷²Dahin, ‘Exploring visual representations’; and Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, ‘“A horrific photo of a drowned Syrian child”: Humanitarian photography and NGO media strategies in historical perspective’, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 97:900 (2015), pp. 1121–55.

⁷³Eva Herschinger, *Constructing Global Enemies: Hegemony and Identity in International Discourses on Terrorism and Drug Prohibition* (Routledge, 2010); and Massari, *Visual Securitization*.

⁷⁴Roderick L. Stirrat, ‘Cultures of consultancy’, *Critique of Anthropology*, 20:1 (2000), pp. 31–46; and Jeffrey D. Stanaway, Ashkan Afshin, Emmanuela Gakidou, Stephen S Lim, Degu Abate, Kalkidan H. Abate, Cristiana Abbafati et al., ‘Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 84 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks for 195 countries and territories, 1990–2017: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017’, *The Lancet*, 392:10159 (2018), pp. 1923–94.

⁷⁵Bandola-Gill, Grek, and Ronzani, ‘Beyond winners and losers’.

⁷⁶OECD, ‘Better Life Index’ (2026), available at: <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>, accessed 3 February 2026.

tells us that they are closely tied to the commodified character of foresight and may also serve to convince organizations to hire the professionals who can brand themselves as foresight experts.

Whether the increasing reliance on visual and aesthetic knowledge forms is an effort to 'art-wash' a global monitoring agenda or a potential opening for more plural forms of value-making depends, therefore, on power/knowledge dynamics, as Grek shows in this special issue. In her examination of the mobilization of aesthetic knowledge in the governance of sustainable development, Grek shows that aesthetic knowledge can be woven with science 'to make affective and persuasive arguments for acting to increase biodiversity' (Grek, this issue). Art-science collaborations can bridge sociotechnical worlds and create boundary objects 'that excite and energise policy actors anew'. Those hybrid knowledge forms are at the same time entangled with technocratic pressures and generate a 'productive space for rethinking in novel, imaginative and potentially disruptive ways the problems that quantitative expertise has not found answers for' (Grek, this issue).

Making knowledge aesthetic, from this perspective, unleashes the potential of 'knowing otherwise', as also argued by Austin and Viga in the context of different, often contradictory, strands of decolonial humanitarianism. In disrupting the hegemonies of knowledge production that sustain core tenets of global governance, decolonial humanitarianism as a political project entails knowing through aesthetics, pursuing not only the decolonization of knowledge but also the emergence of alternative imaginaries and possible futures. Decolonial expertise 'valorises embedded (over disembodied, floating, or parachuting-in), autonomous (over neutral or impartial), and futurist (as opposed to presentist) expertise' (Austin and Viga, this issue). Acknowledging that high levels of abstraction and jargoned language are often used by some of its proponents in ways that intellectually gatekeep the project while insulating its politics, the authors argue that the 'chaotic plurality' of some forms of decolonial knowledge is nonetheless necessary for envisioning desirable *and* viable visions of the future. From this perspective, aesthetic forms of authorizing expertise can spark change and genuine debates about 'power shifts'.

Contributions

We argue that knowledge remains a central feature of global governance, but the way in which it is made authoritative to become expertise is shifting. While scientific objectivity and impartiality continue to play a central role in asserting knowledge as expert, they are increasingly supplemented, or at times replaced, by practices that rely on alternative repertoires: inclusion, moral appeal, timeliness, aesthetic value, and procedural correctness. In launching this discussion on knowledge pluralization in global governance, the articles of this special issue provide conceptual tools and reflections to explore these transformations in the politics of expertise and offer a foundation for future research into the deeply political nature of expertise, even when presented as good, glossy, and glamorous.

First, we set the terms for a much-needed conversation on how expertise is made, authorized, and contested in global governance, beyond the traditional emphasis on scientific objectivity. We do so by providing a new lens to understand the evolving repertoires through which knowledge is made expert in global fora. The commonly held view in the IR discipline is that knowledge is considered authoritative because it stems from scientific facts, evidence, and some form of research – essentially, the process of knowing something through data and proof.⁷⁷ We make the case, however, that what makes knowledge authoritative is no longer just about having the 'right' numbers, scientific research, or data. Instead, knowledge is made to count through its appeal to emotions, imagination, moral claims, and so on. Of course, these practices do not signal the definite and absolute 'end' of science as the cornerstone of expert authority. Rather, they *often reconfigure its use, blending scientific claims with urgency, normative force, and visual allure*.

⁷⁷ Haas, 'Introduction'; and Christian Bueger, 'Making things known: Epistemic practices, the United Nations, and the translation of piracy', *International Political Sociology*, 9:1 (2015), pp. 1–18.

Second, shedding light on those changing practices of knowledge authorization enables us to move beyond dichotomous views that seek to either reestablish indisputable notions of expertise or signal its demise. Instead, we problematize expertise as a social achievement and a contested practice which produces specific power–knowledge relations and political orderings. Echoing Jasanoff and Simmet, our aim is not to sound the ‘funeral bells’ for expertise or proclaim its collapse.⁷⁸ Rather, we seek to identify novel repertoires through which knowledge comes to have (authoritative) effects in the social world. Taking such a perspective makes it possible for us *not to lose sight of the resilient character of expertise* and the role that *hierarchies play in expert-making practices*, even when such asymmetries play out in more subtle and sometimes blinding fashions, under the guise of producing knowledge which is morally good, widely inclusive, or aesthetically dazzling.

Third, by drawing attention to the pluralization of practices that make knowledge expert, we offer a novel perspective on how epistemic authority is produced and deployed in global governance. This reconfiguration is not without its own politics. Claims to inclusion, benevolence, or aesthetic allure may appear democratic or progressive, but they often operate within power-laden structures that ultimately shape what knowledge counts, who can speak, and how problems are understood and governed. These authorizing practices therefore do more than render a set of claims authoritative: *they allow the very exercise of governing*. Without a more expansive understanding of the practices that confer expert status on knowledge, we risk losing sight of how the relationship between knowledge and governing operates in contemporary global governance.

Fourth, through the exploration of a broader array of sites and dynamics where knowledge is validated, we broaden existing analytical and methodological repertoires to study expertise in global governance. Existing studies of expertise have typically concentrated on the study of IOs, experts, or elites.⁷⁹ However, as knowledge-making increasingly moves away from formal institutions and expert cultures, a sole emphasis on these aspects risks overlooking broader knowledge-authorization mechanisms, which are crucial for understanding the dynamics of expertise in a governance landscape increasingly characterized by privatization and marketization, and their associated logics, actors, and knowledge authorization techniques.

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⁷⁸Sheila Jasanoff and Hilton R. Simmet, ‘No funeral bells: Public reason in a “post-truth” age’, *Social Studies of Science*, 47:5 (2017), pp. 751–70 (p. 751).

⁷⁹David Mosse, *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Policy in International Development* (Berghahn Books, 2011); Litzo-Monnet, ‘Exclusivity and circularity in the production’; Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World*; Seabrooke and Henriksen, *Professional Networks*; and Sending, *Politics of Expertise*.