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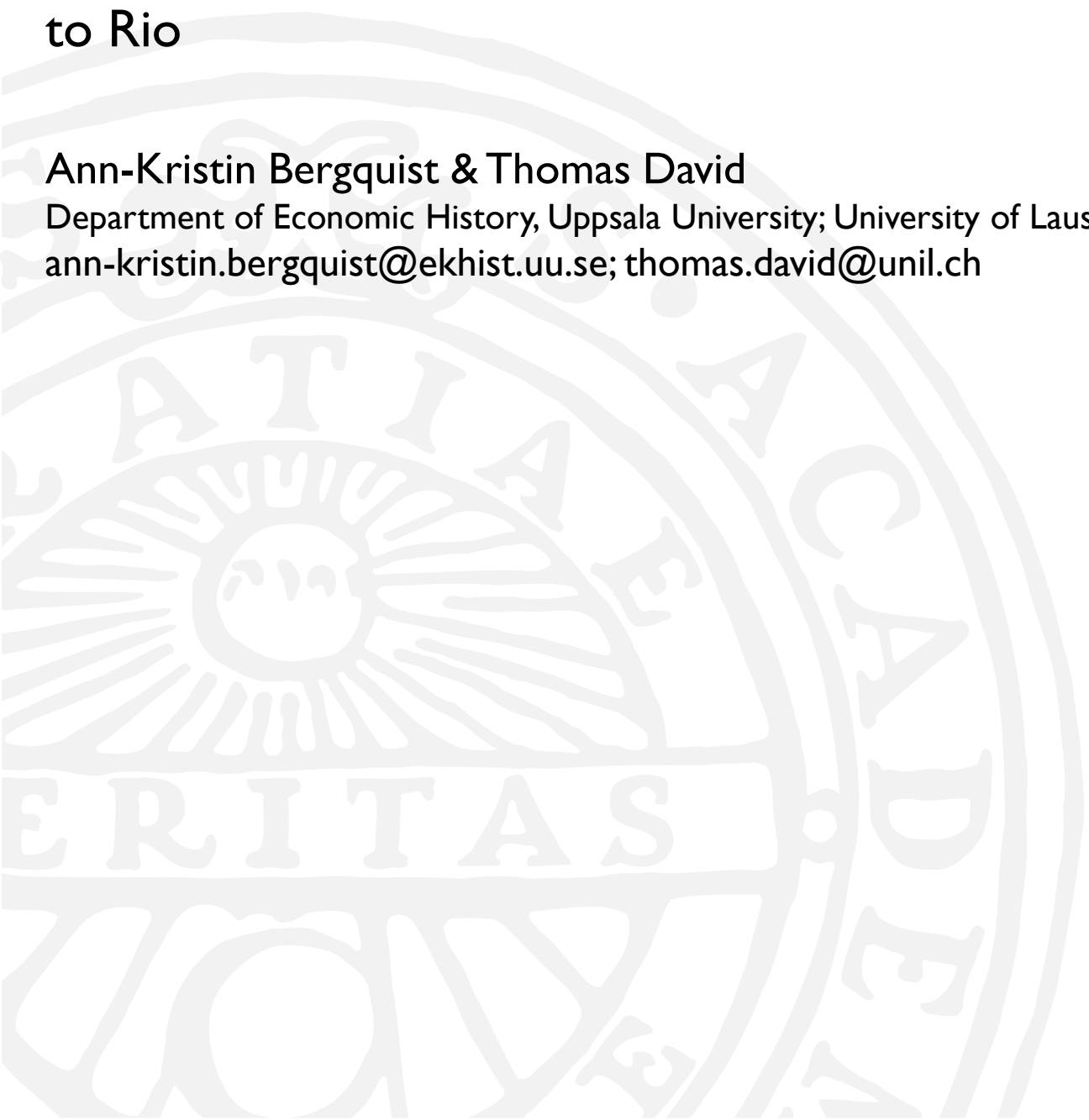
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Business (In-)Action: The International Chamber of Commerce and Climate Change from Stockholm to Rio

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Abstract

This paper engages with the literature that has looked at the historical response to climate change among industries positioned to have had a far-reaching impact on changing the course of the climate crisis. While much of the historical research in this domain has focused on the role of big oil companies, the utility industry and conservative think tanks in the manufacturing of doubt regarding climate science and opposing ambitious climate policies, our focus is on the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – the world’s largest transnational business association. Unlike individual multinational corporations, the ICC developed a close ties and collaborations with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which made ICC positioned to influence international policy discussions. This study finds that the ICC developed a dual strategy, which set aside climate change as the focus for discussion and business action. One strategy, led by ICC Environment Committee, involved intense collaboration with the United Nations and developing a business agenda for sustainable development. At the same time, the creation of the International Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC) in 1991, gave rise to a parallel strategy, led by ICC’s related oil companies. As this study finds, the ICC’s Energy Committee developed close ties to the Global Climate Coalition, a front group designed to combat the scientific evidence of climate change. The paper concludes that the ICC was able to delay meaningful regulatory response to climate change the between 1988-1992 by forming a broad coalition of competing interests and collaborating with agencies established under the auspices of the United Nations.

Keywords: International Chamber of Commerce; United Nations; Climate Governance; Sustainability; Climate Delay

JEL: N40, N50, N80, P18

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Business (In-)Action: The International Chamber of Commerce and Climate Change from Stockholm to Rio ¹

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Abstract:

This paper engages with the literature that has looked at the historical response to climate change among industries positioned to have had a far-reaching impact on changing the course of the climate crisis. While much of the historical research in this domain has focused on the role of big oil companies, the utility industry and conservative think tanks in the manufacturing of doubt regarding climate science and opposing ambitious climate policies, our focus is on the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – the world’s largest transnational business association. Unlike individual multinational corporations, the ICC developed a close ties and collaborations with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which made ICC positioned to influence international policy discussions. This study finds that the ICC developed a dual strategy, which set aside climate change as the focus for discussion and business action. One strategy, led by ICC Environment Committee, involved intense collaboration with the United Nations and developing a business agenda for sustainable development. At the same time, the creation of the International Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC) in 1991, gave rise to a parallel strategy, led by ICC’s related oil companies. As this study finds, the ICC’s Energy Committee developed close ties to the Global Climate Coalition, a front group designed to combat the scientific evidence of climate change. The paper concludes that the ICC was able to delay meaningful regulatory response to climate change the between 1988-1992 by forming a broad coalition of competing interests and collaborating with agencies established under the auspices of the United Nations.

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Introduction

Business responsibility in addressing climate change and business impact on global climate governance have over the past decades grown into a multifaceted field of research that embraces several disciplines. This study engages with the literature that has looked at the historical

¹ We extend our gratitude to all those who took part in the aforementioned conferences and workshops for their invaluable input and insightful discussions: European Business History Association, Madrid (June 2022); Conference “Business and International Order”, European University Institute, Florence (October 2022); Harvard Business School, (October 2023); Global Survey Group (June 2023); European Business History Association, Oslo (August 2023); Conference “Capitalism and the Environment from Stockholm to COP 28”, Lausanne (November 2023); Workshop Limits/No Limits (Uppsala, December) We extend special gratitude to Antoine Acker, Jenny Andersson, Christophe Bonneuil, Kristoffer Ekberg, Robert Falkner, Geoffrey Jones, Sabine Pitteloud, Dieter Plehwe, Guilherme Sampaio, Janick Schaufelbuehl, Glenda Sluga, and Laurent Warlouzet for offering insightful comments on a prior version of this manuscript.

response to climate change among industries with a capacity to exert a far-reaching impact on the course of the climate crisis (Bonneuil *et al* 2021). Much of the historical research has focused on the role of big oil companies (e.g. Oreskes & Conway, 2010; Frumhoff *et al* 2015; Supran & Oreskes, 2017; Franta, 2018; Bonneuil *et al* 2021) and the electric utility industry (e.g. Andersson *et al* 2017; Williams *et al*, 2022) in creating doubt regarding the legitimacy of climate science. Sowing doubt about climate science has at the same time represented one element of a broader loosely organized resistance to climate change regulations, sometimes conceptualized as a ‘climate change countermovement’ (Brulle, 2022, 2014). One central component of this movement was coalitions composed of fossil-fuel related corporations, and their affiliated trade associations to oppose mandatory reductions in carbon emissions (Brulle, 2023; Dunlap & McCright, 2011). More recently, researchers have also identified an evolution from climate denial discourses to climate ‘delay’. Delay discourses accept the existence of climate change, but justified inaction or inadequate efforts (Lamb *et al*. 2022).

The focus of our study is on the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) – the worlds’ largest transnational business association. Unlike individual multinational corporations, the ICC developed close ties and collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) during the 1970s and the 1980s (Bergquist & David, 2023). During the same period, UNEP emerged as the anchor organisation in global environmental governance and eventually also formed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) together with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in 1988. Although qualified environmental expertise was accumulated within the ICC's own expert organs, and via the intergovernmental networks of which the ICC was a part of (Bergquist & David, 2023), climate change only appeared in the ICC's environmental policy discussions and rhetoric in the late 1980s. This should be seen against the backdrop that major fossil fuel companies closely associated with the ICC, such as Exxon Mobile and Royal Dutch Shell, invested in their own research on climate change. But as the President of the ICC environment Committee acknowledged candidly in 1988:

“ICC in general and the ICC Commission on Environment have limited resources. We respond mainly to a list of priorities developed by our member corporations, and global climate change was not on that list.”²

This study begins with exploring why this delay – or inaction – in responding to climate change took hold within the ICC. We then analyze the strategies that the ICC adopted when they eventually started to address this issue in the late 1980s. The study finds that the ICC developed a dual strategy, which set aside climate change as the focus for policy discussions and business practices. One strategy, led by ICC’s Environment Committee, involved constructive co-operation with UNEP in developing a strong business strategy for sustainable development, based on self-regulation and voluntary commitments. At the same time, the creation of the IPPC in 1988 and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC) in 1991, gave rise to a parallel strategy, led by ICC’s related oil companies. As this study finds, the ICC’s Energy Committee developed close ties to the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), a front group formed by the US National Associations of Manufacturers (NAM) and designed to combat the evidence of climate change in order to weaken and delay both US and international climate policy.

We suggest that ICC’s double strategy in responding to climate change had implications for UNEP’s capacity to accomplish a strong support for binding targets and timelines for the UN

² « International Environment Reporter », Issue of 10 February 1988, Archiv fur Zeitgeschichte (thereafter AfZ), Zurich, 124.1.1.

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), that was signed by 154 states at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992. As we will show, ICC's strategies not only involved activities aimed at questioning scientific evidence of human induced climate change. The ICC also worked constructively with the United Nations before Rio to make a business case for sustainable development, which directed the focus away from binding targets to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. We argue that the double strategy was a compromise between the actors within the ICC who had a lot to lose from strong measures against the emission of greenhouse gases, and those actors who saw business opportunities in greening their businesses.

This study draws on archives from ICC's national committees, which have been very involved in environmental and global governance during the two decades covered in this study (Sweden, Germany, Switzerland and United States). These archives shed a new light on environmental strategies of the ICC and the national committees of these countries. In addition, this study also draws on the personal archive of Maurice Strong, who, among other things was the General Secretary of the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and of the Earth Summit in Rio 1992. These archives are very important to understand business links to international environmental politics. The paper will in the following proceed by a literature review. We will then examine the period which preceded the turning point in 1988, focusing on how UNEP and the ICC approached the issue of climate change after the Stockholm Conference. We then turn to the period from 1988 to the UNCED in Rio in 1992.

Literature overview

Previous historical studies have shown that oil industry leaders were aware that their products were causing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions to accumulate in the planet's atmosphere in a potentially dangerous fashion at least from the late 1950s. When US President Lyndon Johnson's Science Advisory Committee warned of global warming in 1965, the petroleum industry's main trade association, the American Petroleum Institute (API), relayed the warning to its members (Franta, 2018). One of the most well-known and documented company cases is Exxon Mobil. Benjamin Franta (2021a; 2021b; 2018) has in several studies demonstrated that Exxon established internal research programs on climate change in the late 1970s and privately acknowledged that prompt action would be required to avoid severe damage. Previous studies have shown that not only Exxon but also Shell commissioned private research on climate change by the early 1980s, but kept silent about the result to the public (Franta, 2021a). As recently found in a study by Christophe Bonneuil, Pierre Louis Choquet and Benjamin Franta (2021), Exxon used the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA) to coordinate an international campaign to dispute climate science and weaken international climate policy, beginning in the 1980s. This playground also impacted the French oil company Total to adopt a similar response to climate change.

In 2011, the sociologists Riley E. Dunlap and Aaron M. McCright introduced the notion of the "climate denial machine", which sketched out the history of climate change science denial, and the actors involved in such activities. These actors included large fossil fuel companies, related industry associations, along with conservative institutes and think tanks. According to their analysis, the motivation of the various "cogs" of the denial machine have varied considerably, from economic (as the case of the fossil fuel industry) to more personal. The glue holding actors together however, has, according to Dunlap and McCright, been a shared opposition to governmental regulatory efforts to restrict CO₂ emissions. While indeed claims of these actors have differed and evolved over time, the theme of 'no need for regulations' has remained constant (see also Oreskes and Conway, 2010). Viewed from a broader theoretical lens, climate

denial can be seen as a part of a defense of the industrial capitalist economic system (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), which since the industrial revolution had tightly co-evolved with the use of fossil energy.

A number of studies have argued that the events that intensified industry reactions against climate science, was the creation of IPPC by UNEP and the WMO in 1988 and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that was signed in Rio in 1992. As a reaction to these events, contrarian scientists, with considerable support from the fossil fuel industry and conservative think tanks in the United States, adopted the strategy of manufacturing uncertainty and doubt as strategy for promoting skepticism regarding anthropogenic climate change (Oreskes & Conway, 2011). One key industry coalition was the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) which according to the sociologist of environment Robert J Brulle (2022) played an important role in obstructing climate action, both in the U.S. and internationally. Another study by the physicist and environmental historian Benjamin Franta (2021a) stressed the importance of economists working for consulting firms. Important among these were the US-based Charles River Associates, who played a key role in weakening, delaying, or defeating a wide range of climate policies from the late 1980s, including US carbon pricing proposals and international climate agreements. Paid by the fossil fuel industry, these economic consultants helped convince the public and policymakers that climate policy would be costly, global warming would be relatively unimportant, and there would be little harm in delaying action. According to Franta (2021a), the history of Charles River Associates illustrates how the fossil fuel industry has used biased economic analysis to delay and defeat climate policy.

In the context of this growing literature on corporate climate denial, delay and opposition against ambitious climate policies, the history of the ICC has not yet been explored. Responses to climate change by the ICC is of particular importance in understanding the power of business interests in global climate governance for three reasons. Firstly, the majority of studies have predominantly focused on the role of actors advocating inaction in one country, mostly in the United States (see Oreskes & Conway, 2010; Dunlap and McCright, 2011; for France, Bonneuil *et al.* 2021). However, these actors did not confine themselves to lobbying their respective governments or domestic public opinions to influence international climate change negotiations; they also engaged actively with international organizations. Brulle (2022: 17) thus mentions the efforts of the Global Climate Coalition during these conferences since the Rio Summit in 1992. In this perspective, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) played a pivotal role for these actors, affording them access to and legitimacy with the United Nations with which they had cultivated close relations since 1945 (David and Eichenberg 2021 and 2022). In matters of global environmental governance, the ICC advanced on policy discussions and collaborations with UNEP in the 1970s, which intensified from the the mid-1980s until the Rio Summit in 1992 (Bergquist & David, 2023). Considering the role of the ICC lends a transnational and global dimension to research that has too often remained confined to the national realm.

Secondly, as mentioned, these studies have most frequently focused on a single sector, primarily the oil and electricity industries (Franta 2021a and b; Williams *et al.*, 2022) or conservative think tanks (Brulle, 2023) . Yet, the ICC, representing business across various sectors rather than any specific, provides an opportunity to examine the involvement (or absence thereof) of various industries in the climate change issue and its role in coordinating these occasionally divergent sectoral (and national) interests at the international level. The study

of the ICC underscores the necessity of investigating these "networks of opposition " (Brulle 2021) beyond a sectoral approach.

Thirdly, these studies have brought to light the various activities and frames employed by these actors of climate inaction or climate delay. Historian of science Naomi Oreskes and environmental scientist Geoffrey Supran (2021) have demonstrated how Exxon employed a rhetoric and framing to construct misleading public narratives about anthropogenic global warming. The term *framing* points to how an issue is portrayed and understood, by constructing meaning by selecting some aspects of a perceived reality. They argue that one of the fossil fuel industry's most important frames about anthropogenic global warming, has been scientific uncertainty coupled with a public rhetoric from the mid-2000 that shifted the focus of responsibility for global warming away from the fossil fuel industry and onto the consumers. Along the same line, Lamb *et al.* (2021) suggest that the discourses created to downplay or discount the need for climate action has indeed been outright denial of the reality or the human causation of climate change. But they also add that one strategy that has received relatively little research attention to date, is policy-focused discourses that exploit contemporary discussions on what action should be taken, how fast, who bears the responsibility and where costs and benefits should be allocated.

In this working paper, we posit that the ICC had a particular capacity to shape policy-focused discourses based on its "entrepreneurial authority". Political scientist Jessica F. Green (2014: 78) defined this concept, by emphasizing its applicability to "situations in which private actors create rules or set standards *without the explicit delegation* of authority by states." The ICC was during the two decades before Rio able to articulate a market driven vision of global environmental governance at the UN arena (Bergquist & David, 2023), that was based on business voluntary engagement in environmental protection. ICC's self-regulating code of conduct – the ICC business Charter for Sustainable Development – presented in Rio can be viewed as "an instance of entrepreneurial authority" as the ICC, a private actor, dictated "standards for behavior and practice that [were] adopted by others" (Green, 2013: 79). From the beginning of the 1970's, the ICC environmental policy was thus not only characterized by a defensive strategy of first glossing over, then denying the presence of climate change, disputing its origins and delaying decision-making by its inaction and/or opposition, but also by a constructive approach, advocating for voluntary initiatives by multinationals in conjunction with market-driven solutions.

Indeed, 1988 marked a turning point in climate change politics. Between 1988-1992, climate change emerged as major public issue and initiated calls for government action. It is, therefore, not surprising that most of the research on the topic of business and climate change governance has been conducted by sociologists and political scientists, and less so by historians. By examining the (in)activity of the ICC in this regard after the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the objective is also to introduce a historical dimension to this discourse, underscoring how the ICC has gradually persuaded the United Nations of the legitimacy of its environmental agenda (see Huf *et al.* 2022).

UNEP, ICC and Climate Change in the 1970s

ICC became an important partner of UNEP after it was created in 1973. A key person behind this partnership was Maurice Strong, a Canadian businessman who in 1970 was appointed the Secretary General of the Stockholm conference and later the first Secretary General of UNEP. In his introductory statement to the first meeting of UNEP's governing council in July in 1973,

Strong emphasized that the environmental dialogue along with the attendant discussion of various “Doomsday” scenarios, implied the existence of certain *outer limits* to changes which man’s activities may endanger. If these limits were to be exceeded, it might, according to Strong, endanger the continuance of human life on the planet. He noted in his speech that *outer limits* had been pointed out by scientists in relation to the generation of heat, the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere, the ozone content of the stratosphere and the health of oceans.³

Later the same year, UNEP, in collaboration with the Aspen Institute in Colorado, organized the “Outer Limits Seminar” between August 19-24. The meeting was jointly sponsored by UNEP and the Aspen Institute, where the consultation took place. Maurice Strong had entered an agreement with Joseph E. Slater, President of the Aspen Institute of Humanistic studies, to jointly sponsor the meeting. 25 scientists of international renown were invited along with “special guests”. Among the participants besides the 25 scientists, were Maurice Strong, who chaired the seminar, Robert O Anderson (a businessman who founded Atlantic Richfield Oil Company (ARCO) and who was committed to environmental issues), Joseph E. Slater, René Dubos (Rockefeller University), Amory B. Lovins (Friends to Earth) and Lester Brown (founder of the Worldwatch Institute).⁴ All these individuals were to be essential international environmentalists during 1970s and 1980s and part of the same transnational networks.

The aim with the Aspen seminar was to identify the particular areas in which “outer limits may exist”. In the letter of invitation, a tentative list of 12 problems and topics was presented.⁵ The very first problem on the list concerned climate change, where the point for discussion was:

“What are the factors controlling the quantitative spectrum of solar radiation reaching the earth’s surface? What are the principal means by which we might purposely or inadvertently interfere with those factors and which are the limits to such interference without producing change in the spectrum that would have major effects of life?”⁶

The second problem on the list also raised questions about climate change, with the question being: “What are the limits to man-made conversion of potential energy to residual that could be reached, before producing significant climate effects at global scale”.⁷ It was concluded though that to begin the discussion with CO₂ output is to “start from the tail end”. Defining the outer limits instead should start with focusing on the ultimate physical constraints to the expansion of the human population.⁸

Participants at the Aspen seminar also concluded on what research activities UNEP should promote. In the area of climatology, two main needs were pointed out. First, develop a reliable climate theory of climate and climate change, and second, study more thoroughly the relationships between living organisms and climate. The climatologists at the seminar

³ Maurice Strong Papers (hereafter: MSP), Box 34 Folders 335-334, Report on the consultation on “Outer Limits” held in Aspen, Colorado, August 19-24 August, 1973 prepared by Adriano Buzzati-Traversi, Senior Scientific Advisor, p 1.

⁴ Ibid, Annex I

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, p 3.

⁷ The problems raised on the list can be summarized to 1) climatic change 2) soil and water 3) toxic substances 4) energy and 5) environmental management. See MSP, Box Folders 335-344, Report on the consultation on “Outer Limits” held in Aspen, Colorado, August 19-24 August, 1973” prepared by Adriano Buzzati-Traversi, Senior Scientific Advisor

⁸ Ibid, p 6.

recommended Maurice Strong and UNEP to establish five major research centers with adequate computer facilities.⁹ It was recommended that a first meeting with a group of meteorologists should be jointly organized by UNEP and WMO.¹⁰ This was an incipient step towards a formation of what would later become the International Panel on Climate Change in 1988.

In parallel, the early 1970s set in motion vibrant actions in the area of international environmental policy within the ICC. Key events included the Stockholm Conference in 1972, ICC's creation of Environmental Guidelines for the World Industry (codes of conduct) in 1973 and the creation of UNEP in 1973. Immediately after the Stockholm conference, Maurice Strong signaled to the ICC that the UN would rely heavily on the ICC for advice and help in finding the right people in building UNEP (Bergquist & David, 2022, 12). Partly as a response to the creation of UNEP, the ICC took in November in 1972 the initiative to form the Center for Industry and the Environment (CIE).¹¹ CIE's principal task was to act in relation to UNEP, but also to also develop relations to the OECD, the Council of Europe and the European Economic Community (EEC). By maintaining regular contact with UNEP, the CIE would, as it was argued, ensure that ICC's members would be fully informed about developments and plans in the area of the environment.¹² In short, the ICC and UNEP built up channels for information sharing already in the early 1970s. The CIE, who started up its work in 1973, provided a first platform to support the circulation of knowledge.

In 1974, when the Center organized its first conference titled "Industry Center (UNEP/ICC)", the chairman of the ICC Environment Committee, John Langley, stated that the world industry would find themselves faced with difficult choices between "optimum economic growth and ideal environmental conditions".¹³ As Langley contended, all aspirations for environmental protection would not be able to be achieved over night, and that it was urgent to establish a list of priorities. For this purpose, Langly found that a dialogue between legislators, industry and the UN were "imperative".¹⁴ It is important to point out in this context that the ICC established early on a policy regarding under which conditions the industry should accept – and not accept – regulatory measures for environmental protection. In the first version of ICC's Environmental Guidelines launched in 1973 and adopted in 1974, it was stated (in Guideline No 24) that the industry would oppose settings of environmental standards in cases where a standard lacked "an adequate scientific basis". Industry would also oppose environmental policies or regulation assessed as "arbitrary or unduly costly to society as whole".¹⁵ Although climate change was not placed on the list of problems that ICC's Center of the Environment would prioritize, it was, as we will see, exactly these arguments about societal costs and scientific uncertainty that the ICC would hold on to in relation to climate change later on.

⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹⁰ Ibid, 12.

¹¹ Swedish National Committee of ICC (hereafter, SNCICC). Box 11 no. 210, 1971-75. Special Committee on Environment. "Proposal for an International Environment Centre for Industry. Meeting on 16 November, 1972."

¹² SNCICC Box 11 no. 210, 1971-75. Special Committee on Environment. "Proposal for an International Environment Centre for Industry. Memorandum".

¹³ SNCICC Box 11 Document 2010/56. Inter-parliamentary conference of coastal states on the control of pollution in the Mediterranean Sea. Statement by Mr J.F.T. Langly, Chairman, Special Committee on the Environment of the International Chamber of Commerce," Rome, March 29- 3 April, 1974, p 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., p 2.

¹⁵ SNCICC. Box 11. Document 210/55 Special Committee on the Environment. Environmental Guidelines for the World Industry. Draft prepared by an ad hoc Working Party and approved by the Special Committee, April 18, 1974, p 4.

However, with the OPEC oil embargo in October in 1973, both UNEP and the ICC began to formulate a policy that embraced more specifically the interrelation between energy use and environmental protection. As an immediate response to the oil crisis, ICC's Environmental Committee introduced an additional paragraph to their Environmental Guidelines in 1974.¹⁶ The initiative came from Exxon Mobile, who suggested that the industry should, as a major supplier of energy, "recognized its responsibility for demonstrating the inter-relationship between environmental conservation goals and energy availability".¹⁷

UNEP tried in parallel to define how they should engage in the energy area. In 1975, UNEP presented a proposal of a twelve-point programme, which set out the future role of UNEP in the field of energy.¹⁸ ICC's Environment Committee was invited to review UNEP's proposal and only then did the question of outer limits and climate change reach the ICC, through UNEP. In November 1975, the ICC's Environment Committee presented the report "Energy and the Environment" to be sent to UNEP's governing council. One point in the UNEP document concerned outer limits and climate change.¹⁹ The ICC comment on this document was that it was no reason to single out *carbon dioxide* as a major pollutant from energy plants. But at the same time, the ICC declared some concerns about the issue: "It seems important to seek to determine whether the discharges mentioned would in fact cause irreversible change of the global climate".²⁰ It was also stated in more general terms that ICC considered research of the effects "which atmospheric and other pollutants had on health and the environment" should be intensified and that socio-economic research was necessary to identify correlations among energy usage, human development and environmental protection. The industry was, according to the ICC, prepared to play its part.²¹

While the ICC Special Environment Committee had been created as a response to the Stockholm Conference in 1972, the oil shock in 1973 meant that the ICC created a new committee; the Energy Commission. It was foreseen that this working group would be as inclusive as possible and should be composed of representatives of the states concerned.²² The aim of this working group was to formulate and collect the views, which the private sector wished to present or defend to governments and intergovernmental bodies (such as UN, OECD, and EEC.). The Energy Commission would "concentrate its efforts on the economic, monetary, financial and social consequences of the energy crisis."²³ However, as we will see, this committee never became important within the ICC until the end of the 1980's.

¹⁶ SNCICC. Special Committee on the Environment. Environmental Guidelines for the World Industry. Draft prepared by an ad hoc Working Party and approved by the Special Committee, April 18, 1974.

¹⁷ SNCICC. Box 11. Document 210/55. Special Committee on the Environment. Environmental Guidelines for the World Industry. Draft Additional Paragraph proposed by Dr Raymond W. Winkler Environmental Conservation Coordinator, EXXON mobile, for incorporation in Document 210/54, April 18, 1974.

¹⁸ SNCICC. "Economic and Financial Policy. Box 11, Document no 201/75. Meeting with the Special Committee on Environment. Preliminary Draft by Jean Guillaume (France) Director of Environment Shell Francaise on the Environmental Consequences of the Energy Crisis. September 9, 1974

¹⁹ SNCICC. "Economic and Financial Policy. Meeting with the Special Committee on Environment. Meeting on November 7, 1975. Document No 210/15.

²⁰ Ibid, p 3.

²¹ Ibid, p 6.

²² The aim was to include developing States which were oil exporters, developing States which were oil importers, developed States which were energy self-sufficient in oil and industrial States which were mainly oil importers.

²³ Gérard Bauer, Problèmes posés par l'énergie, accessoirement par les produits de base et les matières premières. Première note d'information au sujet du Groupe de travail ad hoc "Energie" de la C.C.I., Bienne 21 Février 1974, p. 3. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.1.

In short, climate change was not an issue that the ICC's Environment Committee or Energy Commission paid any attention to internally, although the issue was "in the air" within the UNEP's discussions in the mid-1970s. And when climate change was mentioned, it was by experts who did not belong to the ICC. Thus, in June 1978, during a meeting between a delegation of the USSR authorities (the country was not member of the ICC²⁴) and the ICC and Western business leaders held in Moscow, Dzhermen Gvishiani, a high-ranking government official²⁵, mentioned the report "Energy and Climate" of the US National Academy of Sciences released one year before, which "forecasted that early in the 21st century temperatures in the northern hemisphere might increase by 1/2 or perhaps 1 degree. (...) Soviet experts believed that climatic changes and temperature increases might even occur before the end of this century, due to the so-called "greenhouse effect" arising from increased emission of CO₂ in the atmosphere." Gvishiani concluded that the problem "was not a theoretical one" and "decisions in this area could affect the interests of many countries and even investment plans in specific industries."²⁶ This point was not further discussed by the two delegations.

The ICC's Environment Committee was in general not paying much attention to any specific environmental problems.²⁷ The ICC rather turned its attention to environmental policy designs in its discussions with UNEP, where business self-regulation was a periodical feature of ICC's rhetoric (Bergquist & David, 2023). When the ICC organized the World Industry Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1982, it emphasized that environmental legislation and regulations had to be reasonably harmonized worldwide to diminish the risk of harmful distortion of competition and trade. The most effective way to accomplish harmonization was through business self-regulation. Climate change, or any discussions about outer limits was not on the agenda at this conference, although many UNEP representatives attended. But at the same time, Exxon showed interest internally in the climate issue as early as in the late 1960s. In 1979, Exxon, which was a member of the ICC US Committee, hired Steve Kinsley to study potential impact on fossil fuel combustion on CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. The report concluded that: "present trends of fossil fuel combustion with coal emphasis will lead to drastic world climate changes within the next 75 years", and that the "CO₂ buildup in the atmosphere is a worldwide problem" and that the potential problem is "great and urgent".²⁸ But as demonstrated in a number of studies, Exxon kept silent about their knowledge (e.g. Franta, 2021a; see also Loetscher, 2022, p. 253 and f.).

Transition from Inaction to Action

Although the ICC's Center for Industry and the Environment disappeared in the early 1980s (see Bergquist & David, 2022), the ICC/UNEP collaboration continued. A formative event was the World Industry Conference on Environmental Management (WICEM) in 1984, a

²⁴ On the relations between the ICC and Eastern Europe, see Thomas David, Pierre Eichenberger and Sandrine Kott, "The International Chamber of Commerce Goes East", Geneva, Pan-European Economic Spaces in the Cold War Conference, June 9-11, 2022.

²⁵ He was Deputy Chairman of the State Committee on Science and Technology of the Council of Ministers of the USSR (GKNT), a governmental institution in charge of scientific and applied research policy and international transfer (on Dzhermen Gvishiani, see Rindzeviciute, 2016, 36 and f).

²⁶ USSR Meeting with the International Chamber of Commerce and Western Business Leaders, Moscow, 26-28 June 1978, Summary of the Discussions, p. 61. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.8.1. On the USSR and climate change during the 1970's and 1980's, see Rindzeviciute, 2016, chap. 6. The US report he mentioned is: Geophysics Study Committee. "Energy and Climate" (National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, 1977), 158 pp.

²⁷ The UNEP Industry Office series of industrial seminars. Collaboration here with ICC not explored here. The seminars covered pulp and paper, aluminum, iron & steel, the automotive industry and others (see Huf et al. 2022)

²⁸ Knisely, S., 1979. *Controlling the CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. Report* available at Climate Files. <https://www.climatefiles.com/exxonmobil/1979-exxon-memo-on-potential-impact-of-fossil-fuel-combustion/>

conference jointly organized by UNEP and the ICC. Exxon, Shell and other fossil fuel companies along with range of other multinationals related to other industry branches was involved in the conference. The list of environmental problem areas discussed at WICEM included acid rain, slash and burn deforestation, desertification, water (draught, pollution of drinking water, ocean pollution), toxic wastes, chemical fertilizers and asbestos – but not climate change.²⁹ The discussions of needed R&D circulated around environmental management, and more specially on the concepts of ‘economic efficiency’, ‘cost effectiveness’ (cost benefit analysis), and ‘economics of pollution prevention’. As the ICC argued, progress in the area of efficiency would make it possible to align economic growth with environmental protection and that improved efficiency was the feasible way to achieve sustainable development.³⁰

By introducing new management concepts connected to efficiency, the ICC could demonstrate a strong case of for voluntary business approaches to environmental protection. The underlying logic behind the voluntary approach was that efficiency measures would result in *both* cost savings and improved environmental quality, or a so called ‘win-win’ outcomes.³¹ The conference was in the end perceived as a great success for the UNEP/ICC cooperation. The silence about climate change at WICEM raises, however, at least three questions. Was the issue of climate change strategically ignored at WICEM in order to achieve a conference that would bring the world industry and UNEP together, without tensions? Or was it that climate change was not on the agenda, because science on climate change was still a question for only a small group of experts? And third, what role did the interests of major oil companies and other fossil fuel companies play?

In February 1988, at the second high-level follow-up to WICEM organized in Paris by UNEP and the ICC, Mustafa Tolba, the Executive Director of UNEP, gave an important speech to an audience of business leaders. He reminded that before WICEM, “the relationship between industry and environment was one of confrontation. Everyone was in the trenches and ready to shoot.” Now, since WICEM, there had been a move toward cooperation. However, according to Tolba, the international environmental agenda had during the last four years changed, “including significant new issues.” Among these issues, Tolba stressed “the combined dangers of atmospheric pollution, principally ozone depletion, acid rain, and climate change.” He added that the “changing atmosphere and changing climate” were “a result of the burning of fossil fuels and the uncontrolled emission of waste gases. The outer limit of climate had been reached.” Therefore, emission controls needed “to be applied "soon" on a worldwide basis.” In dealing with climate change, Tolba identified a major problem: how far the energy and chemical industries would be “willing to consider their role in climate change”? He regretted that “the subject was not seriously discussed at the meeting”³². In his answer, Karel Veldhuis, the chairman of the ICC Commission on Environment and a former board member of Unilever, justified the ICC’s failure to take up the case by stating, as mentioned in the introduction, that the ICC had “limited resources” and that global climate change was not on the list of ICC

²⁹ We can here notice that the problems that was brought to attention was the problem areas which concerned developing countries and not the West, who had already come a long way in resolving issues such as acid rain and toxic waste. Transfer of knowledge and technology from the Global North to the Global South was a central theme of the conference.

³⁰ For an analysis of ICC’s role in shaping the concept of sustainable development in the 1980s, see Bergquist & David, 2022.

³¹ Ibid.

³² « International Environment Reporter », Issue of 10 February 1988. AfZ, Zurich, 124.1.1.

priorities. He added however that personally he was convinced that it was “one of the most important issues of the 80s”.³³

Four months later, in May 1988, the ICC Committee on environment debriefed the high-level meeting in Paris. It invited Samuel Tewungwa, one of UNEP’s leading experts who gave a presentation on climate change. The discussion that followed his presentation is interesting because it illustrated some of the fault lines that would be found within the ICC on this topic. On the one hand, Stan Hope, the representative of IPIECA, was skeptical, explaining that “his organization had been following UNEP work in this area closely. He stressed the complexity of the problem and the need to avoid simplistic policy recommendations. For a start, man-made activities were only one of the factors contributing to climatic change, and were not necessarily as important as natural factors.” On the other hand, Eberhard Meller, Head of the Environmental Policy Department, Federation of German Industries, was more sensitive to public pressure, fearing that “political measures might be taken without waiting for a sound analysis of the situation” and reminding that his country had established a Commission on Climatic Change. Finally, the Committee decided that an ICC position paper on climatic change should be prepared in close liaison with the Energy Commission, “perhaps as a priority for 1989.”³⁴

UNEP and Tolba certainly played an important role in ICC's decision to start addressing the issue of climate change. However, ICC’s awakening was also due to the fact that climate change became an important issue in 1988. After two years of discussion, the IPCC was created by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP, fifteen years after the Aspen meeting. The foundation of IPCC marked the beginning of a new level of governmental mobilization around climate change. Moreover, the Toronto Conference on the Changing Atmosphere took place in June 1988 and for the first time put on the international agenda the idea that it was necessary to reduce emissions in order to stabilize Greenhouse Gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere (Falkner, 2008, 106). As emphasized by the ICC’s Environment Committee in a note on the greenhouse effect sent to its members, the climate change phenomenon was “attracting increasing public attention”³⁵.

At first, as ICC did not have “a formal position regarding global climate change”³⁶, it relied on other business associations, in particular US ones, with which she shared common members. At the first meeting of Working Group I of the IPCC (24-26 January 1989), Stan Hope (IPIECA) represented the ICC and was “the only observer from a non-governmental organization”.³⁷ A few days later, Alexander B. Trowbridge, the President of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), attended on the behalf of the ICC the IPCC Meeting. In his discourse, he emphasized that the “first priority should be scientific research” and that, “given the uncertainty in science, policies that make sense in their own right are preferable to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Commission on Environment, Meeting on May 1988, Summary Record, p. 6. ED 708/2, vol. 145, 1988, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich (hereafter, IfZArch).

³⁵ Commission on Environment, Climatic Change / The “Greenhouse Effect”. Note to National Committees and members of the commission, 16.02.1989, p. 1. ED 708/2, vol. 146, 1989, IfZArch, Munich.

³⁶ “Statement by Alexander B. Trowbridge, President National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) before the Response Strategy Working Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change United Nations Environment Programme and World Meteorological Organization, January 30, 1989”, p. 1. ED 708/2, vol. 146, 1989, IfZArch, Munich.

³⁷ Stan Hope, “Note on the First Meeting of Working Group 1 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) at Nuneham park Conference Centre, Nr. Oxford, England 24-26 January 1989”, 27.01.1989, p. 1. ED 708/2, vol. 146, 1989, IfZArch, Munich.

mandated measures.”³⁸ European business associations also helped the ICC to build its discourse on climate change. In April 1989, the ICC Environment Committee “expressed strong general support” for a paper by the Union des Industries de la Communauté européenne (UNICE) entitled “The Greenhouse effect: a UNICE perspective”.³⁹

This paper served as the basis for the ICC first statement on global climate change released a few months later.⁴⁰ In this statement, the ICC declared that it supported the concept of a framework convention which “should set out general principles for addressing climate change” and “allow for the greatest amount of national flexibility in achieving solutions” because of “scientific and economic uncertainties”. It suggested some measures that a framework convention might include, insisting on furthering research and monitoring of global climate change and on promoting the transfer of technologies that were energy efficient.⁴¹ This statement prefigures some of the issues that the ICC would develop over the next three years.

ICC becomes the main business interlocutor of the United Nations (1990-1992)

In 1990, the Environment Ministers of 34 countries of the ECE region attended the Bergen conference on sustainable development to discuss the report *Our Common Future* by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Report (about the history of the Commission, see Borowy, 2013). As part of this conference, the ICC was asked to initiate and coordinate input from constituent businesses. Just before the Conference, the ICC arranged in Bergen an “Industry Forum on Environment” that was attended by 200 CEOs from all over the world, who deliberated the environmental challenges their businesses faced. At the end of the conference, these businessmen adopted an Industry Agenda of Action which was based on two pillars⁴². On the one hand, they supported “the principles of sustainable development” and welcomed the initiative taken by the ICC to draft an Charter for Sustainable Development.⁴³ Thereafter, through its Special Committee on the Environment, the ICC adopted a constructive policy in UN’s conference devoted to some of these issues and its promotion of a business sustainable development policy was part of this policy (Bergquist and David, 2023).

On the other hand, the businessmen in Bergen asked the ICC to form an international task force to develop guidelines to address the risks of climate change. These guiding principles should “indicate actions that companies could take voluntarily” and include initiatives “to increase

³⁸ “Statement by Alexander B. Trowbridge, President National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) before the Response Strategy Working Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change United Nations Environment Programme and World Meteorological Organization, January 30, 1989”, p. 4-5. ED 708/2, vol. 146, 1989, IfZArch, Munich.

³⁹ Commission on Environment, Meeting on 25 April 1989, Executive Summary, p. 1. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.1.3.

⁴⁰ Commission on Environment, Meeting on 27 October 1989, “ICC Statement on a Framework on Global Climate Change”, p. 1. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.1.3. The first draft was prepared by the United States Council for International Business (the US ICC Committee).

⁴¹ Commission on Environment, “ICC Statement on a Framework on Global Climate Change Submitted for adoption to the 59th Session of the ICC Executive Board (Geneva, 27 September 1989)”, 29.08.1989, p. 1-2”. ED 708, vol. B.I.2.20, 1989, IfZArch, Munich.

⁴² “Session IV. The Energy Issue. Background Note”, Commission on Energy, Meeting on 15 March 1991. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁴³ “Programme d’action de l’industrie présenté à la Conférence de Bergen de 1990 “Action pour notre avenir à tous””, 12 mai 1990, p. 1-2. State Archives of Belgium (thereafter SAB), Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2453.

energy efficiency” and “reduce greenhouse gas emissions”.⁴⁴ This task was taken over by ICC Energy Committee. Oil multinationals played an important role in this committee. In 1986, the Secretary General of the Swiss National Committee wrote to the Secretary of the main Swiss business association and asked him to react on a paper entitled “Some suggested principles for taxing energy consumption” written by the ICC Commission on Energy, a committee he knew well as it had been chaired since its beginning by a fellow Swiss businessman. He mentioned in passing that “National Committees with powerful oil company members” were “not very sympathetic to the work of this Commission”, but the ICC had “so far found it wise not to dismantle it.”⁴⁵ Even if he did not mention explicitly which countries, it appears from the minutes of the commission on energy that the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands regularly made reservations about the work of the commission.⁴⁶ However, from 1988, the oil companies saw the usefulness of this committee.

From the beginning, fossil fuel energy (coal, oil, gas) was held responsible for global warming through its large share in the production of CO₂ emissions. In this sense, global warming differed fundamentally from other environmental problems for energy producers: “Whereas for other environmental issues (such as ozone depletion), it was possible for producers to maintain the same level of overall production, but to focus it on other products, global warming requires a reduction in fossil fuel use which is not compensated by growth elsewhere.” (Newell and Peterson 1998: 682). It is thus not surprising that, within the ICC, it was the energy committee and not the environment committee which took the lead on this issue and which shaped ICC's response to climate change in Rio.⁴⁷ Harry Albinsson, Head of Energy Department, Federation of Swedish Industries and member of the ICC Energy Committee summarized well this strategy in a memo written in January 1990: “ICC should now, in my opinion, consider what kind of input the organization should give to the Bergen Conference. We should prepare our delegates to argue against the most “enthusiastic energy savers”.”⁴⁸

It was not only the business world which in Bergen endorsed the ICC as the main business representative on environmental global governance. The United Nations did the same. At the Industry Forum in Bergen, Maurice Strong, who had just been appointed Secretary-General for the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, declared that it was “appropriate” that the ICC had selected “global climate change as a major theme”. According to Strong, it clearly shows that business was “prepared to tackle what is undoubtedly the most important, and most difficult and complex, of all major global environmental issues.” He added that the action process would be “a long, difficult and complex one”.⁴⁹ He concluded by emphasizing the importance of the collaboration with business: “The spirit of partnership and the processes of dialogue and consultation

⁴⁴ Programme d'action de l'industrie présenté à la Conférence de Bergen de 1990 “Action pour notre avenir à tous”, 12 mai 1990, p. 2-3. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2453.

⁴⁵ « Note de Michel Dérobert à Monsieur [Fritz] Ebner, Commission de l'énergie de la CCI : Energie et fiscalité », 21.7.86. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁴⁶ Commission de l'énergie, Compte rendu de la réunion du 7 mai 1982, p. 1 ; letter of Michael Kohn, Chairman of the ICC Commission on Energy, to Leonard Hentsch, Zurich, 14 June 1982. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.3.

⁴⁷ ICC Commission on Environment/ICC Commission on Energy, “Bergen Conference ”Action for a Common Future” (8-16th May 1990), Note to the members of the commissions and national Committees, 10.04.1990. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.1.3.

⁴⁸ « Report of the Workshop on Energy and Environment – Sustainable Energy Use, Velen, Westphalia, Federal Republic of Germany, 11-14 December 1989, Memo from Harry Albinsson to Nigel Blackburn (ICC, Paris, 19.01.1990, p. 1. AfZ, Zurich, 125.3.1.

⁴⁹ Maurice Strong, “The Global Political Setting for a Corporate Environmental Agenda”, Bergen, 10 May 1990, p. 2-3. Part II, Box 42, Folder 380, Peter S. Thacher Papers, Environmental Science and Public Policy Archives, Lamont Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

manifest here in Bergen, in which you, as industry leaders, are playing such a leading role, provide an encouraging basis for this. And the 1992 Conference provides an exceptionally important means of building on and nurturing this spirit of co-operation and partnership.”⁵⁰

During the next two years, the ICC gradually sharpened its arguments during international conferences which marked the preparation of the Rio conference in 1992. In October 1990, Ross Stevens III, Environmental Affairs Manager at Du Pont, summarized the issues at stake: “Environmental organizations would certainly push hard” for a framework convention on climate change. Therefore, the “business community would need to follow developments carefully, stressing for example the need for realism and cost-effectiveness, and for proceeding on substantiated evidence.”⁵¹ Therefore, as the ICC had done for the Brundtland Commission (Bergquist and David, 2023), it closely monitored the work of international organizations related to climate change. First, ICC observers attended the World Climate Conference sponsored by the WMO, UNEP, and other international organizations in Geneva in October-November 1990. This Conference, “the biggest governmental meeting focusing on environmental issues” prior to Rio (Bodansky, 1993, 469), discussed the first IPCC assessment report. Second, in December 1990, the UN General Assembly took the decision to establish the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC), with the mandate to negotiate a convention containing “appropriate commitments” in time for signature at the UNCED in Rio (Bodansky, 1993, 453). The ICC sent delegations to the six meetings organized by the INC between February 1991 and May 1992.

At the same time, the ICC’s biggest efforts to mobilize its members before the UNCED was the arrangement of a second World Industry Conference on Environmental Management (WICEM II) in Rotterdam in 1991. In a background note, the ICC set out its climate change and energy strategy very clearly: “The global warming issue will be a focal point in the UNCED discussions in Brazil 1992. But the energy issue has additional resource aspects that world business has to address in the context of sustainable development. At WICEM, we must, therefore, not limit the energy issue to the global warming debate, but extend the view to see energy as a general resource issue.”⁵² At WICEM II, the ICC launched its business action program which recommended guidelines for businesses which, as it was argued, could be implemented to “make positive contributions towards the global climate change issue”.⁵³

ICC’s strategy for WICEM II was however to keep the issue of climate change low on the program agenda. Efforts were instead made to attract a wide attention to ICC’s Business Charter for Sustainable Development. The Charter, which was prepared in 1988 and published in conjunction to WICEM in 1991, summarized ICC conception on sustainable development. Partly drafted by Shell, it consisted of 16 principles to help companies to convert the vision of the Brundtland Commission into operational reality and to showcase to governments and electorates that the business sector was earnestly addressing its environmental responsibilities (see Bergquist & David, 2023). ICC longstanding relationship with Maurice Strong since the Stockholm conference was a strategic asset in launching the Charter. As Jean-Charles Rouher – Secretary General of the ICC – explained in a message to Strong in December 1990: “As you know, WICEM II is seen as the principal way-station for the business community in the run-up

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 10.

⁵¹ Commission on Energy, Meeting on 26 October 1990, Executive Summary, p. 2. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁵² Session IV. The Energy Issue. Background Note”, WICEM II. Session 4: Energy. Outline, January 31, 1991, p. 1. AfZ, Zurich, 124.1.2.

⁵³ Thomas G. Lambrix, “Industry Task Force on Global Climate Change. Project 2.B: Action by Industry. Discussion paper”, WICEM II Meeting, Draft Outline, January 29, 1991, p. 2. AfZ, Zurich, 124.1.2.

to the UNCED Conference in 1992, and it is therefore particularly appropriate for you to take a prominent role”⁵⁴ Roher also conveyed to Strong that the ICC intended to include in a document circulated during the conference a selection of “short supportive messages from leaders of organizations with authority and influence in environmental affairs” in order to “strengthen the Charter’s importance in the minds of business.”⁵⁵ Roher inquired if Strong would be willing to compose such a message, to which Strong assented.⁵⁶ Strong attended the conference and delivered the opening plenary speech. In this keynote address, he mentioned that the Charter was much in line with the reorientation of government policies he expected to see at the 1992 UNCED conference in Rio.⁵⁷

ICC’s strategy on climate change

ICC’s climate change strategy was based on four pillars: the diffusion of doubts about the scientific results, the discredit of climate science and the promotion of delay messaging; the importance of markets as a solution to the greenhouse effect; the need to find technical solutions; and finally, its pioneering role in environmental global governance. The first three pillars are familiar from studies which have highlighted in the case of business (in)actions in the United States (Oreskes and Surpan, 2021; Brulle 2022; Williams *et al*, 2022). Our own research has highlighted the importance of the fourth one. By defining and promoting its Business Charter for Sustainable Development, the ICC acted as an instance of “entrepreneurial authority” (Green 2014), which bestowed upon it a high degree of legitimacy with international organizations, and the United Nations in particular.

First, the ICC contributed to the ‘denial machine’ (Dunlap & McCright, 2011), which aimed to create uncertainty on the research of climate science and scientists. In 1991, at WICEM II, Harry Albinsson presented a paper entitled “An industrial initiative to improve energy efficiency” which was, according to his author, “a summing up of today’s position on the issue of energy efficiency primarily in the industrial sector as seen by the international business community”. In this paper, Albinsson was explicit: “The climatic change issue is fraught with scientific uncertainties and unknowns.”⁵⁸ The questioning of scientific research on climate did not deny the phenomenon of the greenhouse effect but insisted on the uncertainty of the results and on the need for further research. At the 1992 Rio Conference, the ICC published business briefs which summarized its position concerning the main global environmental issues and that it made available to governments and non-governmental organizations. The Business brief No 4 was devoted to energy and climate change and summarized well ICC position: “The ICC shares the world-wide concern about possible future climate change brought about by increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. At the same time, specific future climatic impacts are uncertain and difficult to predict. Therefore, considerable scientific effort is required to resolve uncertainties in our understanding of the natural environment and in computer-generated predictive capabilities.”⁵⁹ Creating uncertainty on scientific research was

⁵⁴ MSP. Box 443. Folder 4214. Jean Charles Rouher to Maurice Strong, 12 December, 1990.

⁵⁵ MSP. Box 443. Folder 4214. Jean Charles Rouher to Maurice Strong, 12 February, 1991.

⁵⁶ MSP. Box 443. Folder 4214. Fax from Nigel Blackburn to May Davidson, 03 April 1991.

⁵⁷ MSP. Box 443. Folder 4213. Notes for remarks by Maurice Strong, Secretary General United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Opening Plenary Session of the Second World Industry Conference on Environmental Management, Rotterdam, Netherlands, Wednesday, 10 April, 1991.

⁵⁸ Harry Albinsson, “An industrial initiative to improve energy efficiency”, Draft Paper, January 29, 1991, p. 1-3. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁵⁹ ICC Business Brief, N° 4: Energy and protection of the atmosphere. Prepared for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1-12 June 1992. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2456.

also important for business as it could insist on the fact that the Framework Convention should exclude binding targets and timetables for reductions of greenhouse gases (Falkner 2008, 109). The position taken here also dates back to the wordings of ICC's very first Environmental Guidelines from 1973, which held that industry would oppose regulation where adequate scientific evidence was uncertain or arbitrary, or if it was unduly costly to society as whole.

The ICC also employed experts who were “contrarian scientists”. During the 1980s, Tor Ragnar Gerholm was a Consultant to the ICC Energy Committee.⁶⁰ He was a renowned physics Professor at Stockholm University and served as a member of the Nobel Prize selection committee for physics. At the same time, he was known for his controversial views on climate change (Dunlap & Jaques, 2013, 728; Ekberg & Pressfeldt, 2022). In 1990, at a meeting of the ICC Commission on energy, Gerholm emphasized that the IPCC reports, which had just been published, “provided a good and balanced basis for discussion”. He also added that they “also helped to counter the alarmist predictions frequently cited in the media.” However, a “weakness in the IPCC reports was the absence of assessments of the huge cost of adapting to climatic change”⁶¹, adopting the argument frequently advanced by the oil industry which stress that climate policies threaten prosperity (Oreskes and Supran, 2021). Some months later, at a meeting of the same committee, Gerholm was much more critical, arguing “strongly that the scientific case for global warming was not yet conclusive, and at least ten years further research was required before the introduction of expensive and far-reaching measures to counter it.”⁶²

This strategy of sowing uncertainty is not surprising. We have seen that at the beginning of its public awakening to climate change, the ICC collaborated with key institutions of the “climate change countermovement” such as the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) and IPIECA (Brulle, 2022). This collaboration continued thereafter. For example, in February 1991, at the first session of the UN Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change, John Shlaes, of the Edison Electric Institute – the US trade association for investor owned utilities which was a key actor of the electric utility industry’s role in promoting climate denial, doubt, and delay (Williams *et al*, 2022) – delivered a statement on behalf of the GCC to the drafting of which ICC representatives actively contributed. In his statement, he declared that business and industry were “aware of the great complexity and uncertainty that characterize today’s limited scientific understanding of future climate change, and its impacts.”⁶³ Thomas G. Lambrix, the President of GCC, was appointed in 1991 Vice-Chairman of the ICC Commission on energy and “would provide an important input to the Commission”⁶⁴. In this capacity, he was one of the main authors of the ICC statement on energy and climate change presented at WICEM II in Rotterdam, then at Rio.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Commission on Energy, 08.02.1984, List of Members, p. 3. ED 708/2, vol. 1057, IfZ, Munich.

⁶¹ Commission on Energy, Meeting on 28 October 1990, Executive Summary, p. 2. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁶² Commission on Energy, Meeting on 15 March 1991, Executive Summary, p. 2. AfZ, Zurich, , 480.1.4.9.4.

⁶³ “Joint Statement by Industry/Business non-Governmental Organizations at Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change”; Washington DC, 4-14 February 1991”. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2453. See also ICC Commission on Environment and ICC Commission on Energy. “Report on the First Session of the U.N. Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change”, 19 March 1991. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2453.

⁶⁴ Commission on Energy, Meeting on 11 October 1991, Executive Summary, p. 1. See also Commission on Energy, Meeting on 15 March 1991, Executive Summary, p. 3. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁶⁵ Thomas G. Lambrix, “Industry Task Force on Global Climate Change. Project 2.B: Action by Industry. Discussion paper”, WICEM II Meeting, Draft Outline, January 29, 1991, p. 2. AfZ, Zurich, 124.1.2.

The literature on the GCC has emphasized its action, mainly in the United States, and has somewhat overlooked its international networks, especially before 1992 (Newell and Petterson 1998; Brulle 2022). The same is true for IPIECA which at the same period coordinated an international campaign to weaken international climate policy by disputing climate science (Bonneuil *et al.* 2021). During the 1980's, IPIECA sent observers to the ICC environment and energy committees who took full part in the Commission's work.⁶⁶ At the end of the decade, the ICC strengthened its relations with IPECA. In 1992, in a meeting of the ICC Energy Committee which planned the follow-up work of Rio, John Lemlin, the Executive Secretary of IPIECA, put forward that his organisation "would be keen to extend its strong links with the ICC."⁶⁷

For GCC and IPIECA, the affiliation with the ICC was significant, as it provided access to and considerable legitimacy with international organizations to disseminate widely its ideas (Newell and Patterson 1998, 690). Similarly, it allowed them to speak not just as representatives of a specific sector, but as voices for the business community at large. At a meeting of the ICC environment in 1991, John Lemlin "welcome ICC input (...) since the issues involved evidently had implications for the business community as a whole."⁶⁸

The second pillar of the ICC strategy on climate change was its emphasis on the importance of the markets as articulated by the President of the ICC Energy Committee Michael Kohn in 1992: "Following the collapse of centrally planned government economies, there is growing interest in applying the rules of the market economy. The market is indeed the most efficient strategy to resolve current problems in the field of energy and environment."⁶⁹ The command and control approach – which had been used in industrialized countries since the 1970's and which consisted for example in establishing uniform emissions standards and banning the use of certain substances in certain industrial processes – was considered as "flawed because of its rigidity, and uniformity". Moreover, the provisions made by government agencies did not "consider the diversity of individual agents and their different abilities to adapt themselves technically and economically."⁷⁰

At the beginning of the 1990's, carbon tax was promoted as a means to reduce carbon emission. Some Scandinavian governments introduced such an instrument. The European Union also considered implementing such an instrument, which – the press reported – led to "the most ferocious lobbying ever seen in Brussels" as business was opposed to such a tax (*The Economist* quoted by Falkner 2008, 106; see also Warloutet 2022, 388-390). The ICC also rejected the idea of a carbon tax. In a review of the WICEM conference, John Hunt, a journalist of the

⁶⁶ ICC, Fact sheet No 2, Environment, 19.02.1988 p. 2. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.1.2.

⁶⁷ Commission on Environment, Meeting on 8 October 1992, Executive Summary, p. 5. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.1.5.

⁶⁸ Commission on Environment, Meeting on 9 April 1991, Executive Summary, p. 3. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.4.

⁶⁹ In this paper entitled "The Role of the market in solving problems in the field of energy environment" and submitted as a basis for discussion by the ICC Energy Committee, Michael Kohn and some of his Swiss colleagues tried to take stock of the issue in a relatively nuanced way (AfZ, Zurich, Michael Kohn. papers, 1.4.1.). The paper was published four years later and presented a much more neo-liberal tone heavily criticizing the role of governments – "Direct regulation has historically been the most common means by which governments have limited pollutant emissions. The main drawbacks of direct regulation are their lack of flexibility and the increasing costs and complexity of this form of instrument" – and emphasizing much more the importance of tradable permits schemes and voluntary approaches (including joint implementation) (Kohn, 1996, 147). This evolution reflects the growing emphasizing by business associations on the role of markets as a solution to climate change, but also to the intervention of US delegates (in the 1992 paper, no US businessman was involved).

⁷⁰ Kohn, "The Role of the market in solving problems in the field of energy environment", World Energy Council - 15th Congress, Madrid 20-25 September 1992, p. 11. AfZ, Zurich, Michael Kohn. papers, 1.4.1.

Financial Times, emphasized that there “was a cool reception for the notion of a carbon tax on fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas.” Torvild Aakvaag, the vice president of Norsk Hydro and chairman of the ICC Environment Commission, said that “it would have to be harmonized internationally to be efficient and I don’t think it is possible. It is inconceivable that China, which consumes 1bn tons of coal a year, would be willing or able to introduce such a tax”⁷¹

During this period, a new market mechanism was progressively put forward by the ICC: tradeable permits which allowed a company with lower pollution to sell its surplus permits to one with higher pollution. At WICEM, John Hunt emphasized that the use of market instruments “to encourage better performance through the workings of the free-market rather than by tougher regulations was given strong backing. Tradeable permits were advocated as one such method.”⁷² However, it is mostly after Rio that the ICC would emphasize this instrument. In a report published in 1996 by the ICC Energy Committee, the second conclusion of the report was that tradable permit schemes had “the potential to achieve more cost-effective emissions reductions than direct regulation.” (Kohn *et al.*, 1996, 147).

The third pillar of ICC strategy on climate change was the “no regrets” actions, which included attempts to promote and implement cost-effective energy efficiency programs and to reduce energy use in manufacturing.⁷³ Transfer of energy-efficient technologies to Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia was also being considered, likely in an effort to alleviate the tensions arising from climate change policies between the industrialized North and the Global South.⁷⁴ This strategy also included discourses that delayed ambitious programs to tackle climate change (Williams *et al.* 2022, 6-8). ICC supported “immediate “no regrets” global climate change actions that emphasized improved energy efficiency, sound science and took into consideration the economic impacts of such actions” as “specific future climatic impacts” were “uncertain and difficult to predict”.⁷⁵ The point with the notion of “no regrets” was to undertake measures that would be profitable anyway, regardless of whether climate change was to become a reality. Yet, these programs required the development of new advanced energy technologies. It was also necessary “to maintain all the present energy supply options, including nuclear energy, and further to develop renewable energy sources such as wind and hydro power”⁷⁶. From the beginning of the 1980’s, the ICC energy committee promoted nuclear energy.⁷⁷ At the end of

⁷¹ John Hunt, “Industry on the warpath to fight greenhouse battle”, *Financial Times*, Wednesday April 17, 1991 SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2453.

⁷² John Hunt, “Industry on the warpath to fight greenhouse battle”, *Financial Times*, Wednesday April 17, 1991. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 245.; Kohn, “The Role of the market in solving problems in the field of energy environment”, World Energy Council - 15th Congress, Madrid 20-25 September 1992, p. 11. AfZ, Zurich, Michael Kohn. papers, 1.4.1.

⁷³ ICC Business Brief, N° 4: Energy and protection of the atmosphere. Prepared for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1-12 June 1992, p. 2. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2456. See also Falkner 2008, 107.

⁷⁴ Thomas G. Lambrix, “Industry Task Force on Global Climate Change. Project 2.B: Action by Industry. Discussion paper”, WICEM II Meeting, Draft Outline, January 29, 1991, p. 3. AfZ, Zurich, 124.1.2.

⁷⁵ ICC Business Brief, N° 4: Energy and protection of the atmosphere. Prepared for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1-12 June 1992, p. 2. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2456.

⁷⁶ Harry Albinsson, “An industrial initiative to improve energy efficiency”, Draft Paper, January 29, 1991, p. 14. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁷⁷ See for example, Second ICC Symposium on Corporate Communications, «The Business Community as a Positive Force in Informing Society: The Nuclear Energy Case», Zurich, 20-22 May 1981. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.3. Commission de l’énergie, “Déclaration de la CCI sur les utilisations de l’énergie nucléaire”, 20.01.1982. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.3.

the decade, it tried to increase its lobbying by playing on widespread concerns about the greenhouse effect and the increased demand for non-fossil fuel energy sources.

As mentioned, studies on the US business' promotion of climate science skepticism to delay action have focused mostly on the oil and the electric utility industry. In Europe, the nuclear energy industry was also involved in this campaign (Bonneuil *et al.* 2021 mention this point). It is notable that within the ICC energy committee, the nuclear lobby was strong. Its Swiss Chairman, Michael Kohn, President since 1976 of Motor-Columbus, a company active in the field of hydroelectricity, was nicknamed the "atomic pope" as he was one of the strongest advocates of nuclear energy in Switzerland. In 1966, his enterprise planned the construction of a nuclear power plant in Switzerland but was forced to abandon the project for political reasons in 1988 (Lüond 2020). Juhani Santaholma was another important pronuclear businessman. He was a member of the ICC Energy Committee since the beginning of the 1980s and played an important role in the preparation of the Rio Conference.⁷⁸ During the 1980's and 1990's, he worked for Perusvoima Oy (PEVO), a company funded by a Finnish private energy company, Teollisuuden Voima (TVO), and an energy government-owned company Imatran Voima, to create a new nuclear reactor. In Finland, the business community, led by the forest industry, was very active in promoting the development of nuclear energy as they needed a source of cheap energy (Jensen-Eriksen, 2020). Some scholars have suggested that the climate change debates presented new opportunities to some business sectors such as renewable energy firms and the nuclear industry, which were supportive of international action to combat global warming (Newell and Peterson, 2010, 42; Falkner 2008, 98-99). Yet, the case of the ICC shows that, between 1988 and 1992, there was a collaboration, a community of interests, between the representatives of oil industries and of nuclear industry.

The fourth pillar of ICC strategy, which indeed became the most public one, emphasized its pioneering role in environmental global governance. Indeed, the ICC often highlighted the environmental responsibility of business and its pioneering efforts in the field of environment, illustrated by its frequent references to the Convention of Montreal. The negotiations which led to the Montreal Protocol in 1987 and the reversal of the depletion of the ozone layer were "UNEP's greatest achievement" (Ivanova 2021, 152). The ICC followed closely and participated in the elaboration of the Montreal Protocol. The business sector was at the beginning divided on the Protocol (Falkner 2008: 16-45).⁷⁹ However, after the signature of the agreement, the ICC supported strongly the rapid implementation of the Montreal Protocol and helped industry, especially in developing countries, to "use appropriate substitutes."⁸⁰

At the "Saving the Ozone" Conference in London in March 1989, organized by UNEP, Peter Wallenberg, the Swedish President of the ICC, presented the "Industrial Response". He emphasized that his organization had "been taking an increasingly strong interest in environmental questions for nearly 20 years" and that its Commission on Environment "early observed and discussed the problem of ozone depletion". He reminded his audience that in July 1988 the ICC had "prepared a statement on the CFC issue, which gave strong support to the Montreal Protocol." The statement requested ICC members "to recommend their governments

⁷⁸ Commission de l'énergie, Compte Rendu, Réunion du 7 mai 1982, List of Participants, p. 1. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.3.; Commission on Energy, Meeting on 11 October 1991, Executive Summary, p. 2. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.9.4.

⁷⁹ ICC Commission on environment, Summary record of the Meeting of the 27 May 1988, 7-8. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.1.2.

⁸⁰ ICC's Own Programme on Sustainable Development, in ICC Brochure "Sustainable Development, the Business Approach", 1989, p. 9. ED 708/2/146, 1989, IfZ, Munich.

to ratify the Convention and the Montreal Protocol without delay.”⁸¹ These positions were appreciated by representatives of international organizations. When Samuel Tewungwa came in front of ICC’s environment committee in 1988 to make his presentation on climate change, he began his talk by saying he had been “very interested to see the draft ICC Statement” on the Montreal Protocol, by congratulating the ICC “on taking an initiative in this direction” and by hoping to count on ICC support “on expediting the entry into force of the Montreal Protocol”⁸². It is thus not surprising that, at the beginning at least, the ICC mentioned this Protocol in its first statement on climate change. In 1989, the ICC suggested that a framework convention might include, among others, the support for the Montreal Protocol and the ongoing international process to phase out the use and production of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).⁸³ In Bergen, the Position Paper on Climatic change reiterated this point.⁸⁴

The ICC Business Charter for Sustainable Development was also strategically used to highlight the pioneering role of the ICC in environmental governance. The Charter was a success as it was adopted very rapidly by numerous multinationals.⁸⁵ Eighteen months after the launch of the Charter, around 1040 companies and business organizations have given it their formal support, of which half are based in Europe (Eden, 1994, p 163). For the ICC, its Business Charter was the proof of its goodwill for environmental issues, including climate change. A discussion paper of the “Industry task force on global climate change” emphasized this point: “(...) at the current speed of improvements, greenhouse emissions will not reach an acceptable level.” The ICC business Charter “supports the speeding up of this process.”⁸⁶

A division of labor thus emerged within the ICC. While the Energy Committee was responsible for the organization’s first three strategic pillars of its climate change policy – the dissemination of skepticism regarding scientific findings and the undermining of climate science credibility; the significance of markets as a means to address the greenhouse effect; and the imperative to find technical solutions –, the Environment Committee acted as an instance of “entrepreneurial authority” by defining and promoting the ICC’s Business Charter for Sustainable Development. Thanks to its double strategy embodied by its environment and energy committees, the ICC was able to adopt a position on international environmental governance in Rio, which succeeded in bringing together business sectors with divergent, even conflicting, interests. This certainly explains why business and industry were able to shape at UNCED the very way in which international environmental governance was considered (Chatterjee & Finger, 2014).

Sally A. Eden, who provided a contemporary analysis of the role of business in Rio, observed that the ICC was successful in injecting the business point of view forcefully into the UNCED

⁸¹ Peter Wallenberg, « The Industrial Response: a world-wide view and some Swedish examples », London, 5-7 March 1989, p. 1. ED 708/2/146, IfZ, Munich. See also the brochure « Saving The Ozone Layer. A Global Task” January 1990, written by the the Federation of Swedish Industries, with Swedish environmental NGOs and academic societies. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2453.

⁸² Commission on Environment, Meeting on May 1988, Summary Record, p. 5. ED 708/2, vol. 145, 1988, IfZArch, Munich.

⁸³ Commission on Environment, ICC Statement on a Framework Convention on Global Climate Change. Submitted for adoption to the 59th Session of the ICC Executive Board (Geneva, 27 September 1989)”, 29.08.1989, p. 2. ED 708, B I. 2.20, IfZArch, Munich,

⁸⁴ Commission on Energy and Commission on Environment, “Energy and Sustainable Development. Position Paper for Use at Bergen Conference”, 27.04.1990. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2453.

⁸⁵ “The Success Story of the ICC’s Green Code for Business: More Than 1,260 Supporters,” *ICC Business World* 4, no. 3 (Apr.–June 1994): 4–5.

⁸⁶ Industry Task Force on Global Climate Change, “Discussion paper for Bad Regaz meeting February 1-3 1991”, p. 3. AfZ, Zurich, 124.1.2.

debate (Eden, 1994, p 164). In Rio, the ICC was accompanied by the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD), which also lobbied for market friendly policy outcomes. J. Timmons Roberts and Peter Newell (2016, p 7) have argued the emergence of voluntary approaches to sustainable development in global environmental governance was a result of the major success that “international industry” achieved in Rio, where business sought to actively redirect the debate away from criticism against industry and a need for global regulation.

The very negotiations for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change produced “a compromise agreement based on the lowest common denominator”, as “the framework convention did not specify the level at which atmospheric concentrations should be stabilized, nor did it include binding obligations to reduce greenhouse gases within a given timeframe” (Falkner 2008, 108). It is thus not surprising that, “after the United States had successfully insisted on the exclusion of specific targets for the stabilization of greenhouse gas emissions”, the ICC “expressed its support for the Convention”, commenting that “the end result corresponded well to the fundamental points it had advanced” since the beginning of the work of the IPCC in 1989.⁸⁷ The exact impact the ICC had on the design of the Climate Convention between 1988 and 1992 is impossible to quantify. But as Robert Falkner (2008, 109) emphasized, the fact that “the Rio agreement on climate change took the form of a framework convention that excluded binding targets and timetables for GHG reductions” could be seen as “a major success for the business lobby”.

The aftermath of Rio and ICC’s declining role

Rio represented the zenith of ICC's involvement in international environmental governance. In his address to the Plenary Session on behalf of the World Business Community, Senator Albano Franco, President of the Brazilian Confederation of Industry and Vice-President of the Brazilian ICC Committee emphasized that Maurice Strong called the ICC “the standing army of business.”⁸⁸ According to Strong, the ICC was the principal instrument and the foremost business organization in the world for the effective implementation of UNCED’s conclusions by businesses.⁸⁹

However, after Rio, the ICC gradually lost its leadership in sustainable development among the business community and the Business Council for Sustainable Development gradually established itself as the leading player in this field. When Maurice Strong's appointment as Secretary-General of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, one of his initial decisions was to designate Stephan Schmidheiny, a Swiss industrialist with close ties to the ICC, as his special adviser.⁹⁰ In his new role as special adviser, Schmidheiny established the BCSD, comprising forty-eight business leaders from various parts of the world. The BCSD also published a book for the conference, titled “Changing Course: A Global Business Perspective on Development and the Environment” which presented the business community's perspective on environmental governance at both the corporate and international levels (Jones, 2017, 177).

⁸⁷ Commission on the environment, « United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992. Interim Report on the UNCED Conference and Associated Events », 25.06.1992, p. 2. SAB, Bruxelles, Archives de la Fédération des entreprises de Belgique (FEB), Box 2454.

⁸⁸ Senator Albano Franco, “Address to the Plenary Session of UNCED on behalf of the World Business Community”, Rio de Janeiro, Wednesday 10 June, 1992, p. 1. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.3.2.

⁸⁹ Jean Charles Rouher to Gregor Kuending, Secrétaire Général du Comité National Suisse de la CCI, “Projet de Conseil International de l’Environnement et du Développement Durable (CIEDD) de la CCI”, 17 September 1992, p. 1-2. AfZ, Zurich, 480.1.4.11.3.2.

⁹⁰ On the ambiguity of the environmental actions of Schmidheiny’s firm in the 1980 and his neoliberal involvement in the 1990’s, see Moll-François and Elsig (2021) and Mach (2002).

Along with the ICC, Schmidheiny and the BCSD presented in Rio a project which was ambitious and more encompassing than the ICC's Business Charter. The BCSD had also successfully forged connections with sectors such as banking and insurance, which had played a limited role in the development of the Charter. After Rio, the ICC tried a counter balance to Schmidheiny's BCSD by forming the World Industry Council for the Environment (WICE).⁹¹ This initiative was short lived, and in 1995 WICE merged with the BCSD forming the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). The WBCSD then quickly emerged as the leading business voice on corporate environmentalism on a global scale and overshadowed the ICC in this role (on the importance of the WBCSD, see for example Najam 1999; Green, 2014: chapter 5; Kaplan 2024). Since 1995, at least, a split appeared on the issue of climate change between anti- and pro-regulatory positions, between industry such the insurance and the chemical industries on the one hand and the oil industry on the other, between European and US business (Faulkner 2008, 110 and f.; Fromhoff *et al* 2015; on the logics of conflicts within the ICC on environment issues in the 2000s, see also Orsini 2011).

Concluding Remarks

UNEP brought attention to climate change in relation to the notion of “outer limits” to economic growth in the 1970s, something that the ICC was aware of, through their information sharing. But as ICC expressed already in its first Guidelines from 1973, industry would oppose settings of environmental standards in cases when the adequate scientific basis was uncertain, or when environmental policies or regulations were deemed arbitrary or unduly costly to society as a whole. ICC stayed muted about the climate change issue until 1988, while at the same time, engaging proactively on environmental policy-discourses and stressing the efficacy of self-regulation in its collaboration with UNEP.

This study of the ICC makes a novel contribution, not only because that the ICC represented the world's largest transnational business organisation, but because its long standing connection to the UN and UNEP explains why the interests of big business made such a big imprint on the UNCED in Rio. The case of the ICC not only sheds new light on the power of business in environmental global governance before and during Rio, but demonstrates the multifaceted way in which the ICC came to respond to climate change. It resembles many aspects of climate denial and delay strategies, in a time period (1988-1992) that was very formative for the future course of action. As argued by Stoodard *et al* (2022, 657) “Had concerted and decisive action been taken at the time, moderate emissions reductions and an incremental transition away from fossil fuels could have averted much of the climate change that now has been locked in.”

One strategy, led by ICC Environment Committee, was based on a constructive cooperation with UNEP, that involved the WICEM I conference in Versailles in 1984, the Montreal Protocol in 1987 and WICEM II in 1991 in Rotterdam. Here, ICC acted as an instance of “entrepreneurial authority”, by developing a strong business strategy for sustainable development, eventually manifested in its Business Charter for Sustainable Development. By introducing a strong business case for “sustainable development”, the ICC promoted the idea, particularly at the UN arena, that industry would voluntarily engage in combating climate change. This policy discourse was also strongly supported by the Business Council for Sustainable Development in Rio, but also by the Secretary General of the UNCED, Maurice Strong.

⁹¹ The two organizations, operated under distinct models—WICE grounded in corporate commitment and BCSD centered around CEO commitment (See Bergquist and David 2023, 26).

The creation of the IPPC in 1988 and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC) in 1991, instigated a parallel strategy, led by ICC's related oil and nuclear companies. As this study argues, the ICC's Energy Committee developed close ties to the GCC, the front group designed to combat the evidence of climate change. However, ICC's energy committee did not limit itself to a denial strategy only. It also emphasized the importance of market mechanisms and technological solutions to combat climate change, but without arguing in favor for binding targets and timelines in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The double strategy also gave the ICC legitimacy in terms of global environmental governance by presenting itself as a pioneer and a responsible player. For this achievement, the notion of sustainable development was important, since the concept was open for a translation into business practices, designed by business itself. ICC's Charter for Sustainable Development was a major contribution in this aspect. The double strategy also allowed business to gather around shared values (importance of the free market and "no regret" actions) across sectors with divergent interests and to present a united front in Rio to defend its interests. The ICC influenced the regulatory discourse, reluctantly acknowledging the necessity of precautionary measures while advocating for adaptable and market-friendly mechanisms (Falkner 2008, 139).

As Lamb et al. (2021) have noted, policy statements can become discourses of delay, when they promote ineffective solutions and thereby draw attention away from more substantial and effective measures. The International Chamber of Commerce was a pioneer in creating such delay discourses, although it is plausible that many actors truly believed that the business led responses to climate change was the most promising way forward.

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