

Balkan Black Box

An Outlook on Transparency and Accountability in Central (and Eastern) European Water Concessions

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[Abstract]

Celebrated by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Public Private Partnerships have become a *leitmotiv* for public services. Northern, southern, eastern and western utilities have experienced a major involvement of the private sector, while witnessing a shift in the role of public authorities under the header of economic service provision.

Central and Eastern Europe have been no exception in this trend. Under the neo-liberal auspices of World Bank and EBRD, international investment funds have been mobilized for the renovation, re-structuring and upgrade of poorly maintained drinking water supply systems and networks.

Mixed and sometimes controversial outcomes in this process have sparked vivid interest among academics and practitioners: while the economic literature focuses on information gaps between the relevant actors in common public-private endeavours, politics scholars stress issues of responsibility and legitimacy. This paper intends to provide a bridge between these two approaches focusing on transparency and accountability.

Investigating the role played by information in several PPP cases between Sofia, Tallinn and Bucharest, an overview of recent privatisation processes for drinking water supply is provided. The amount and nature of the information publicly available, the presence and structure of monitoring bodies and the channels for the enforcement of the several concessions at stake are used in order to outline the contours of the new networked governance of drinking water supply.

A thick opaqueness is revealed for most privatization cases, though: the allocation of risks and responsibilities between public and private counterparts is difficult to outline, undermining access to water as Human Right as well as threatening the democratic foundations of environmental governance. All over Central and Eastern Europe, poor transparency and vague accountability make the private provision of drinking water appear as a Black Box: un-transparent, un-democratic, un-accountable and thwarting most arguments in favour of its introduction.

[Keywords]

Type II Agreements, Public Private Partnerships, Privatization, Central and Eastern Europe, Transparency, Accountability, International Financing Institutions, Drinking Water Supply.

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1. The Background: Agreements Type II in Action

Celebrated by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Public Private Partnerships have become a *leitmotiv* for public services. Surrounded by about 10.000 UN Member State delegates, inter-governmental organisations and official observers, a hundred Heads of State gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa¹, and pleaded for a greater involvement of private actors in the achievement of the Millennium Goals. Both civil society and the business have responded promptly to the appeal and an the initial list of roughly 200 multi-stakeholder partnerships worldwide almost doubled in the turn of a few years, as documented by the CSD Partnership Database (UN)².

Partnerships focus on fields such as water, energy, health, agriculture or biodiversity; their common header is to converge private means and knowledge in pursuing goals of public utility. Explanation for such a development is the acknowledgement that institutional actors (international and supranational entities, governments, ministries, municipalities) are not able to achieve the ambitious goals entailed by the Millennium Declaration on their own: quantitatively, they do not possess the means while, qualitatively, they have come to recognise a profound knowledge gap for the successful implementation of Sustainable Development.

Moreover, national governments have been increasingly crowded out of the Sustainable Development arena: globalization has increased the authority and importance of supranational and international entities, from the EU to the WTO, while decentralisation trends have shifted, over the last decade, more and more decisions and duties from national to regional and sub-regional level (See OECD, 2000:12).

Utilities worldwide provide basic services for populations ranging from few rural households to millions of urban settlers. This is the development more and more of them are experiencing: from state provision they have been transferred to municipal administrations and from there to private operators attached to multinational companies.

¹ Figures from: http://www.un.org/jsummit/html/basic_info/faqs.html.

² See: <http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/welcome.do>

Rationale for the involvement of the business sector in the provision of utilities lies in its superior capabilities in terms of service provision: introducing the logic of the market, the business sector has both the incentives and the skills to improve services by identifying and eliminating the wasteful practices typical of public (mis)management (see OECD, 2000:8; UN, 1995:xi). Public authorities, for their part, shall withdraw from direct service provision and concentrate in providing the best institutional and regulatory framework for this transition to happen. This way, the best results can be harnessed: a better service at a lower price.

Thus, northern, southern, eastern and western utilities have witnessed a major involvement of the private sector and a shift in the role of public authorities. The common header is that of economic service provision. This ideal setting fits well in the concept of “joint problem solving” which is at the base of Public-Private-Partnerships: public and private actors joining their complementary strengths towards a common goal. “Type II Agreements” have in this the potential to mobilize an enormous amount of resources and achieve Sustainable Development.

2. The Context: Central and Eastern Europe + Reconstruction = Privatisation

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE in the following) have been no exception in this trend. Under the neo-liberal auspices of World Bank and EBRD, international investment funds have been mobilized for the renovation, re-structuring and upgrade of poorly maintained infrastructure all over the region. This paper will focus on the specific developments that affected drinking water supply systems and networks (in the following: DWS).

Almost two decades after the collapse of the Warsaw pact, CEE Countries still bear the signs of their recent past of command economy. Such a legacy is still readable in the characteristics and the present state of their physical infrastructure: DWS networks were designed following gigantism and centralisation guidelines. As soon as central support faded, they have quickly proven impossible to maintain.

At the turn of the millennium, a growing number of municipalities in CEE faced a urgent need to renovate their DWS infrastructure: leaking pipe networks as well as obsolete or broken down treatment facilities were endangering the health of millions, while simultaneously polluting the environment and deteriorating the water basins the drew upon. As public resources clearly were not up to the task, the mobilisation of private actors, in the new era of economic liberalism, appeared as the most obvious answer (UN, 1998:1).

Around the year 2000 an impressive number of water concessions has taken place. A wide variety of options is available for private involvement in infrastructure issues, ranging from contracting out to BOO-schemes (Build, Own, Operate – see Table 2.1). Despite this potential diversity, most cases took the shape of BOT-schemes where the emphasis lies on renovating / expanding the DWS network rather than building new infrastructure from scratch.

Options for PPP	
Contracting Out / Management Contracts	The private sector simply provides a service or manages a facility for an agreed period and fee without taking on the financing or revenue risk.

Options for PPP	
Joint Ventures	Public and private sectors jointly finance, own and operate a facility.
Leasing	All or a substantial part of the risk associated with funding, developing, managing and operating the facility is transferred to the private sector, which receives lease payments for its use.
BOT (Build Operate Transfer)	Project developed by the private sector, which takes primary responsibility for funding, designing, building, and operating it for a sufficient period of time to service and repay the debt raised for this purpose and earn a suitable return. Control of the project is then transferred back to the public sector (which retains formal ownership of the projects assets throughout).
BOOT	Build, Own, Operate, Transfer. Variant of BOT.
DBFO	Design, Build, Finance, Operate. Variant of BOT.
DCMF	Design, Construct, Manage, Finance. Variant of BOT.
BLT	Build, Lease, Transfer. Variant of BOT.
BOO	Build, Own, Operate.

Table 2.1: Forms of involvement of the private sector in public infrastructure development projects. Source: UN, 1998:3. Note how the allocation of risks changes from type to type. For a more detailed analysis, refer to OECD, 2000.

Tenders granted a small number of Water Multinationals (such as SUEZ, VEOLIA, International Waters, RWE) the right to operate the facilities and charge water users accordingly through their subsidiaries everywhere in CEE. Regulations were put on water prices to prevent arbitrary tariff hikes. For their own part, the new private operators committed themselves to the much needed infrastructure renovation, supported by International Financing Institutions through long-term-low-interest loans.

The shift from public to private operators has far reaching consequences for drinking water provision. As explained in an earlier paper (Roggero, 2005), the concept of “economic” drinking water provision is partly in contrast with the right to water, the idea of water as a human right³. Such a circumstance is particularly relevant for population experiencing poverty, the case for the urban and rural poor in CEE.

Economists maintain that utilities in general and DWS in particular are, both in the west and the east, prone to cross-subsidisation. This means that water tariffs seldom reflect the costs of the operators, the difference being covered with taxpayers' money. The introduction of market mechanisms would require moving to a full cost recovery in water tariffs, a change which is not necessarily feasible in poverty contexts, underlying nonetheless an inescapable truth: in a way or another, water services must be paid for.

Moreover, if private operators contribute with their knowledge to an increased efficiency, a price reduction would be expected, particularly if competition can be ensured. At the same time, the costs for renovating and upgrading the DWS infrastructure have to be borne by its ultimate beneficiaries: the water users. Price hikes are therefore all but unlikely, considering also that a DWS operator enjoys *de facto* a monopoly advantage over water users.

The delicateness of the situation should warn us against a naïve or simplistic approach towards the capabilities of the business in operating utilities. If public actors are not able to provide water services,

³ See also: Moretto, 2005:14, table 3 (Draft Document).

a private operator left on its own in a monopoly situation is also likely to miss the mark. The privatisation of DWS is therefore to be seen as a joint effort of public and private sectors, correctly reflected by the idea of a partnership.

Rather than exploring pricing issues, this paper will investigate the specifics of the interplay between counterparts of PPP schemes. Given the focus on PPPs, we will refer to privatisation as a transition towards service provision through a private actor within a regulatory framework. This can be considered as an intermediate situation between commercial service provision and provision through a state owned enterprise⁴. While deriving an analytical framework, the following section will explore the relevance transparency and accountability assume for the success of a partnership scheme and will identify the necessary variables for an analysis of CEE water concessions.

3. The Analytical Framework: Transparency and Accountability: issues, definitions, measurements

Mixed and sometimes controversial outcomes in the ongoing process of privatisation have sparked vivid interest among academics and practitioners. Referring to the CEE context of this study, the case of Sofia (BG) is paradigmatic: in a city experiencing severe draught, an extremely leaking prone DWS system requires renovation efforts for estimated 150 million EUR. The introduction of a private operator in 2000, supported by an EBRD loan, has triggered continuous tariff hikes while the state of the network further decays and no sign suggests any inversion of the trend.

The Sofia narrative, very briefly summarised above, is fully representative of a worldwide evidence: after a first enthusiasm for joint public-private endeavours, a wave of discontent and disappointment has taken over, forcing both institutional decision makers and business representatives to identify the causes of such a backlash (UN, 1998). For their part, academics concentrate their efforts in tackling the requirements for a successful implementation of PPP.

While the economic literature focuses on information gaps between the relevant actors in common public-private endeavours, politics scholars stress issues of responsibility and legitimacy. This paper intends to provide a bridge between these two approaches focusing on transparency and accountability.

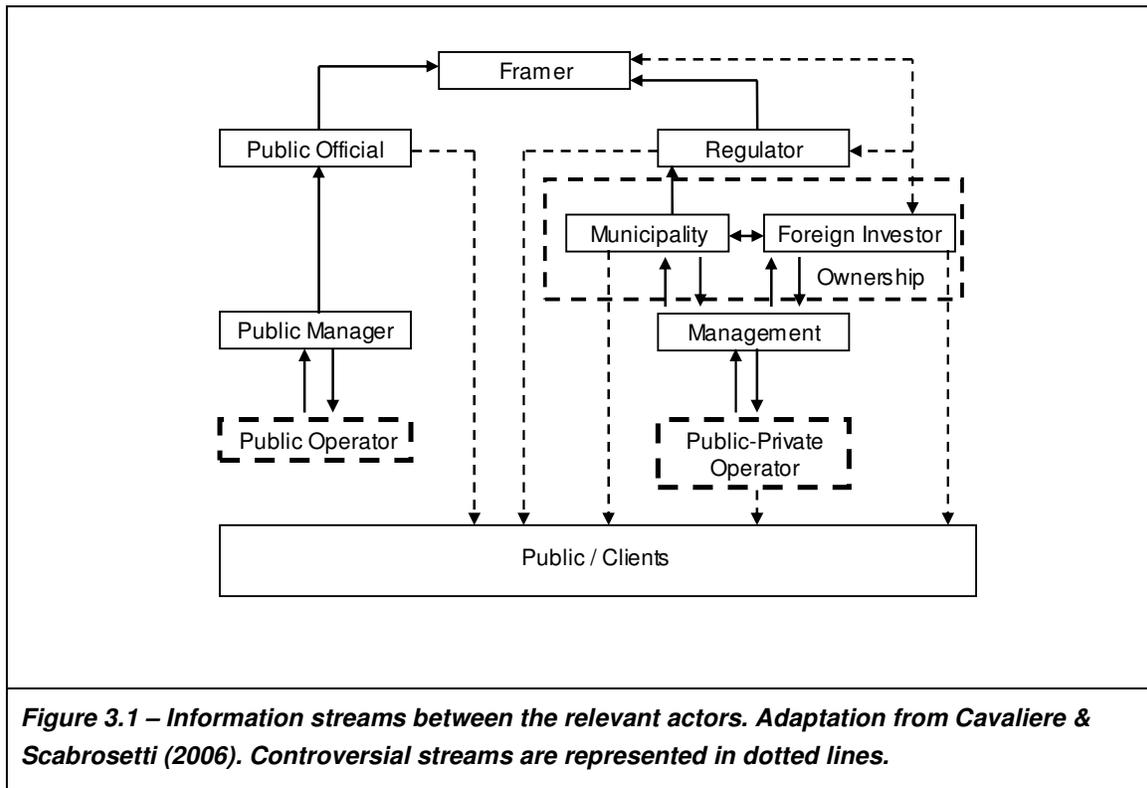
As an overarching framework we shall refer to Cavaliere and Scabrosetti (2006:6)⁵. Given a “framer” at the top of the hierarchical structure, deciding whether to privatise or not, the choice is either to refer to a public official, delegating to a public manager, or to refer to a regulator providing a framework for the activities of a private management. In the second case, the connection between regulator and private manager is mediated by the presence of the owners of the private firm (see Figure 3.1).

Crucial in this schematisation is the emphasis put on information flows between the agents involved. Information is flowing both top-down and bottom-up. Given that the first advantage of private operators over public ones is knowledge (mostly in the form of know-how), Cavaliere and Scabrosetti point at

⁴ For similar conceptualizations, see van der Laan et alii (2001:2) and Medda and Pels (2002:3).

⁵ Based, in turn, on Shapiro and Willig (1990): *Economic Rationales for the Scope of Privatization*, in Suleiman, E. N., Waterbury, J. (eds), *The Political Economy of Private Sector Reform and Privatization*, Boulder: Westview Press.

information asymmetries as a first gap to overcome in PPP schemes: a (theoretically) completely informed minister becomes a less informed regulator in the case of a PPP.



Assumptions can be made on the either benevolent or malevolent nature of both actors, pointing at the tendency of both to pursue private agendas at the costs of the institutional commitments that underly the partnership scheme. Beside any preference for either one or the other option, asymmetry of information clearly represents a first hint in the direction of transparency and accountability as a crucial variable for the success of a PPP scheme.

Attaching directly on this point is the issue of public scrutiny. If the scheme above highlights “internal” information flows, public scrutiny points at the possibility for external reviewers and the public at large to track the process leading to decisions taken by utility operators. Leaving aside any consideration about transparency and accountability of public actors, a reason why private operators should be in general accountable to the public at large lies in their enjoying a limited liability (Koenig-Archibugi, 2004:236). Instead of further elaborating on this argument, the present study adopts a general assumption that secrecy (a reasonable choice for a commercial entity) is questionable in the frame of joint public-private endeavours and is by no way acceptable at least for the public actors involved in a PPP scheme.

The argument above raises the issue, whether transparency and accountability should be considered as a goal for their own sake, or whether they also play an instrumental role in terms of the correct functioning of a PPP scheme. We can frame an answer to this question in the broader terms of implementation and participation gaps in Sustainable Development projects. Starting from the latter,

the recognition that Sustainable Development is not achievable without the participation of civil society represents an argument in favour of considering transparency and accountability as a goal on its own, particularly for what concerns public scrutiny.

At the same time, PPPs have a purpose in overcoming the implementation gap of SD. This argument strongly relies on matters of efficiency and effectiveness: transparency and accountability are to be pursued as long as they increase the efficiency and or effectiveness of PPP projects. Is there a potential trade-off in this? Is there a possibility that increased transparency and clearer accountability, while increasing participation, reduce the performance of a PPP scheme?

To the author's knowledge, not much has been published on the direct effects of transparency and accountability on the attainment of PPP goals. Instead, if accountability is not often addressed, a quick look at some economic literature can provide useful insights on how transparency can emerge in contexts of efficiency and effectiveness. With no ambition of exhaustiveness, some findings are listed in the table below (Table 3.1). Attention is thereby given to the way transparency is defined and operationalised.

Authors	Year	Transparency (T) and Accountability (A) as...	Relevant findings and outcomes
(1) Razin & Sadka	2006	Increased (T) as a reduced knowledge advantage of direct foreign investors.	A smaller knowledge gap between foreign and national investors can reduce FDI.
(2) Cavaliere and Scabrosetti	2006	Focus on information gap on least-cost technology. (T) as disclosure of cost information.	Relevant for bidding process: auctioning competition drives up concession bids, but actual costs are learned only afterwards. Winner is not necessarily the most efficient.
(3) Angeletos & Pavan	2004	Increased (T) as either a reduction in common uncertainty or a reduced heterogeneity of expectations.	More transparent public information increases market coordination and therefore welfare (Coordination is assumed socially beneficial).
(4) Brocas et alii.	1996	Utilities are better informed than the regulator on quality of labour: implicit (T) issue.	Higher water prices are consistent with information asymmetries (Simulation results based on data from California water districts).
(5) Turnovec	1999	(T) as property distribution (primary vs. secondary ownership structure). Quantification in terms of theory of matrices.	Secondary ownership blurs control and therefore (A).

Table 3.1: Literature on Transparency and Accountability in PPP schemes.

The above supports the argument that transparency can positively affect the success of a PPP scheme as better information would improve bidding procedures (2), allow for a better allocation of resources (3), facilitate procurement (4) and enhance the accountability profiles of the operators (5).

The conclusion that a greater transparency would reduce the incentives for foreign investors (1) remains however an open question from the point of view of this paper.

It is important to note that the literature presented above operationalises transparency in terms of information availability. Exception in this is the contribution by Turnovec (1999), focusing on ownership and bridging transparency and accountability issues in one leap. Following this path and pursuing an operational conceptualisation, the relationship between accountability and transparency is best sought after in the realm of political science.

The table below (Table 3.2) summarises a number of contributions from the field of policy studies and international relations.

Authors	Year	Approach to Accountability (A) and Transparency (T)	Relevant findings
(1) Bäckstrand ⁶	2005	Background: Legitimacy of Networked Governance. (T) is meant as access to information on performance and progress of partnerships. (A) refers to relationships between actors and can be <i>internal</i> as well as <i>external</i> .	1) (A) is fundamental for input legitimacy; 2) (A) depends on (T); 3) Partnerships lack a clear principal, electorate and coherent constituency – external (horizontal) accountability suits them better.
(2) Streets	2005	Different sectors part in PPPs have different (A) traditions (different information to different recipients). (A) has trade-offs in terms of flexibility, cost-efficiency and decision-making.	1) It is not possible to satisfy all recipients; 2) Implementation Partnerships shall focus on (A) of outcome.
(3) Benner et alii	2004	(T) is functional to (A). (A) can refer to actors, processes, outcomes.	1) a pluralistic form of accountability is needed for PPPs (networked governance); 2) (T) is crucial for (A) of actors and process
(4) Peeters	2003	(A) conceived as emphasis on <i>external</i> and <i>internal</i> quality control. (T) is tackled as a question of disclosure of criteria and procedures.	1) Credibility towards investors and integrity towards screened companies are central (Focus on financial sector).

⁶ Draft document. Since the author couldn't be contacted, the quote is made under the responsibility of the author of this paper.

Authors	Year	Approach to Accountability (A) and Transparency (T)	Relevant findings
(5) Koenig-Archibugi	2004	(A) of Actors / Process / Outcomes. <i>Internal</i> (A) as within delegation; <i>external</i> (A) as towards general public. (T) relevant for Process (A) as long as coupled to sanctions.	1) Gaps in (A) for TNCs – standard “regulation and supervision” models of (A) do not work; 2) Governments are weak links in an (A) chain from TNCs to citizens; 3) Voluntary (as opposed to mandatory) instruments are therefore currently preferred.
Table 3.2: Approaches to Accountability and Transparency			

A more contrasted picture emerges:

1. input legitimacy of PPPs requires the accountability of actors and processes;
2. accountability of outcomes best applies to implementation oriented partnerships;
3. accountability gains from clear identification of the actors involved (actor accountability) and their qualifications;
4. actors can be made accountable for their *modus operandi* (process accountability) as well as for achieving (or not) the goals agreed in the concession terms (accountability of outcomes);
5. internal accountability channels can be complemented by external scrutiny and the possibility for citizens to challenge decisions and actions taken in the frame of a PPP;
6. accountability and related transparency are toothless if not coupled to sanctions.

A translation of the above into the specifics of water concessions would first of all point at the actors involved as far as accountability of input is concerned: transparency would require them to be clearly recognizable and to provide information about the tender that has verified their qualifications. Process accountability would instead focus on pricing strategy, investment decisions and how the water operator deals with its own cost structure: disclosing the concession’s terms and conditions is thereby crucial. Finally, accountability of outcome would refer to all accomplishments in terms of the “joint problem solving” that has justified the PPP.

In this context, internal and external accountability have to be distinguished (Koenig-Archibugi, 2004:236-237; Bäckstrand, 2005:7⁷): publicly available information represents a body of evidence in support of external accountability; the information flows between the actors, in particular those flows foreseen by the concession contract, constitute the object for an analysis of internal accountability. This implies that an investigation of the internal information flows requires the availability of detailed information on the concession terms – in the best case, of the concession contract. It will be showed below that this is usually not the case, as information on the partnership specifics is usually not disclosed. The analysis will therefore focus on the possibilities for public scrutiny, therefore targeting external accountability.

⁷ Both refer to the work of Robert Keohane.

Transparency is represented, for all three dimensions, by the amount and quality of information made available by the actors involved: the operator, the municipality and the multinational corporation. Gathering this kind of information, we argue, can provide useful insights on the accountability profile of a public-private water concession. The operational framework is schematised below (Table 3.3).

Actor	Accountability of Input	Accountability of Process	Accountability of Outcomes
Key Question	Who is participating in the scheme?	Who is responsible, what for? Which are the terms of the agreement?	What have been the achievements? Are they consistent with the goals of the partnership?
Municipality	Items M1a, M1b, M2a, M2b, M3a.	Items M3a, M3b, M3c	n/a
Operator	Items O1a, O1b, O2a, O2b.	Items O2c, O3a, O3b	Items O4a, O4b
Multinational	Items B1, B2, B3, B4	Items B3, B4	Items B5a, B5b
Table 3.3: Operational framework and relative items (enlisted in table 4.)			

4. Materials: Privatisation Cases under Review

Investigating the role played by information in several PPP cases in Central and Eastern Europe, the remainder of this paper is centred on a set of recent privatisation processes in drinking water supply. The focus is on the amount and nature of the information publicly available, assessing the room for public scrutiny in the recent privatisation cases. The analysis is based on the identification of the actors involved and on the extent to which they report on their participation through websites and annual reports.

The selection of cases is based on publications by the UK based PSI⁸ Research Unit. PSIRU is recognised as one of the most authoritative institutions monitoring the development of public utilities worldwide, particularly in respects of the current global privatisation wave. An initial list of 57 records has been narrowed down to 26 cases, mainly on the basis of the geographical scope of this paper⁹. The list of the cases is presented in Table 4.1.

Municipality	Country	Inhabitants	Operator	Multinational
Durres, Fier, Lezhe, Saranda	Albania	201,000		Aquamundo (subcontractor to Berlinwasser)
Elbasan	Albania	100,000	Elber Sh.p.k.	Berlinwasser
Kavajë	Albania	40,000	U.K. Kavaja Sh.a	AquaMundo

⁸ See <http://www.psiu.org> and <http://www.world-psi.org>. For the specific documents, see Lobina (2001) and Hall (2003).

⁹ Moreover, Czech Republic and Hungary were overrepresented. A choice has been made giving preference to the most populated areas. Other cases have been disregarded as a clear reference to one or a few municipalities could not be established.

Municipality	Country	Inhabitants	Operator	Multinational
Yerevan	Armenia	1,088,300	Yervodokanal (Yerevan Water & Sewerage Company)	Acea (management contract)
Sofia	Bulgaria	1,246,791	Sofiiska Voda AD	United Utilities
Prague	Czech Republic	1,183,729	Prazske vodovody a kanalizace (PVK)	VEOLIA
Brno	Czech Republic	366,661	BVK (Brno VaK)	SUEZ
Ostrava	Czech Republic	315,000	Ostravske VaK (OVAK)	SUEZ
Tallin	Estonia	401,694	Tallinna Vesi	United utilities
Zagreb	Croatia	973,667	Zagrebacke Otpadne Vode doo	RWE Aqua / SHW Hoikter Wassertechnik
Budapest	Hungary	1,695,000	Budapest Water Works (Fővárosi Vízművek)	SUEZ / RWE
Szeged	Hungary	162,889	Szegedi Vizmu	VEOLIA
Pecs	Hungary	156,576	Pecsi Vizmu	SUEZ
Gjakova	Kosovo	150,000	Hidrosemi Radoniqi Gjakova (HRG)	Gelsenwasser
Herzeg Novi, Kotor, Tivat, Budva, Bar, Cetinje	Montenegro	114,092	MonteAqua	AquaMundo
Skopje	F.Y.R. of Macedonia	506,926	Skopje Vodovod	
Gdansk	Poland	501,309	SAUR Neptun Gdansk	SAUR
Bielsko Biala	Poland	190,780	Aqua SA	United Utilities
Dabrowa Gornicza	Poland	129,700	PWiK Dabrowa Gornicza	RWE-Thames
Glogow	Poland	71,686	PWiK Glogow	Gelsenwasser
Bucharest	Romania	1,929,615	Apa Nova Bucuresti SA	VEOLIA
Timisoara	Romania	315,977	Aquatim	SUEZ
Ploiesti	Romania	232,452	Apa Nova SRL	VEOLIA
Trencin	Slovakia	56,850	TVS (Trencin)	SUEZ
Maribor	Slovenia	115,693	Aquasystems d.o.o	SUEZ
Bled	Slovenia	10,899		Berlinwasser

Table 4.1: Reviewed Cases. Inhabitants retrieved from Wikipedia.org and referring to 2001-2004.

For all the cases, the main actors have been sought after and relevant information has been retrieved (with a varying degree of success) from the websites of municipalities, operators and multinationals, consistently with the analytical framework developed in the previous section. Journalistic sources have instead provided background information, adding on the narratives reported by PSIRU. For a limited number of cases, the WaterTime project¹⁰ also represented an additional source of information, together with the PPP Sourcebook of the European Commission¹¹.

The information provided by the actors has been scanned according to the items listed below (Table 4.2):

Actor 1) Municipality	Item No.	...aims Accountability of
has a civic website	M1a	Input
in foreign language	M1b	Input
mentions the actors	M2a	Input
provides detailed information on the actors	M2b	Input
mentions the PPP	M3a	Input + Process
provides information on the concession terms	M3b	Process
provides information on the tender	M3c	Process
Actor 2) Operator	Item No.	...aims Accountability of
has a website	O1a	Input
in foreign language	O1b	Input
mentions the actors	O2a	Input
shows the ownership structure	O2b	Input
mentions the PPP	O2c	Process
provides information on the concession terms	O3a	Process
provides information on the tender	O3b	Process
shows progress information	O4a	Output
shows progress against a benchmark	O4b	Output
Actor 3) Multinational	Item No.	...aims Accountability of
has a website	B1	Input
mentions the actors (link, press release, etc.)	B2	Input
provides information on the PPP / concession terms	B3	Input + Process
provides information on the tender	B4	Input + Process
shows progress	B5a	Output
shows progress information against agreed benchmark	B5b	Output
Table 4.2: Review Items.		

The reference to the on-line material represents a partial limitation to the validity of this study. It is a limitation in the sense that information can be made available through several other channels that

¹⁰ A project funded by the European Commission. See <http://www.watertime.net>.

¹¹ Available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/pppguide.htm.

budget constraints made not possible to investigate¹². This is to be considered only a partial limitation, though, in the light of the comparative low-cost profile of the internet as a communication tool. The leading argument, in this case, is that for an operator committed to renovation efforts worth several million Euros, the most cost-effective way of disclosing information on its own activities is through the internet, particularly given the international dimension of the PPP processes analysed hereby. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of the actors involved (20 municipalities, 19 operators and all multinationals) has a website, a significant proportion of which also in a foreign language¹³.

Setting forth the description of the item list, the rationale behind the input-related items is that actors must be clearly recognisable, in order to be made accountable. Therefore, attention has been given to the fact, whether actors make their own participation in water provision explicit or not (obvious for the operator), together with the role of their counterparts. Spelling out the ownership structure has been considered particularly relevant for operators: cases range between the complete private ownership to the almost complete public ownership in case of management contracts. All other cases lie between these two extremes¹⁴.

Moreover, if mentioning the PPP relates to the accountability of inputs, this also represents a first item of process accountability as it signals a particular way of dealing with drinking water supply. Process items relate to the foundation and operation characteristics of the PPP scheme. They are centred on the disclosure of information concerning the concession contract (the fundamental piece of regulation for the operation of the scheme) as well as the way the partnership has come to being (tender). The accent is put on process in the light of the importance of competition for the economic performance of a PPP scheme. Nonetheless, providing information on the tender is also a way for multinationals to disclose information on their qualification as partners; for this reason the item B4 is intended for capturing transparency features relevant for both input and process accountability.

As best informed actors, multinationals and operators are also able to disclose information on the progress of the partnership, provided, as it is in most cases, that a clear rationale can be identified as a justification for the involvement of private parties. Corresponding output items (O4 a and b, B5 a and b) try therefore to capture whether achievements are communicated and whether this happens in the frame of the concession agreement.

An analysis based on these items has returned the aggregated results presented in Table 4.6.

Actor 1) Municipality	Item	Total	% on N
has a civic website	M1a	20	76
in foreign language	M1b	12	46

¹² As an example, call-center responsiveness and readiness to provide information over the phone or via traditional mail, as well as through personal visit.

¹³ Usually English and / or the national language of the foreign investor (French or German). Please note that the absence of a website in a foreign language has not been considered *tout-court* an obstacle for the analysis of the case. A dedicated item kept track of eventual language problems for the cases where internet resources and skilled web browsing were not capable of overcoming the linguistic barriers.

¹⁴ It could be disputed whether having a website contributes to accountability of actor or whether it should be considered as a control variable for the suitability of the case to the study. It has been chosen to consider these items in terms of accountability of actors under a general assumption that an organisation sets up an internet portal first of all to provide information on itself and on its fields of operation. This circumstance has however been taken into account in formulating the (qualitative) judgements over the overall accountability profile of the actors.

mentions the actors	M2a	9	34
provides detailed information on the actors	M2b	2	7
mentions the PPP	M3a	1	3
provides information on the concession terms	M3b	1	3
provides information on the tender	M3c	0	0
Actor 2) Operator	Item	Total	% on N
has a website	O1a	19	73
in foreign language	O1b	12	46
mentions the actors	O2a	15	57
shows the ownership structure	O2b	15	57
mentions the PPP	O2c	7	26
provides information on the concession terms	O3a	6	23
provides information on the tender	O3b	0	0
shows progress information	O4a	6	23
shows progress against a benchmark	O4b	3	11
Actor 3) Multinational	Item	Total	% on N
has a website	B1	26	100
mentions the actors (link, press release, etc.)	B2	19	73
provides information on the PPP / concession terms	B3	3	11
provides information on the tender	B4	0	0
shows progress	B5a	3	11
shows progress information against agreed benchmark	B5b	0	0
Table 4.3: Aggregated results – number of records satisfying the items among the reviewed cases. N=26			

5. Discussion

A quick glance to the results above suggests several observations:

1. no actor provides information on the tender;
2. municipalities mention their counterparts at best; no information is generally provided on either the PPP scheme, the concession terms or the actors involved;
3. operators seldom provide information on the PPP, both regarding its formation and the contractual terms;
4. multinationals are even more hesitating in disclosing factual information on their subsidiaries abroad: the fact that they operate under a PPP scheme is seldom brought up, as well as the terms of the concession allowing them to operate;
5. very scarce information is provided on achievements and the overall progress of the partnerships; if a very few operators present their achievements in the frame of the partnership scheme, in no case this is done by a multinational.

These points will be singularly addressed in the following.

5.1 The opaqueness of the tenders

The circumstances that have brought the public and private actors together are opaque in all cases. If eventual reports by EBRD or WB, providing financial services in several of the partnerships reviewed, do mention that the partner selection has taken place according to international standards, it is never possible to obtain the specifics of the decision process that has led to the choice of the private counterpart. Moreover, it is not possible to know which other competitors have taken part to the bidding process or whether a tender has taken place at all. Competition related arguments in favour of the involvement of private actors are therefore questionable.

From the point of view of the multinationals involved, this circumstance could suggest a preference for secrecy and confidentiality. Considering, though, that public authorities abdicate a rather sensitive duty for a rather long horizon (20 to 30 years in most cases), it is puzzling how few information they provide to justify the correctness of their decision to privatise.

Moreover, the bidding process has far-reaching implications for the operator, as the winning bid determines crucial parameters for the concession contract such as tariffs and the investment plan. It is difficult to understand why operators make no reference whatsoever to the developments that have for the most given shape to the partnership scheme in which they concretely operate.

5.2 The silence of the municipalities

Another puzzling outcome of the present study is the passive role undertaken by most municipalities in disclosing information about the partnerships, testified by the low scores of item M2a and item M2b. Given that local authorities, even when privatising, remain responsible for the provision of drinking water, it is difficult to understand why they seldom mention that water is provided to the citizen through an independent operator, totally or partly owned and / or run by a foreign company and regulated by a document which is the outcome of international negotiations.

From a diametrically opposed point of view, municipalities are owners or co-owners in 15 of the 26 cases. In 6 cases they are majority owners: Brno (CZ), Budapest, Szeged, Pecs (HU), Bielsko Biala, Glogow (PL). Given the importance of drinking water for a city's inhabitants and economy, one would expect municipalities to give more resonance to the power they exert on the water operator. With the notable exception of Budapest, this does not happen.

Municipalities, moreover, play a crucial role in the tender process as well as in the definition of the concession agreement. Given the potential for conflicts over tariffs and investments, it is in a municipality's interest to fully disclose the negotiated terms of agreement and hold the operator accountable for compliance with the concession. This is not the path chosen by the vast majority of the Municipalities: only the Municipality of Budapest provides information on the concession terms (M3a, M3b), while in the case of Sofia and Bucharest, it is the institutional monitoring body (Omonit and ARBAC, respectively) disclosing the contractual basis of the partnership¹⁵.

5.3 The unconscious operators

The transition from a public to a private or public-private drinking water operator has left little traces in the cases reviewed, as far as operators are concerned. A good percentage of the operators discloses

¹⁵ Not captured by items M3a, M3b and M3c.

details on its ownership structure, thereby providing background information on the major owners (municipality and / or multinational). As captured by items O2a and O2b, a certain transparency emerges and supports the accountability of actors.

Things look less bright when process dimensions are at stake: a little number of operators refer to the PPP process (O2c), and provide information on the concession terms (O3a). As anticipated above, the tender is neglected by the totality of the operators (O3b). This circumstances affect directly the accountability profile of the partnership: paradigmatically, in the case of Trencin (SK), third-party access to the concession text has been denied by both the operator and the ministry on the basis of trade secret (Havlicek, 2006).

In such extreme cases, possibilities for public scrutiny run dim, but even more opaque is the situation for operators under management contract¹⁶. In these cases the only source of information is the multinational website, as neither operators nor municipalities have a website. These are the more problematic cases, where the priority is to alleviate poverty situations in very instable circumstances. Retrieving information on these cases is very difficult in general. The data collected show that the presence of foreign operators makes no contribution in bridging this information gap.

5.4 The multinational vagueness

As a matter of fact, the contribution of the multinationals towards better transparency and a clearer accountability can be disputed. Multinationals do not disclose substantial information in the first place: even though they are by all means the best suited actors to do so (item B1) and make no secrecy of their operating abroad (item B2), they almost never provide information on the PPP and / or disclose the concession terms.

As captured by the item B3, only three cases could be found (roughly) disclosing the terms of the agreement (Aquamundo for its two Albanian cases and the German RWE in the Zagreb Concession). The remaining 23 cases go no further than a few press releases and, eventually, a link. As highlighted above, no details are provided on the tender process (item B4).

Interesting results emerge if the analysis is brought to the level of the individual multinationals. Table 5.1 enlists the biggest players in the case reviewed. The approach of the several multinationals appears quite homogeneous, as they all mention their participation in the cases (item B2) but do neither provide information on the scheme (item B3 – exception made for Berlinwasser and RWE, as highlighted above) nor disclose information on the tender (item B4).

Operator	Label	Origin	Cases	B2	B3	B4	Remarks
Suez	OW4	Fr	7	5	0	0	Merged with Lyonnaise des Eaux
Veolia	OW5	Fr / Be	4	4	0	0	Former Vivendi
Berlinwasser	OW1	De	3	3	2	0	
RWE	OW3	De	3	3	1	0	
United Utilities	OW6	UK	3	3	0	0	Acquired the shares of International Waters in all three cases: Tallinna Vesi (EE), Sofyiska Voda (BG) and Auqua SA (Bielsko Biala, PL)

¹⁶ Three cases in total: Kavaja (AL), Yerevan (AM) and Gjakova (KO).

Table 5.1: Data for the single multinationals involved. The items are: B2 – mentions the actors; B3 – provides information on the PPP / concession terms; B4 – provides information on the tender.

Interestingly, a disaggregation of the operator's data on the base of the multinational involved suggests a certain influence of the foreign actor on the (internet based) information disclosure of the single operators. These results are shown in Table 5.2.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>OW1</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>OW3</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>OW4</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>OW5</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>OW6</i>	<i>%</i>
O1a	has a website	0	0	2	66	7	100	4	100	3	100
O1b	in foreign language	0	0	2	66	4	57	4	100	2	66
O2a	mentions the actors	0	0	2	66	5	71	4	100	3	100
O2b	shows the ownership structure	0	0	2	66	5	71	4	100	3	100
O2c	mentions the PPP	0	0	1	33	2	28	3	75	1	33
O3a	provides information on the concession terms	0	0	1	33	0	0	3	75	2	66
O3b	provides information on the tender	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 5.2: Operator's performance disaggregated by multinational. Multinationals are, in order, Berlinwasser (OW1), RWE (OW3), Suez (RW4), Veolia (OW5), United Utilities (OW6). Output items have been omitted as they will be specifically dealt with further in the text.

It is remarkable that operators led by Veolia and Suez are systematically outperforming those led by other multinationals from the point of view of transparency. This suggests either a specific information disclosure policy or simply an internet presence style systematically pursued by the French multinationals through their subsidiaries abroad (the operators). This result can be brought up as an example of a good transparency practice successfully transmitted from a foreign investor to a local operator, above all in the case of Veolia, which proves particularly comprehensive, as shown in Table 5.3.

<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Operator Comprehensiveness Score</i>	<i>Multinational Label</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Operator Comprehensiveness Score</i>	<i>Multinational Label</i>
<i>Budapest (HU)</i>	0.86	OW3, OW4	<i>Tallinn (EE)</i>	0.43	OW6
<i>Prague (CZ)</i>	0.57	OW5	<i>Pecs (CZ)</i>	0.43	OW4
<i>Sofia (BG)</i>	0.43	OW6	<i>Trencin (SK)</i>	0.43	OW4
<i>Ostrava (CZ)</i>	0.43	OW4			

Table 5.3: Comprehensiveness scores by municipality. Comprehensiveness is calculated as a simple

weighted summation of the scores (either 0 or 1) returned by the several items for each operator. The table provides only the first three rankings. The remaining operators scored from 0.29 downwards, meaning that they provided information on less than one third of the topics.

5.5 The missing achievements

The vast majority of the reviewed cases didn't score high in terms of accountability of outcomes. Transparency proves thereby very low, as not even one operator out of four provides information on the results achieved (item O4a) and only three operators in total do so in the frame of the PPP scheme (O4b). Multinationals perform even worse on this aspect, considering that some information is made available in only three cases (B5a) and never against a benchmark consistent with the objectives of the partnership (B5b).

This result is puzzling in many respects. First of all, the introduction of private actors has been welcomed as a new era of managerial expertise and thoroughness in the administration of public utilities. How is it possible, then, that results – the backbone of modern management – find so little space in the communication of the new operators? Secondly, private actors have made their appearance on the arena of public services for a purpose: to apply their knowledge and skills in very specific issues, mostly related to the renovation and / or upgrade of the DWS infrastructure.

This result is nonetheless consistent with another finding mentioned above: the terms of the concession are seldom disclosed. The overall picture is that of operators presenting themselves as pure commercial entities, making no mystery of their partially or totally private nature and understating the institutional aspects of their operations. Multinationals, on their side, do not fail to make public the international cooperation projects they embark on, and the challenges they represent. The terms of their commitments are never disclosed though, as well as the results they actually achieve.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations: Opening the Black Box

The analysis above has returned several findings:

- beyond mentioning their own involvement and that of their counterparts, municipalities provide little information on the partnership schemes;
- operators seldom make the terms of their procurement clear and rarely report progress;
- multinationals apparently do not pursue transparency as far as processes and outcomes are concerned; eventually, they stimulate their subsidiaries to do so.

Taking these findings into account, a transparency-based judgement over the accountability profile of Central and Eastern European drinking water concessions can be schematised as in Table 6.1.

Actors / Accountability of Actors	... Processes	... Outcomes
Municipalities ¹⁷	positive	very negative	N/A

¹⁷ Municipalities have accountability and transparency obligations towards their citizen. It is positive that partners are mentioned and that an extensive information disclosure takes place through the internet, even in foreign

Operators ¹⁸	very positive	negative	very negative
Multinationals ¹⁹	mildly positive	negative	negative

Table 6.1: Transparency and accountability in the reviewed partnership cases. Judgements draw upon the items, grouped according to the kind of accountability they refer to, as represented in table 5.

The analysis reveals therefore a thick opaqueness for most privatization cases: the allocation of risks and responsibilities between public and private counterparts appears blurry, in the most literal sense. Access to water as Human Right is thereby undermined, and the democratic foundations of environmental governance threatened as poor accountability practices cast a shadow over the legitimacy profile of the whole privatisation process. All over Central and Eastern Europe, poor transparency and vague accountability make the private provision of drinking water appear as a Black Box: un-transparent, un-democratic, un-accountable and thwarting most arguments in favour of its introduction.

Following recommendations draw upon the best among the partnership cases analysed and aim at developing transparency practices that foster the accountability profile of PPP schemes.

Recommendation 1: Disclose partnership details

Target

- Municipalities

Rationale

- In average municipalities do not provide the details of the partnerships they are part of. This undermines accountability of process as both the procedures followed for partner selection and the terms agreed for the concession become difficult to retrieve.
- The ideal role of a municipality in a public private partnership is to provide the best institutional framework for the successful implementation of the scheme. Working on the interface between the private counterparts and the stakeholders, municipalities are the best suited actors for ensuring an appropriate information disclosure on the privatisation process.

languages. Despite this, the judgement is only *merely* positive as detailed information on the actors in generally not provided. Moreover, specific PPP information is lacking. For this reason, and in the light of the institutional role municipalities have in the partnership scheme, the judgement over Process Accountability is *very* negative. Outcomes ideally do not compete the activities of a municipality. Therefore they have not been addressed.

¹⁸ Operators are the central implementing entities within a PPP. The overall judgement over input accountability is *very* positive as actors / owners are usually clearly recognisable with a certain amount of detail. Process accountability is judged negatively as the partnership terms are not disclosed for most cases. Accountability of outcomes is judged *very* negatively in the light of the very little information provided and the importance that such information represents for implementing actors.

¹⁹ Multinationals' performance has been judged *mildly* positive in terms of input accountability for reasons similar to those mentioned for municipalities. The judgement is only *mildly* positive, though, given the lack of information on the tender processes, constituting also input accountability for these specific actors. The negative judgement over accountability of process and outcomes refers to the lack of information disclosure.

Examples of good practice

- Portal of the Municipality of Budapest: a subsection can be found titled “*The assets of the Municipality*” and providing details on the overall privatisation concept pursued by the city council. Information is disclosed on the specific partnership with RWE and Suez focused on the management of Fővárosi Vízművek (Budapest Water Works).
- The Municipality of Prague runs the utility information platform “*Spolu pro Prahu*” (Together for Prague). It contains detailed information on the actors involved (No PPP specific information, though).
- Specific information disclosure can be delegated to monitoring bodies. This is the role undertaken by ARBAC in the Bucharest case (RO) and Omonit, in Sofia (BG).

Recommendation 2a: Disclose both concession terms and achievements**Recommendation 2b: Present them in a consistent way****Target**

- Operators

Rationale

- Operators seldom disclose the concession terms and very rarely compare their achievements with the goals set by the partnership agreement.
- Accountability of process and particularly accountability of outcomes are crucial for the success of an implementation scheme.
- Operators are the most important implementing actors: disclosing their outcomes consistently with the rationale of the PPP is the only way for them to provide legitimacy to their actions, particularly in sensitive areas such as pricing or service quality.

Examples of good practice

- The PPP in Bucharest is not based on investment commitments but on “*service levels*” encompassing dimensions such as water quality, performance of the customer care center, number of service cut-offs, etc. ARBAC, an external monitoring body, regularly verifies the compliance of the operator Apa Nova Bucuresti. The operator, for its part, discloses its own achievements to the public along the benchmark of the service levels entailed by the partnership contract and shows the certifications received by ARBAC.

Recommendation 3: Adopt a proactive role towards transparency**Target**

- Multinationals

Rationale

- The vast majority of information provided by multinationals on their operations abroad is provided in the form of press releases. Information provided this way is acceptable in terms of actors accountability but it's insufficient in terms of process and outcomes accountability.
- Dedicated information platforms are necessary in order to disclose concession terms and provide insights on the achievements that the company's participation has made possible.
- A similar approach will also benefit from the disclosure of tender related information, showing the specifics that have made the company the best qualified partner in the public-private endeavour.

Examples of good practice

- Veolia represents in these regards the best practice. It does not provide information on either tenders or achievements for its operations abroad, but apparently it assumes a proactive role in fostering the accountability profile of the operators it is part of.

7. The Way Ahead: Further Research

The present paper has investigated transparency and accountability issues in the context of the networked, public-private provision of drinking water in Central and Eastern Europe. The concepts of transparency and accountability have been explored on the basis of a literature review that bridged contributions from economics and political sciences. The operationalisation of the concept has been performed in two steps, firstly identifying transparency as information disclosure and then considering specific information disclosure as a prerequisite for specific kinds of accountability.

A series of 22 items, covering the common threefold contextualisation of accountability (input/actors, process, output/outcomes), has been used in order to explore and organize the amount of information disclosed by the relevant actors in the 26 PPP schemes reviewed. The performance of the actors in covering the full range of items identified has allowed for an overall transparency-based qualitative judgement of the accountability profile of the several partnerships under scrutiny.

Limitations of the study

As a first limitation, the definition of transparency as information disclosure puts a public-scrutiny bias on the overall scope of the study. Accountability can be both internal and external, as highlighted in section 3. If publicly disclosed information is available both internally and externally, the same cannot be said for internal information disclosure. This implies that assessing transparency towards the public at large leaves the whole territory of internal accountability uncovered.

Nonetheless, this limitation loses momentum as soon as the institutional aspects of a PPP come into consideration. A certain amount of information can flow only internally (e. g. from the operator to the municipality), without public disclosure, along the channels foreseen for internal accountability. Such information, though, is supposed to reach the public at large as soon as the public actors (municipality and / or a public monitoring body) are involved, under the assumption that secrecy is not appropriate within public bodies.

Secondarily, the functional approach adopted hereby considers transparency as a basic requisite for accountability. A framework linking information disclosure to sanctions is necessary for them to ensure actual accountability and, subsequently, enforcement. Both matters of space and budget constraints did not allow for a consideration of the legal dimension of the partnerships studied, particularly for what concerns non-compliance issues. It has to be stressed, however, that such an analysis would have been hardly possible considering the tight non-disclosure of concession terms revealed by the present research. Besides, when information disclosure towards the public at large is at stake, reputation issues can be assumed to be an effective form of sanction.

A third limitation lies in the exclusion of IFIs from the analysis. This exclusion was based on the consideration that, as a simple matter of information disclosure, institutions such as the World Bank or EBRD are transparent, even to the extent that, where present, they have been used as a source of background information on the partnership process. An analysis of IFI information disclosure would rather focus on the accuracy of the information provided and its comprehensiveness in terms of attention given to social and environmental issues. Assessing the quality of the information provided at a much deeper level than what performed hereby, such an analysis would have not been consistent with the objectives of the present study.

Fourthly, ownership issues have not been tackled by the present study. The scope is limited to the actors most directly involved, without any consideration for secondary ownership issues as suggested by Turnovec (1999). This limitation is consistent with the little meaning such an analysis would have had if not extended to its implications for the enforcement of the concession terms (not available in most cases, as shown above).

Fifthly, for a sub-European study involving cases spread across 14 countries and three time zones, language is an inevitable source of imprecision in the data collection. Two factors mitigated the language problems in the present study: firstly the involvement of multinational companies has led several municipalities and operators to provide information in foreign languages such as English, French or German; secondly, skilled internet search techniques and the availability of on-line translators and powerful search engines have drastically facilitated the orientation within municipality or operator website that did not provide information in either English, French or German²⁰.

Finally, limiting the analysis to the materials made available via internet neglects other, more traditional, channels for information disclosure. An implication of this diversity of channels is the diversity of audience that they can serve. In other words, it is true that disclosing information via internet can expand the boundaries of public scrutiny to a wider community – an almost necessary condition given the international origin of the (in part even public) funds involved in the partnership schemes. At the same time, the very same community affected by the privation programme can have little or no access to internet resources; information disclosed via internet can have very little relevance as other channels could be more appropriate in this case.

²⁰ As an example, the presence of Sofyiska Voda could be sought after also in the Bulgarian site of the municipality of Sofia, as Google Search is able to process Cyrillic websites as well. Moreover, substantives are declined in languages such as Czech, Serbian or Polish, implying that the final letters of a noun can change according to the grammatical context in which the noun is placed. Modern search engines are able to perform searches taking this aspect into account. Moreover, the author of this paper is an Italian native speaker, facilitated therefore in the Romanian cases as well.

Hints for further research

In the light of the six limitations above, a few hints can be suggested for further research into the accountability and transparency profile of water concessions, particularly for the context of Central and Eastern Europe:

- Specific case studies, complemented by interviews and by an analysis of the concession contracts, could shed light on the reasons behind the limited efforts of most actors in disclosing the details of the partnerships under review.
- On a case by case basis, if information is disclosed about the specific terms of the several partnership agreements, insights could be gained on the channels for internal accountability. This way, the allocation of responsibilities and settlement fora would be made explicit and allow for a legal analysis of non-compliance issues.
- Participatory approaches could explore the responsiveness of the affected community to the developments within the partnership and better qualify (if not quantify) the relevance of reputation issues as a form of sanction. Moreover, better insights could be gained on the extent and relevance of several different channels for information disclosure.
- Again, a case by case study could further deepen the effective role of IFIs within the partnership scheme and assess the appropriateness of their performance in terms of transparency.
- The concept of accountability of actors could be further investigated through the conceptualisation by Turnovec (1999): secondary ownership ties could be explored, thereby gaining insights on potential enforcement gaps for the cases where liability / legal accountability issues might arise.

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On-Line Resources

- CSD Database
<http://webapps01.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/welcome.do>
- European Commission - Regional Policy
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/pppguide.htm
- OECD
<http://www.oecd.org/>
- PSIRU – Public Services International Research Unit
<http://www.psiru.org>
- TNI.org
<http://www.tni.org/books/publicwater.htm>
- UN about WSSD
http://www.un.org/jsummit/html/basic_info/faqs.html
- WaterTime
<http://www.watertime.net/>