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Water use in electricity generation for water-energy nexus analyses: The European case

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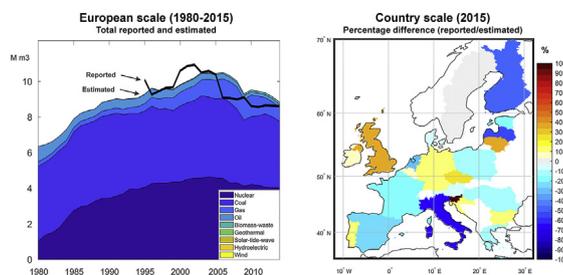
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HIGHLIGHTS

- Electricity plant water withdrawals are estimated using a comprehensive analysis.
- Estimates resemble reported levels on spatio-temporal scales of country/year.
- The results support perspectives in larger scale water-energy nexus management.
- More open source, freely available and detailed data are however urged.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



The water withdrawal used for cooling of electricity generation plants has been estimated. The results show a resemblance of both historically reported data on a European scale (1980-2015) as well as on a country scale (2015).

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ABSTRACT

With almost 40% of the global population suffering from water scarcity, the need to manage water resources is evidently urgent. While water and energy systems are intrinsically linked, the availability of comprehensive, integrated data sets across the domains of water and energy is generally lacking. As a result, estimated indicators representing volumes of water usage per unit of electricity or fuel produced are often required to analyse the water-energy nexus. In this paper, an “ensemble” of indicators is assembled representing water usage spanning different electricity-generation technologies based on previously published works in an attempt to depict the level or lack of detail in current large-scale energy-sector water-usage data. Based on these, the degree in which using such estimates is suitable for reproducing electricity-production water-usage at coarser spatio-temporal scales is assessed. The performance of the ensemble median/min/max as a predictor of water use is evaluated for the period from 1980 to 2015 using additional information about the constituents of the European energy system. Comparing with the reported values for 1980–2015, the median provides a skillful reproduction of historical yearly water use for the EU (EU28) as a whole. A further analysis for 2015 indicates that reasonable agreement is also seen at the country level. Thus, the results suggest that an “ensemble-based approach” has the potential to provide sturdy estimates of yearly water use by energy systems for analyses at both the country and regional levels.

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1. Introduction

Water and energy systems are inextricably interdependent. The water sector is a major consumer of energy for purposes such as water treatment, pumping and desalination. Similarly, water is essential for

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cooling power plants, electricity generation and bio-fuel production, as well as in the extraction, mining, processing, refining and disposal of fossil-fuel residues. 44% of total global water withdrawals are used for energy production, a dominant share of which is cooling water in thermoelectric electricity generation (Collins et al., 2009). Energy and water are both limited resources that are essential for the fundamental services, including food production, required by a rapidly growing global population that is projected to reach 9.7 billion in 2050 (United Nations, 2017). As a result, it is increasingly critical to manage the nexus between energy and water properly (Kurian, 2017) in the broader context of dependent socio-economic sectors, including the wider water–energy–food nexus (Griggs et al., 2013; Howells and Rogner, 2014; United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Moreover, proper water–energy management is especially crucial in light of the fact that electricity and fuel production relies on an estimated 90% of non-sustainable water sources (WWAP, 2014), as well as the increasing demands for water, energy and food driven by, among others, the growth in population and economies (Hoekstra et al., 2012).

Over the last decade or so, analyzing issues within or related to the water–energy nexus has become increasingly important for both the scientific and policy-making communities (Dai et al., 2018; Miralles-Wilhelm, 2016). Likewise, the capacity to assess water and energy interlinkages at an increasingly higher resolution has also improved accordingly. Analyses of the water–energy nexus span a broad range of spatial levels, from the local (e.g. plant or city) (Chen and Chen, 2016) to the regional or national (Kibaroglu and Gürsoy, 2015; Mayor et al., 2015). Meanwhile temporalities range from multi-decadal (including climate change) (Mekonnen et al., 2016; Voisin et al., 2013) down to days or hours (or even lower) for operational applications (Castronuovo and Lopes, 2004).

A comprehensive review of methods and tools for macro-assessments of the water–energy nexus has recently been carried out by (Dai et al., 2018). From this analysis it is evident that, while a wide range of new methods and frameworks for comprehensively assessing interactions between water, energy and other elements have been developed, in general the availability of tools for nexus analyses that are at the same time integrative and multi-level is still poor (Daher and Mohtar, 2015; Howells et al., 2013). Instead, methodologies used for analyzing the water–energy nexus tend to be characterized by specific levels and data requirements (Liu et al., 2017), ranging from purely qualitative assessments to highly data-intensive model-based approaches (Granit et al., 2013). The review also found that none of the studies and methods considered provide a 'singular framework' for performing nexus studies.

The challenges of data availability at relevant spatio-temporal levels for analyzing the water–energy nexus, for example, on water use by energy systems and vice versa, is well documented (Chini and Stillwell, 2017; IRENA, 2015; Larsen et al., 2016). While in general water and energy systems can be considered to be well-monitored and managed (developing countries excluded), the availability of integrated data sets covering both domains is often severely limited at the relevant levels of aggregation in relation to nexus calculations, that is, beyond the site-specific level. Further, such data may be incomplete and inconsistent due, for example, to differences in the inherent conditions for the collection of data on water use by the energy sector between countries and regions, which can constrain the applicability and comparability of estimated water uses. For example, records from the US, while otherwise of good quality, have significant gaps concerning water-intensive energy technologies like nuclear (Macknick et al., 2012). Conversely, dependencies between water and energy systems, that is, water consumption or withdrawals related to specific energy technologies, may be expressed in terms of representative volumes of water use per unit (e.g. L/MWh) of electricity or fuel produced (Basheer and Elagib, 2018; Gleick, 1994; Inhaber, 2004; Macknick et al., 2012). This approach introduces a significant source of uncertainty arising from the (lack of) accuracy, but it also enables quantitative nexus calculations to be

made at different levels and is frequently used by integrated assessment models.

In light of the poor data on water usage within the energy sector, as highlighted above, this paper addresses the extent to which reported estimates of water usage in electricity production provide an accurate 'bridge' when modelling the interdependencies between water and energy systems. Thus, many initiatives, like the Platform for Regional Integrated Modelling and Analysis (PRIMA) (Kraucunas et al., 2015), as well as the ETSAP-TIAM community (Føyn et al., 2011), aim at developing flexible multi-scale tools for analyzing the water–energy nexus in order to satisfy users' increasing demands by linking existing model components with new ones that use such an approach. In this context, the present study may be seen as an attempt to identify and validate a suitable set of parameters. To estimate water usage, multiple literature estimates of water withdrawal and consumption rates for electricity production technologies are collected in conjunction with the distribution of individual power plants and their corresponding technologies in order to calculate the country-level EU28 yearly water usages for 1980–2015, followed by a validation against reported numbers (Eurostat, 2018). The analysis is relevant because it highlights the best possible estimates of water usage within electricity production at coarser scales using freely available sources, albeit at coarse spatio-temporal resolutions (country/yearly). Thus, despite a certain resemblance between estimates and reported values, the paper also aims to show that the currently available data on energy-sector water usage is very inadequate, not least, in their detail and availability. Despite the current focus on providing open-access environmental data of increasing quality, data on the water–energy nexus are still limited in their availability. One aim of this paper is therefore to convey this information to users mainly in the academic community but also to politicians in light of the current tendency towards more open and available data.

2. Data and methodology

In this study, withdrawals of water are defined as the total amount of water that is extracted or diverted from its groundwater or surface water source and used during electricity-generation operations (as opposed to, e.g., including the construction phase), including the return flow. Thus, the cooling water addressed in this paper is freshwater only. Water consumption is similarly defined as the net balance, including only evaporated and transpired water, as well as water stored in crops and/or other products. Both terms (withdrawals and consumption) are jointly referred to as 'water usage'. Using this definition water consumption becomes a subset of water withdrawals.

The term 'median', as used in this study, is the most commonly used term in the recent literature (Davies et al., 2013; Macknick et al., 2012). It can therefore to some extent be regarded as the standard metric. However, some literature uses the term 'average' (Mielke et al., 2010; NETL, 2010), whereas other, typically older literature sources simply give a representative value (Gleick, 1994; Inhaber, 2004). Furthermore, many studies build upon each other by re-issuing the findings of older studies. However, for any literature sources where the median estimate is based the middle value in between the reported minimum and maximum spans, this may introduce a certain bias towards underestimation, as argued by (Macknick et al., 2012). The span of the entire range is addressed by employing the minimum and maximum estimates. Correspondingly, the estimated mean and min/max ranges cannot be asserted to be 'robust' from a strictly statistical perspective (e.g., as quantified by t-procedures).

2.1. Data

The data used in this study can be grouped into three main categories depending on their nature and how they are used. 1) The first category covers data on the water withdrawal and consumption rates of electricity production as a function of the energy source and cooling

Table 1
Literature sources for the estimates of water usage per unit of energy produced, an indication of the available information per relevant energy source, and the number of total occurrences in the literature of the median/minimum/maximum levels for withdrawals and consumption. The literature is sorted chronologically within the categories of peer-reviewed and grey literature respectively. 'CSP' denotes concentrated solar power, and PV denotes photovoltaic solar technology.

Energy source/Reference	(Gleick, 1994)	(Inhaber, 2004)	(Mielke et al., 2010)	(Macknick et al., 2012)	(Davies et al., 2013)	(Sanders et al., 2014)	(Spang et al., 2014)	(Byers et al., 2015)	(Zhang et al., 2016)	(U.S. Dept. of Energy, 2006)	(EPRI, 2008)	(Clark et al., 2010)
Coal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Gas	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Oil	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nuclear	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Biopower	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
CSP	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Solar PV	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Wind	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Geothermal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Hydro	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ocean	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Table 1 (continued)

Energy source/Reference	(NETL, 2010)	(Averyt et al., 2011)	(Kohli and Frenken, 2011)	(IEA, 2012)	(WWAP, 2014)	(Clark et al., 2015)	(NREL, 2015)	Withdrawals		Consumption	
								Median	Min–/max.	Median	Min–/max.
Coal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12	10	12	11
Gas	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12	10	12	11
Oil	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7	6	7	6
Nuclear	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11	10	11	11
Biopower	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	7	6	7	7
CSP	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8	9	8	10
Solar PV	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6	7	6	8
Wind	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6	7	7	7
Geothermal	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6	6	7	7
Hydro	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	2	1	3	1
Ocean	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1	0	1	0

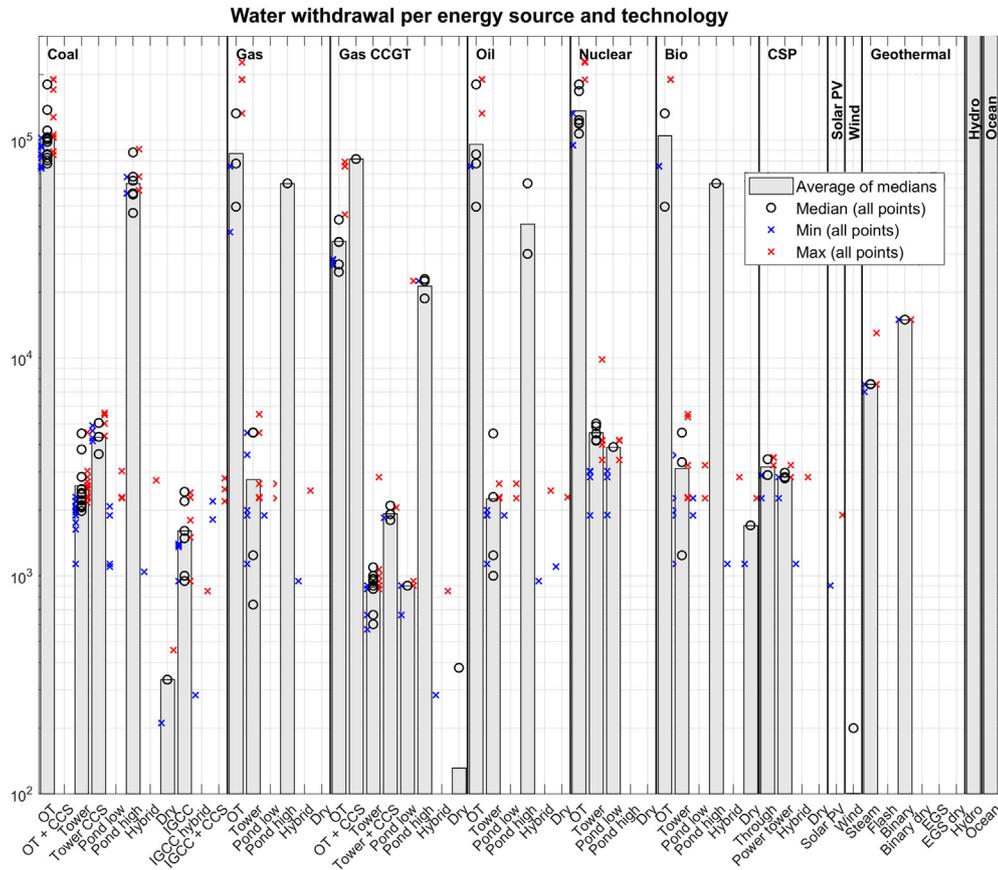


Fig. 1. All median, min, max (markers) and average of medians (bars) water withdrawal rates (L/MWh) for each energy source and cooling technologies combination (as visible within the Y-axis limits). ‘CCGT’ denotes combined cycle gas plants, ‘OT’ denotes once-through, ‘CSP’ denotes concentrated solar power and ‘EGS’ denotes Enhanced geothermal system.

technology in question. The sources for these data are listed in Table 1. II) The second category covers data on individual electricity-generation plants which are used to estimate country-specific electricity generation per energy source, cooling technology and water source (fresh/saline). These data derive from (Enipedia, 2018; Global Energy Observatory, 2018; Shift Project Data Portal, 2018). These databases aim to include up-to-date information on individual power plants, although the present study necessitated substantial further online research to confirm whether or not, for example, plants were active or the type of cooling technology. III) The third category covers actual reported surface and groundwater withdrawals (both freshwater) used for cooling electricity generation plants, data being derived from (Eurostat, 2018). Annual data for the EU are available from 1970 to 2015. However, for earlier years there are an increasing number of data gaps on reported freshwater withdrawals. 1980 is therefore used as a starting point. For data gaps which are still present after 1980, linear interpolation has been used to fill the gaps, since this is the most conservative method and since a method aiming to reproduce patterns from neighbouring countries was considered too arbitrary for the short periods which needed gaps to be filled (a few years).

2.2. Estimated water use by energy source and technology

The estimated water usage related to specific energy technologies found, for example, in the scientific literature exhibit great local variations across natural, geographical, technological, hydro-climatic conditions and differences in definitions. Table 1 gives a list of previous studies within the categories of both peer-reviewed and ‘grey’ (report-style) literature as identified by the authors, who have estimated

water usage by different energy technologies. While the list is comprehensive, it is by no means complete. Figs. 1 and 2 give all individual withdrawal and consumption factor estimates (median, min and max levels) respectively from the listed studies (markers) as well as their average value (bars) and Appendices A and B give the corresponding median values in table form. In general, the levels were found to be reasonably similar across literature sources, particularly for the median values, which also form the basis of the present study. The definitions in depicting water usage vary across literature, which is often not elaborated but instead visible from the numbers themselves or from the categories used. As an example, some sources group water usages across technologies, making the ranges appear exceptionally broad. All such cases are omitted in order to reflect only actual combinations of energy source and cooling technology. Another example includes pond cooling where the levels vary substantially which is believed to be related to definitions (using either the total withdrawn amount or only make-up water). In the present study, this is accounted for by dividing these definitions into two separate shares. It is further highlighted that data points in Figs. 1 and 2 may appear directly on top of each other having the same or corresponding values.

2.3. Reconstruction of water use by energy plants in Europe

To evaluate the performance of water-usage levels derived from the literature review, the water used by European energy systems is estimated. To do this, information on the share of different (a) energy sources and (b) cooling technologies (national), (c) the source of the water body used in nexus calculations (i.e. sea- or freshwater), principal cooling technologies related to energy source and country, and the

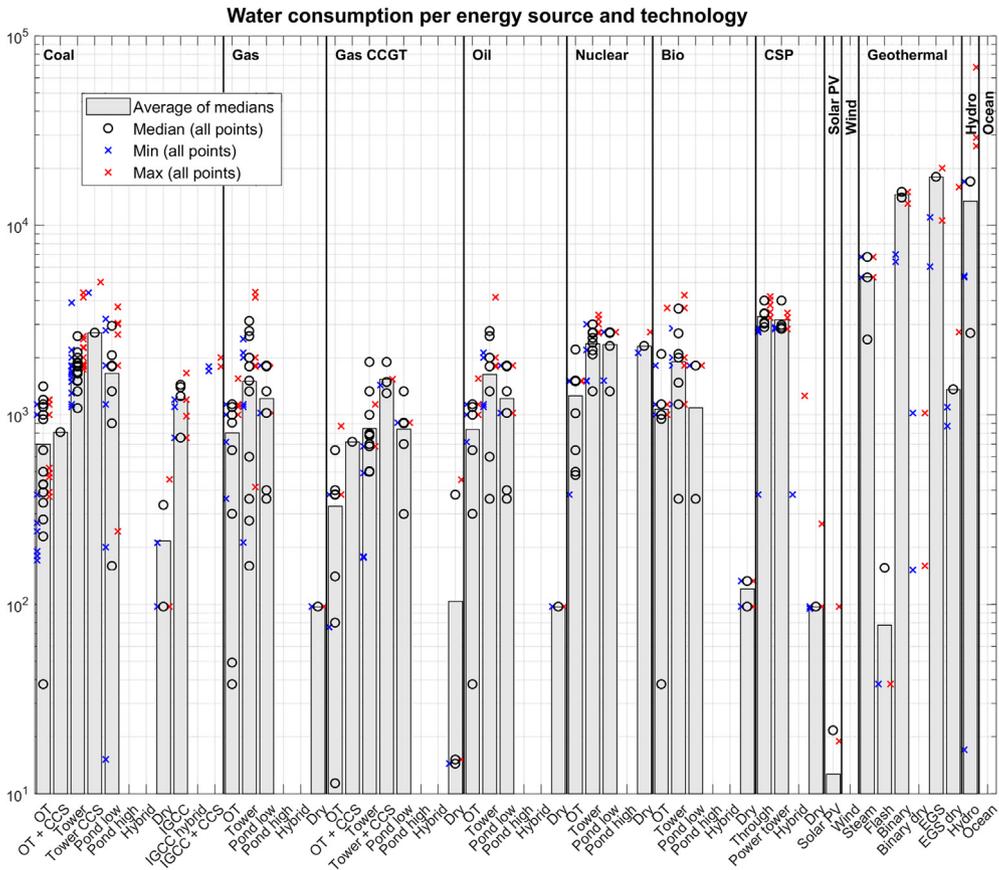


Fig. 2. Similar to Fig. 1, except for depicting water consumption rates.

electricity generated for each of the EU28 countries is collected. Only open-source data were used (see below). Based on this information, the amount of electricity plant cooling water is estimated. Hereafter

this estimate of electricity plant cooling water will be referred to as EW ('estimated withdrawals'). Finally, the results are compared with the actual reported freshwater withdrawals available through Eurostat.

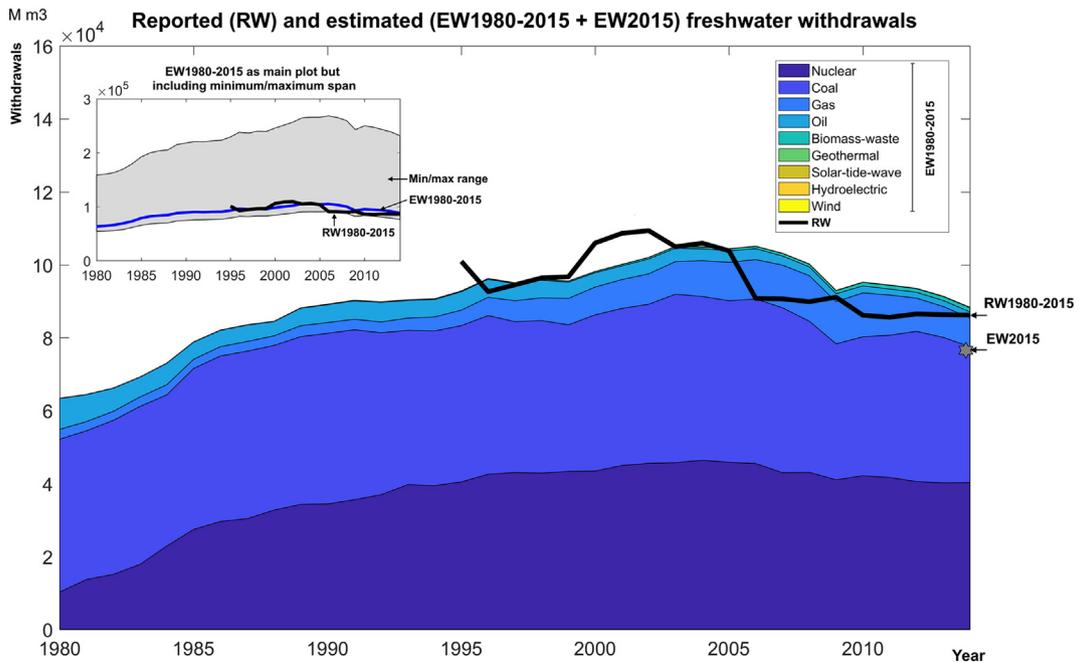


Fig. 3. Main figure: reported (RW) and estimated freshwater withdrawals per energy source (EW1980–2015) (as well as the sum of estimated freshwater withdrawals per country (EW2015) (arrow)). Insert: EW1980–2015 calculated based on minimum and maximum water-usage levels for each energy source, cooling technology and RW.

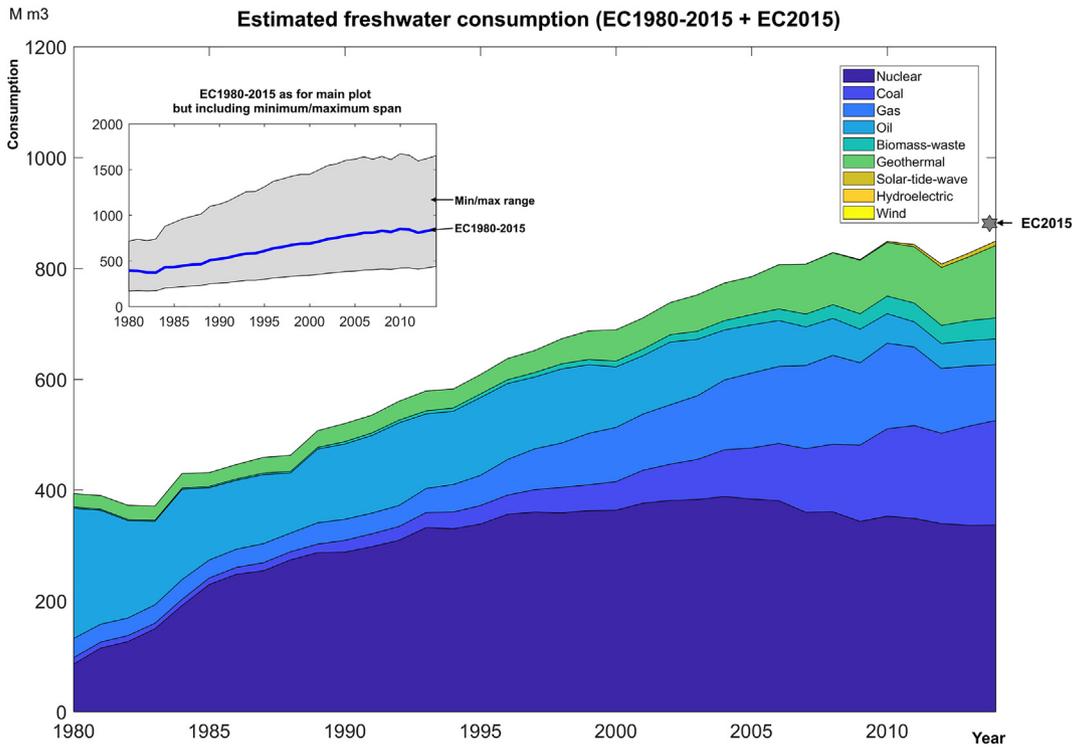


Fig. 4. Main figure: estimated freshwater consumption (EC1980–2015) per energy source and the sum of estimated freshwater consumption per country (EC2015) (arrow). Energy sources correspond to legend in Fig. 3. Insert: EC1980–2015 calculated based on minimum and maximum water usage levels for each energy source and cooling technology.

plants are all located in Spain, constitute 97% of the total EU28 capacity, and all employ parabolic trough technology.

In the Baltic States a high level of mismatch between the databases was found, necessitating correction. One example is the absence of the gas–oil-based Elektrenai power plant in Lithuania from the Enipedia database, even though it accounts for a dominant share of electricity generation in the country. Another example is the 84% use of coal

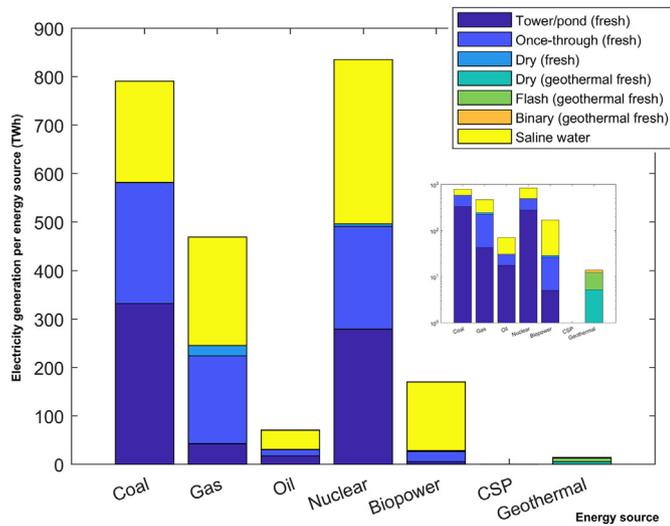


Fig. 5. Electricity generation per energy source (Eurostat, 2018), freshwater shares per energy source and corresponding cooling technologies for these freshwater shares. The ‘insert’ plot corresponds to the main plot but uses a log-scale y-axis for improved reproduction of low-generation energy sources such as CSP.

declared for Estonian electricity generation at the Shift Project data portal, although no plants are listed either in Enipedia or by the Global Energy Observatory. Detailed data on the Czech Republic’s electricity systems, including information on plants and cooling technology, were obtained from (Ansoorge et al., 2016). For Greece, a lowered median water withdrawal rate of 2220 L/MWh was used compared to the 3238 L/MWh used for other countries (see references in Table 1 and values in Fig. 1 and Appendix A), as described in (Fernández-Blanco et al., 2017). For the Netherlands, the differences between RW and EW could be caused by differing definitions, since only 11 out of 32 gas plants (34% of generated electricity) are clearly located inland at river locations or by the sea, whereas for coal plants the corresponding level is 5 out of 8 (40% of generated electricity) (Global Energy Observatory, 2018). As the remaining parts are located close to the outlets of rivers or within estuaries, inconsistencies between the use of either the ‘freshwater’ or the ‘sea’ category could arise between databases. Similarly, the Borssele nuclear plant is located close to the Schelde River outlet but is listed as having freshwater cooling. Therefore, for the Netherlands, the estuary/downstream locations were defined as freshwater plants, since this was seen as the only plausible explanation for the high RW, although it is still not matched by EW using this definition. For Sweden, no coal power is listed by the Global Energy Observatory (Global Energy Observatory, 2018), whereas it is listed in Enipedia (Enipedia, 2018) and the Shift Project Data Portal (Shift Project Data Portal, 2018). This might be due to the interchangeable energy source for the Västäräs power plant, the only coal-fired electricity plant in Sweden.

3. Results

In the following the results of reconstructing levels of the withdrawal and consumption of freshwater from the energy sector in EU28 are compared with reported withdrawal data from Eurostat

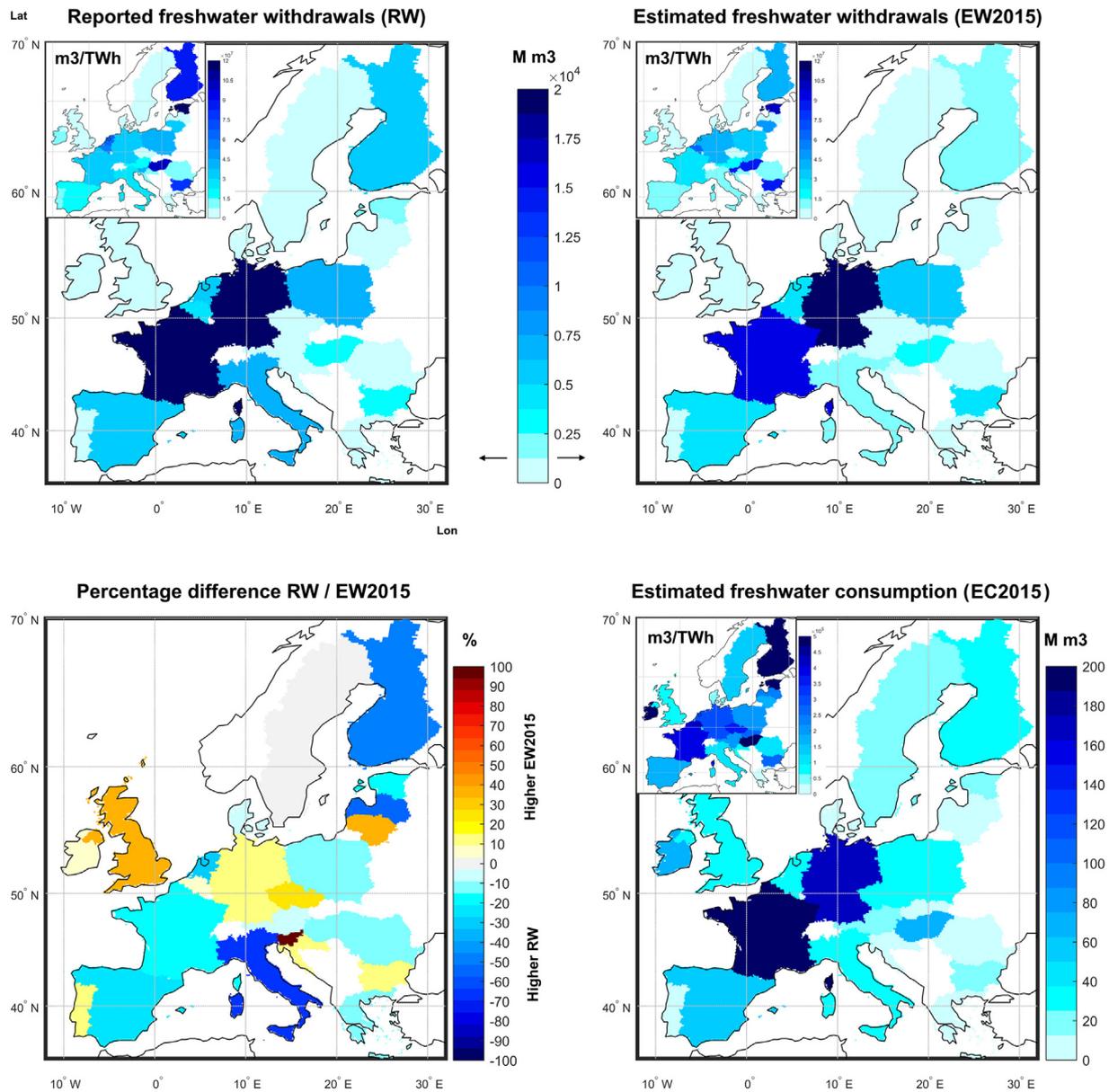


Fig. 6. Freshwater withdrawals (EW and RW) and consumption (EC) for EU28 countries. *Top left:* reported freshwater withdrawals (RW2015). *Top right:* estimated freshwater withdrawals (EW2015). *Bottom left:* difference between RW2015 and EW2015 (%). *Bottom right:* estimated freshwater consumption (EC2015). Inserts show levels from the main plots but per generated electricity amounts. Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovakia have no reported water withdrawals (white colour).

(Eurostat, 2018). As discussed above power plants and their associated energy production (in TWh) in Europe, based on the available EU28 level information for the period from 1980 to 2015, are initially characterized, followed by estimates of corresponding water usages using the median, minimum and maximum factors from Figs. 1 and 2 (EW1980–2015 and EC1980–2015). For 2015, for which more detailed information is available, an improved country-level analysis is carried out (EW2015 and EC2015).

Figs. 1 and 2 depict all the 896 median, min and max data points on electricity production water withdrawal and consumption which have been extracted in literature as a basis for this study (although a few are not visible within the selected Y-axis limits). See also Appendices A and B. A total of 56 technologies are listed based on eleven energy sources (gas is separated between non-CCGT and CCGT for better visual overview). The span in levels from literature varies depending on energy source and technology but there is a tendency for the dominant combinations such as coal, gas and nuclear using tower and once-

through cooling (see also Figs. 3 and 4) to have more consistent estimates. A tendency for the withdrawal estimates to be more similar than the corresponding consumption estimates is also seen. A reasonable level of agreement between RW and EW is seen (Fig. 3) using the median factors at the aggregated spatio-temporal levels used here. It is evident that conventional energy sources such as nuclear, coal and gas, which require excessive amounts of cooling water, clearly dominate the picture, whereas renewable (and less water-intensive) energy sources are essentially negligible. Results based on the more detailed country-level plant data from 2015 (indicated by a star), on the other hand, seems to slightly underestimate actual water use by the total European energy system. Furthermore, it is evident that the span between the minimum and maximum estimates is substantial (Fig. 3; insert).

In the case of EC (Fig. 4), select renewables such as geothermal and biomass are found to play a significant role here compared to RW/EW, and EC2015 is estimated at a higher level than EC1980–2015. As seen

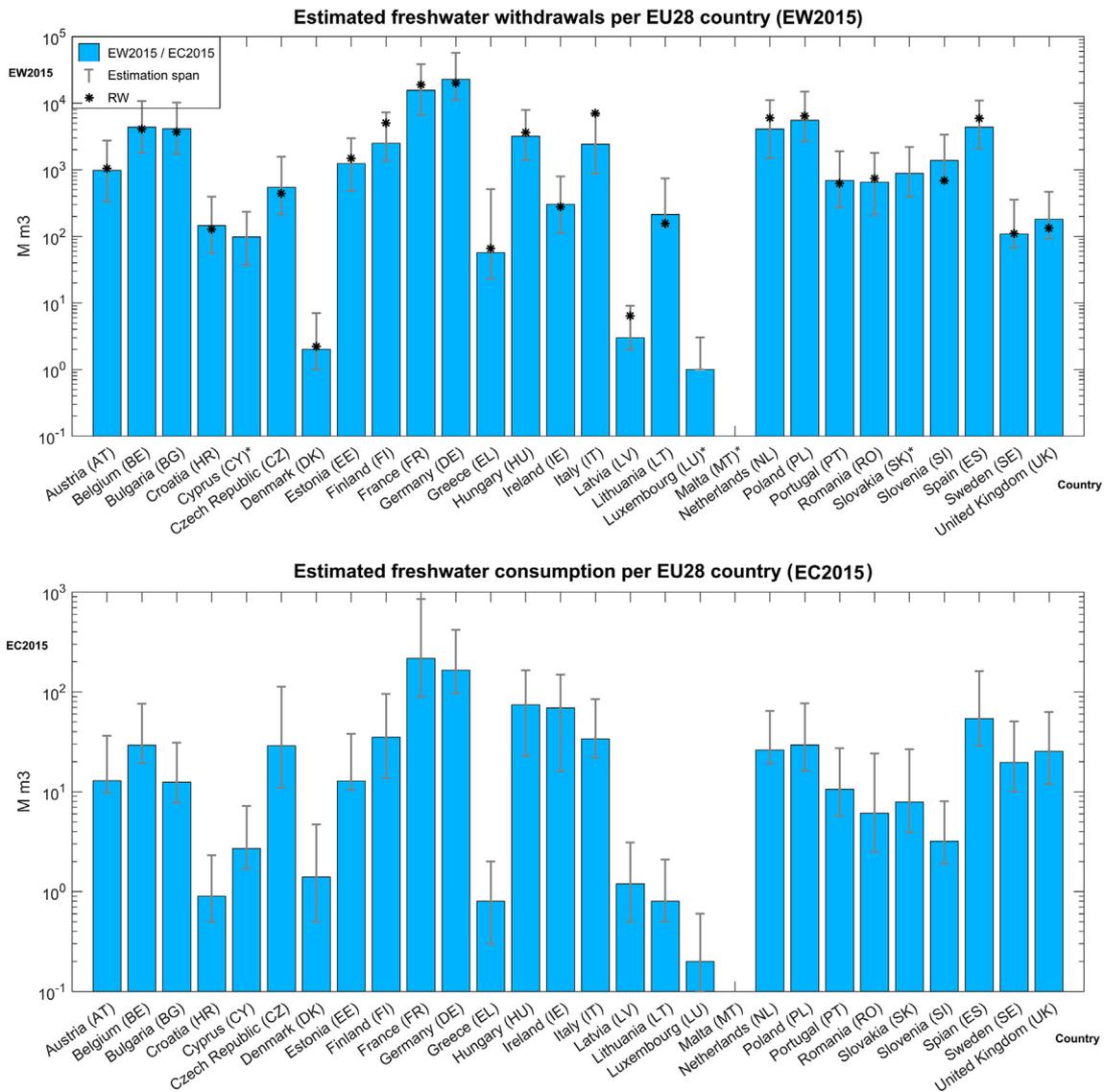


Fig. 7. Estimated and reported freshwater withdrawals, as well as estimated freshwater consumption with ranges based on minimum and maximum water-usage levels for each energy source and cooling technology. Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovakia have no reported water withdrawals (marked with asterisk).

in the insert (Fig. 4), a large span is seen between the maximum and minimum values. As compared to Fig. 3, in this case it is difficult to assert the validity of the median estimates since no figures are reported for validation in the literature.

Fig. 5 summarizes analysis step 'd' above by providing an overview of the estimated division of cooling technologies within each energy source (sources with negligible water use are omitted) and the corresponding water source, that is, freshwater or saline water, for EU28. Despite a higher total level, the generation of electricity from nuclear sources (830 TWh) shows lower water-consumption figures than electricity generation from coal sources (791 TWh). This is related to the division of energy sources in between countries and their access to cooling water. For example, Germany produces a large share of its electricity based on coal as an energy source in inland locations. From the figure it is also clear that renewable technologies employ negligible amounts of water, though this omits biofuel production or evapotranspiration from hydropower reservoirs.

Fig. 6 compares country-level estimated withdrawals (EW2015, top right) and estimated consumption levels (EC2015, bottom right) respectively with the reported values (RW2015, top left) based on the

more detailed country-level analysis for 2015. From RW2015 it is clear that energy systems in Central Europe, in particular in France and Germany, are particularly water-intensive with regard to total volumes of water compared to the rest of EU28. This pattern is less significant when correcting for the electricity produced (insert, top left), where instead Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary and the Netherlands stand out. Furthermore, it is seen that the estimated water withdrawals for Europe generate country-level 'patterns' that resemble those of RW (see also Fig. 7). In general, RW is found to exceed RW2015 for most countries (bottom left) with some notable exceptions like Germany, Lithuania and the United Kingdom, although the latter's deviation is likely to be related to low absolute withdrawal levels due to a high degree of seawater cooling. Slovenia also stands out (approx 100% overestimate). This is likely to be related to the single nuclear plant in Slovenia, which uses approximately 74% of all national cooling water according to the calculations (EW). Therefore the RW/EW difference may be related to differences between the median values, given the conditions of this single plant. In Finland, most of the larger electricity plants are located along the coastline while still having a freshwater use (RW) of approximately 5000 M m³. While most biomass plants in Finland are

located inland, adding to the country's freshwater use, a high relative difference of approximately 50% is still seen. For Italy, little attention has been given to investigating the reasons for the large spread between RW and EW, since the latest RW reporting dates from 1980, rendering any attempts at validation futile (the 1980 level is used throughout the period).

Fig. 7 shows the water usage results for EW2015 (top panel) and EC2015 (bottom panel) for each country using the median, minimum and maximum levels. For EW2015, the results are shown in conjunction with RW2015 to enable their validation by country. Assuming this to be a first-order estimate of the 'true' associated uncertainty, the estimates (EC2015) approximate well to the corresponding reported values (RW2015), and all estimates are within the illustrated range associated with the country-level estimates except in the case of Malta, where information on local energy sources is lacking.

4. Discussion

As shown above, the estimates of water withdrawal rates compare reasonably well with the independent validation data from Eurostat and with the spatiotemporal scales assessed here, both in reproducing key aspects of the time series data from 1980 to 2015 and in representing the variability in water use for energy by country. Below the implications of the analysis presented here are discussed alongside recommendations for the direction of future data provision within the water–energy nexus.

To achieve the above-mentioned results an 'ensemble' of water-usage factors from a range of studies (cf. Table 1) was initially considered. While the authors by no means consider this factor set to be exhaustive, in each of the studies reviewed the estimated water uses (withdrawal and/or consumption) by different energy (cooling) technologies were inferred from local investigations. There was a tendency for them to originate in the USA in particular, possibly due to commercial interests resulting in data not being directly obtainable (Rothausen and Conway, 2011). One example of openly available data originating from the US is (Maupin et al., 2014), which contains very detailed information over time on, for example, water withdrawals per source (surface/groundwater) and per sector (industry, agriculture, housing), with numerous subcategories. As a result of the excessive data from the US, it might be expected that slight differences in local management practices and technology implementation between the US and Europe (and the rest of the world) might introduce a bias. A study by (Macknick et al., 2012), which also examines the water-usage data sources used in the present study, states that some median values are created based on the midpoint between the range endpoints, which may introduce an underestimation bias. Moreover, for some energy production and/or cooling technologies only a very few studies exist (cf. Table 1). In summary, these potential sources of uncertainty and biases imply a lack of complete statistical robustness with regard to the term 'median'. However, the median estimates in the studies considered here inherently agree well (results not shown), suggesting that the median factor seems to represent a fairly robust metric with which to represent yearly water usage on the larger European scale. Conversely, and not surprisingly, there is greater variability in the case of the minimum and maximum factor values (e.g. as illustrated by the inserts in Figs. 3 and 4), which are used here to represent the uncertainty associated with the factor estimates.

Another source of uncertainty is the assumption that the low-generation plants have the same technology/water source characteristics as the top 75% of electricity plants (calculated on the basis of electricity generation; see above). Smaller plants tend to have the oldest technologies (i.e. once-through cooling) using more water per unit of electricity generated (as seen in the databases listed above and in (U.S. Dept. of Energy, 2006)), which would imply a negative bias in respect of the estimates of water withdrawals. Here this bias is regarded as largely negligible for EU28 based on the low extent of countries and energy sources where not all plants were assessed.

Mapping European energy production convincingly represents another considerable source of uncertainty. In this study information

from several sources is combined to represent energy production and dominant technologies across EU28, as well as to detect and account for obvious gaps or flaws in the underlying data sets. The availability of accurate information in this regard is clearly critical for the results, as this might otherwise lead to erroneous results and/or introduce significant biases in estimated water usages. That said, even for the relatively data-sparse case of modelling water use by energy sources for EU28 between 1980 and 2015, a decent level of agreement with the validation data was found (e.g. Figs. 3 and 7).

A key motivation for conducting the present study estimating water usage in electricity production is the lack of data available to analyse the water–energy nexus properly in quantitative terms, as also highlighted by (Chini and Stillwell, 2017; Larsen et al., 2016). Optimally, such data should be freely available, have wide (global) coverage, have a high temporal resolution, have detailed information on a single plant level, as well as with regard to water (source/sink), have shared and user-friendly formats, be collected using the same conventions, be forced by the same conditions (e.g. for future scenarios) and be congregated in a single database for easy acquisition. Taken together these suggestions are fundamentally out of reach for the near future for reasons of policy (Scott et al., 2011), coordination, financing and commercial interests (Goldstein et al., 2008). However, every step in this direction would improve the possibilities and range of the analytical steps and assumptions needed for most nexus analyses and, in essence, facilitate the emergence of firmer conditions for studying the implications of anthropogenic energy-related activities and water-management perspectives, as (Hussey and Pittock, 2012) also conclude.

By embedding the assembled median water-usage estimates within energy-system models such as TIMES (Simoes et al., 2013) or OSeMOSYS (Howells et al., 2011), the water-requirement impacts could be dynamically simulated and used to investigate a range of water management- and policy-related issues more reliably. In the context of the water–energy nexus, another potential issue to investigate is the impact of introducing more renewable energy technologies into the energy grid and/or add water shortages and related market demands.

5. Conclusions

This paper has investigated the extent to which estimates of an ensemble of factor sets representing volumes of water use per unit of electricity produced by different energy sources, in conjunction with a comprehensive review of the individual cooling technologies and water sources for individual electricity plants, provide an adequate predictor of water withdrawal and consumption levels generation by energy production. Based on validation data, the factor set estimates are found to generate a skilful reproduction of reported withdrawals on the coarse scales assessed here, which, on a yearly basis, include historical levels for EU28 (1980–2015) and individual country levels (2015). In the present demonstration, country-level information was extracted from a number of databases, some of which were found to be ambiguous, inadequate and/or contradictory. To support quantitative studies of the water–energy nexus at different levels and thus facilitate the improved management of water resources, the authors therefore recommend sustained and coordinated efforts towards improving the availability of data linking observations and projections of, for example, energy and water systems at relevant spatio-temporal levels using common scenarios (including climate change) and assumptions.

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Appendix A Median water withdrawals. Table form of median values in Fig. 1. Literature sources with several values are numbered accordingly.

Water withdrawal per literature source/energy source/technology (L/MWh)		Inhaber, 2004	Macknick et al., 2012 (1)	Macknick et al., 2012 (2)	Macknick et al., 2012 (3)	Davies et al. (2013) (1)	Davies et al. (2013) (2)	Davies et al. (2013) (3)	Davies et al. (2013) (4)	Davies et al. (2013) (5)	Davies et al. (2013) (6)	Davies et al. (2013) (7)
Coal	OT	78,000	137,600	102,539	85,512			180,000				
	OT + CCS											
	Tower		3804	2222	2400			4500				
	Tower + CCS		5031	4342								
	Pond low											
	Pond high		46,277	67,812	56,955							
	Hybrid											
	Dry											
	IGCC		1488	2430					1000		2200	
	IGCC Hybrid											
IGCC with CCS												
Gas	OT	78,000	132,489									
	Tower		4554									
	Pond low											
	Pond high											
	Hybrid											
Gas CCGT	Dry											
	OT		43,078									
	OT + CCS											
	Tower		965				900			1000		
	Tower + CCS		1915							2100		
	Pond low						900					
	Pond high		22,523									
	Hybrid											
DRY		0										
Oil	OT	78,000						180,000				
	Tower							4500				
	Pond low											
	Pond high											
	Hybrid											
Nuclear	Dry											
	OT	107,000	167,883					180,000				
	Tower		4168					4500				
	Pond low											
	Pond high											
Biopower	Dry											
	OT		132,489									
	Tower		3324									
	Pond low											
	Pond high											
CSP	Hybrid		1703									
	Dry											
	Through		3430									2900
	Power tower		2975						2800			2800
Solar PV	Hybrid											
	Dry											
Wind	Solar PV	10										
	Wind	1										
Geothermal	Steam											
	Flash								7600			
	Binary											
	Binary dry					15,000						
	EGS											
Hydro	EGS dry											
	Hydro	1.E + 07										
Ocean	Ocean	4.E + 07										

(continued on next page)

Appendix B Median water consumption. Table form of median values in Fig. 2. Literature sources with several values are numbered accordingly.

	Water consumption per literature source/energy source/technology (L/MWh)	Gleick (1994)	Mielke et al. (2010)	Macknick et al., 2012 (1)	Macknick et al., 2012 (2)	Macknick et al., 2012 (3)	Davies et al. (2013) (1)	Davies et al. (2013) (2)	Davies et al. (2013) (3)	Davies et al. (2013) (4)	Davies et al. (2013) (5)	Davies et al. (2013) (6)	Davies et al. (2013) (7)	Davies et al. (2013) (8)
Coal	OT	1200	1136	946	428	390		1100		650	1100			
	OT + CCS													
	Tower	2600	1514	2601	1813	1866		1800		1330				
	Tower + CCS													
	Pond low			2063	2949	159		1800		1330	1800			
	Pond high													
	Hybrid													
	Dry													
	IGCC			1438									1400	
Gas	IGCC Hybrid													
	IGCC with CCS													
	OT	1100	1136	908				1100		650	1100			
	Tower	2600	1514	3127				1800		1330				
	Pond low							1800		1330	1800			
	Pond high													
Gas CCGT	Hybrid													
	Dry													
	OT		379	379				400		650	400			
	OT + CCS													
	Tower		681	776				700	1900	1330	700	1000	700	
	Tower + CCS			1488								1900	1300	
	Pond low			908				700		1330				
Oil	Pond high													
	Hybrid													
	Dry			8										
	OT	1100						1100		650	1100			
	Tower	2600						1800		1330				
	Pond low							1800		1330	1800			
Nuclear	Pond high													
	Hybrid													
	Dry													
	OT		1514	1018				1500		650	1500			
	Tower		2082	2544				2700		1330				
	Pond low							2700		1330	2700			
Biopower	Pond high													
	Dry			2309										
	OT		1136	1136										
	Tower		1476	2093										
	Pond low													
	Pond high													
CSP	Hybrid													
	Dry													
	Through Power tower	4000	3028	3430										2900
	Hybrid			2975			4000							2900
Solar PV	Dry													
	Solar PV			4										
Wind	Wind													
	Wind													
Geothermal	Steam	6800	2498	6800										
	Flash			0										
	Binary			14,000			15,000							
	Binary dry													
	EGS			18,000										
	EGS dry													
Hydro	Hydro	17,000	17,034	17,000			2700							
Ocean	Ocean													

(continued on next page)

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