

The Re-contextualisation of Climate Change in Activist Discourse. Counter-narratives and Temporalities in the Web-Documentary *Seat at the Table*

Abstract: Activists and NGOs have increasingly used digital platforms to communicate alternative views of climate change science, while concurrently adopting discursive and rhetorical strategies to increase support and promote action. Based on such premises, the web documentary *Seat at the Table* (2021) recontextualises climate science to inform and persuade laypeople. Yet, it presents an alternative genre for the popularisation of climate-change scientific knowledge. Drawing on Corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis and the Appraisal Framework, the study investigates the re-contextualisation of activists' social practices in web documentaries to provide a space for the analysis of dominant and non-dominant discourses of climate change. Hence, it investigates how climate change is discursively represented and appraised by activists and the so-called “unheard voices” of climate change.

Keywords: *climate change, activist discourse, counter-narratives, new media, web-documentary*

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, scientists provided scientific evidence of the anthropogenic causes of climate change, which is often described and perceived differently by laypeople who consider it an abstract issue and future-oriented risk.¹ Yet, the advent of the Internet has provided several opportunities for the popularisation of climate science.² The latter is characterised by recontextualization and involves a wider “range of actors and voices, which cause multiple communication challenges due to the high number of stakeholders, interests, opinions, and attitudes represented”.³

The investigation of climate change discourse in news media, broadcasting, microblogging and social media has found that the debate over climate change has been largely characterised by negative projections about the future such as catastrophic and apocalyptic scenarios.⁴

The present article investigates how NGOs and activists have used digital platforms to communicate their views of climate change while adopting discursive and rhetorical strategies to increase support and promote action. More specifically, it takes into consideration the response of NGPS and activists to policies and international negotiations to achieve climate change targets about the reduction of CO₂ emissions.⁵ It will focus on the response of NGOS and activists to the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (hereafter COP26) held in Glasgow in 2021 as it represented a pivotal opportunity

¹ Andrea Sabine Sedlaczek, “The Field-Specific Representation of Climate Change in Factual Television: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis” *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14.5 (2017), 480-496.

² Neyla Koteyko et al., “Climate Change Communication and the Internet: Challenges and Opportunities for Research” *Environmental Communication*, 9.2 (2015), 149-152.

³ Kjersti Fløttum, ed., *The Role of Language in the Climate Change Debate* (Taylor & Francis, 2017); Katherine E. Russo, “Speculations about the Future”, in Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio, Miguel-Ángel Benítez-Castro and Francesca De Cesare, eds., *Populist Discourse: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 190-206.

⁴ Cinzia Bevitori, “Values, Assumptions and Beliefs in British Newspaper Editorial Coverage of Climate Change” in Christopher Hart and Piotr Cap, eds., *Contemporary Critical Discourse Studies* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 603-626; Kjersti Fløttum et al., “Representations of the Future in English Language Blogs on Climate Change”, *Global Environmental Change*, 29 (2014); Katherine E. Russo, “Speculations about the Future”.

⁵ Peter Weingart et al., “Risks of Communication: Discourses on Climate Change in Science, Politics, and the Mass Media”, *Public Understanding of Science*, 9.3 (2000), 261-283.

for the implementation of the Paris Agreement (2015) and the commitment to supporting developing countries and vulnerable communities in adapting to climate change. It will do so by analysing the web documentary *Seat at the Table* by the climate activist and filmmaker Jack Harries (Studio Silverback, 2021). The latter was presented at COP26 in order to give a voice to under-represented subjects in the international climate debate, to inform and persuade governments and civil society.⁶ It argues that while documentaries do not represent an unfiltered record of 'reality', they may play an important role and may be considered a powerful genre for the popularisation of unconventional climate change science, due to the creation of images that offer a counter-narrative to widespread popularisations of scientific evidence in order to respond to the expectations of a different audience.⁷

The article is organised as follows: Section 2 provides the research background on climate activism and its role in the 26th Conference of Parties. In Section 3, the literature review on the recontextualisation of climate change in activist discourse in new media is outlined. Section 4 describes the materials and the methodology applied to this study, while section 5 discusses the major findings, focusing on the activist counter-narratives regarding climate change in the web documentary *Seat at the Table*. Finally, Section 6 lays out concluding remarks.

2. Research Background: COP26 and Climate Change Activism

Since the mid-1990s, climate change issues have gained a growing consensus among governments and institutions, resulting in the setting up of a decision-making body to monitor the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Moreover, since 1995, the debate over climate change has been addressed annually during the United Nations Climate Change Conferences to track the progress towards net-zero carbon targets. Accordingly, as a result of the endorsement of the Kyoto Protocol during COP3 in 1997, the ultimate task of Conferences of Parties resulted in the assessment of the measures implemented to reach the objectives of the Convention.

In 2021, COP26 aimed at bringing Parties together “to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change”.⁸ Over 190 Parties negotiated the completion of the Paris Agreement rulebook and jointly set the target to limit the average global temperature warming to 1.5 degrees. Further, the UK Presidency established four goals to be accomplished by the end of the Summit:

- Secure global net-zero by mid-century;
- Adapt to protect communities and natural habits;
- Mobilise finance to support developing countries in climate adaptation;
- Enhance cooperation between governments and civil society.

In order to reach the aforementioned goals, actions to tackle the climate crisis include the switch to electric vehicles and the use of renewables, the protection of ecosystems and the curtailing of deforestation through cooperation among institutions and civil society.⁹

Climate public campaigns have always significantly impacted policymaking and the legislation process. Since the 1980s, NGOs have started campaigning on environmental issues, gaining earnest exposure in the 2000s. In recent years, climate activism has seen the development of local and global

⁶ Maurizio Gotti, “Reformulation and Recontextualization in Popularization Discourse”, *Iberica*, 27 (2014).

⁷ Alexander Pollak, “Analyzing TV Documentaries”, in Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyżanowski, eds., *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 77-95.

⁸ UK Government and United Nations 2020, www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/cop26.

⁹ UK Government and United Nations 2020, COP26 Goals, www.ukcop26.org/cop26-goals/.

movements attracting different social actors who mobilised to manifest the inadequacy of policy actions and international negotiations on carbon emissions. It might be argued that the most effective practice of climate activism is to be found in the collective efforts of communities that hold “those with the power to make big differences to account – be it government or business”.¹⁰

In 2018, climate change activist movements acquired greater exposure, catching the attention of media and politicians. Namely, the young activist Greta Thunberg, named Time Magazine’s Person of the Year for 2019, started her solo school strikes to require climate action in Sweden. This represented a starting point for adults of Gen Z and Millennials to engage in climate change activism, as the most active generations addressing environmental issues online and offline. The reason for such a generational conceptualisation of climate change activism is based on the assumption that “environmental problems were widely thematized in terms of intergenerational consequences”.¹¹

In October 2021, the International Energy Agency released the World Energy Outlook, a complex document that provided guidance on climate negotiations during COP26, mainly regarding future energy use and greenhouse gas emissions scenarios. The annual publication illustrated three different future forecasts, encompassing several hypotheses and the possible evolutions:

1. The *Stated Policies Scenario* considers the decline of emissions in the electricity generation sector by 2050 and its increase in other sectors. In this scenario, energy and climate policies are close to being implemented. The result is a temperature increase of more than 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels by 2100;
2. The *Announced Pledges Scenario*, based on commitments announced ahead of COP26. This scenario is based on the hypothesis that if all the commitments turn into implemented policies, CO₂ emissions will decrease by 40% by 2050;
3. The *Net-Zero Emission Scenario*, which aims at reaching carbon neutrality by 2050 and limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees.¹²

COP26 represented a change of course in climate policy. Yet, notwithstanding the significant commitments delivered by world leaders, Greta Thunberg defined the Conference “The Festival of Greenwash” as none of the climate-established goals was fulfilled, and underrepresented groups had no relevant access to negotiations. COP26 did not provide a space to discuss climate injustice. Groups of activists, indigenous peoples and organisations mainly from the Global South participated in the Conference as observers and declared that it did not represent climate change reality. They were excluded from the decision-making process concerning the environmental crisis, whose aim was to outline the urgency of taking action to secure the protection of natural habitats and communities worst affected by climate change and how specific actions can ensure climate justice.

In this context, the web documentary *Seat at the Table* tried to represent the voices of marginalised social actors in COP26. The filmmaker Jack Harries interviewed laypeople on the frontline of the climate emergency (also referred to as *unheard voices*) to share the environmental stories behind the climate crisis and shed light on impacts and innovative solutions to climate change that could ensure survival for future generations. The work was released on YouTube ahead of COP26 and then shown during the Conference. By telling the stories of those who do not have a seat at the world leaders’ table, it asked them to consider vulnerable communities in the decision-making process as they are fundamental in the outcome of global climate negotiations.

¹⁰ Simon Goldhill and Georgie Fitzgibbon, “Climate Activism: Introduction”, *Journal of the British Academy*, 9.5 (2021), 1-5.

¹¹ Jonathan White, “Climate Change and the Generational Timescape”, *The Sociological Review*, 3 (2016).

¹² “COP26: Three Scenarios for the Future”, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (2021), www.ispionline.it.

3. The Representation of Climate Change and Activism in New Media

Nowadays, laypeople generally tend to seek information on the Internet and for this reason, user-generated contents on climate change have been disseminated through online media as they reach a broader audience through interactive tools. In recent decades, new media have played an increasingly prominent role in communicating climate change, representing laypeople's main source of information. Therefore, they are fertile grounds for scholarly research.

While previous studies have mainly focused on the role of 'traditional' means of communication¹³, there is a growing interest in new media due to their diversified practices of information disclosure regarding climate science, such as user-generated and interactive contents. Online platforms such as YouTube belong to the social media category of "content communities ... in which users can share audio and/or visual contents".¹⁴ They are a distribution channel with potential a viral impact worldwide. While mainstream television broadcasters are still major producers of audiovisual content, according to Statista, in 2016, more than 25% of lay users consumed videos on online platforms.

Even though they have a potential in communicating climate change and engaging audiences, documentary films and series have been scarcely investigated.¹⁵ Although it is often ignored, climate change activism has greatly increased in recent years in new media spheres. The latter provide a space for debate of scientific findings and bottom-up solutions denied by intergovernmental institutions. Yet, people's awareness and attitudes concerning environmental disputes are often shaped by mediated information, therefore they are extremely powerful.¹⁶ Yet, despite YouTube's popularity and the possibility of establishing online communities, climate change in online media is generally less considered compared to the attention it receives in mass media, including broadcast television and the news.¹⁷

The communication of climate change through the genre of online web documentary series represents a valid instance of recontextualisation as it provides laypeople accessibility to scientific knowledge originated in highly specialised contexts. The recontextualization of activist discourse in new media "implies a process of adaptation of popularization discourse to the appropriateness conditions of the new communicative events and to the constraints of the media employed, which have become quite varied in their nature and are often used in an integrated way".¹⁸ Indeed, through online web documentaries NGOs and activists may reach broader audiences more effectively, provide information and mobilise actions to tackle the climate crisis.¹⁹ Furthermore, the communication of climate change issues through online documentaries offers an opportunity to:

- Address scientific findings: NGOs and 'lay' social actors may access science in a form that is more accessible;

¹³ See for example Cinzia Bevitori, "Values, Assumptions and Beliefs in British Newspaper Editorial Coverage of Climate Change", *Contemporary Critical Discourse Studies* (2014), 603-625; Brigitte Nerlich, Richard Forsyth, and David Clarke, "Climate in the News: How Differences in Media Discourse between the US and UK Reflect National Priorities", *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, 6.1 (2012), 44-63; Katherine E. Russo, *The Evaluation of Risk in Institutional and Newspaper Discourse: The Case of Climate Change and Migration* (Napoli: Editoriale scientifica, 2018); Peter Weingart, Anita Engels, and Petra Pansegrau, "Risks of Communication: Discourses on Climate Change in Science, Politics, and the Mass Media", *Public Understanding of Science*, 9.3 (2000), 261-283.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ashley Bieniek-Tobasco et al., "Communicating Climate Change through Documentary Film: Imagery, Emotion, and Efficacy", *Climatic Change*, 154.1 (2019), 1-18.

¹⁶ Katherine E. Russo, "Speculations about the Future".

¹⁷ Alicia De Lara et al., "Online Video on Climate Change: A Comparison between Television and Web Formats", *JCOM: Journal of Science Communication*, 16.1 (2017), A04-32.

¹⁸ Gotti, *Reformulation and Recontextualization in Popularization Discourse*.

¹⁹ Bieniek-Tobasco et al., *Communicating Climate Change through Documentary Film*.

- Increase support to get funds and strengthen the sense of belonging among individuals in order to create a collective identity²⁰

Furthermore, while mainstream media systems are often claimed to oppress the voice of non-governmental institutions and individuals, the so-called ‘blogosphere’ and online media platforms, including YouTube, guarantee popular inclusion to marginalised social actors and provide climate activists access to mainstream media spheres. The downside may be that in the attempt to provide an unfiltered version of climate change reality user-generated contents also include extreme viewpoints that may alter scientific knowledge.²¹ Nevertheless, the widespread use of such popular online platforms contributes to articulating narratives promoting counter-hegemonic climate change discourses. In this light, Askanius and Uldam, in their study on mobilisation videos of protest events during COP15 released on YouTube, argued that online discourse on climate activism and interviews represent “a possibility to bypass mass media filters”, providing a space for the proliferation of activists and marginalised social actors’ practices of self-representation.²² The latter facilitates the construction of community-based communication and sense of belonging.

In the representation of climate change and activism in web documentaries on YouTube, social actors are considered “creators, communicators, and audiences of one another”²³ and greatly influence the online public sphere with regard to the communication of dominant and non-dominant notions of climate change. YouTube videos are intended to be remarkably dynamic products generating mediated social interactions.²⁴ Since they are released on online video platforms, they are characterised by two key themes: customisable information and inclusivity as a vehicle of activism (adapted from O’Neill and Boykoff, 2011).²⁵ In addition, in order to capture the extremely fleeting attention of online audiences, web documentaries often include strategies for engagement and emotionally involvement.²⁶ As Brosch argues, “[a]ffect and emotions are strongly intertwined with cognitive and motivational processes, they provide important evaluative information and reorient information processing and behaviour towards events that are relevant to overarching goals and concerns”.²⁷ Hence, the presence of emotions in narratives further increases their efficacy by inspiring action and providing a space for the spread of activism and counter-narratives. Consequently, the re-contextualisation of climate change in web documentaries often imposes new reflections and interpretations upon scientific information that may be narrativized and result in the construction of stories and imaginaries. For instance, they have led to the widespread discursive construction of often apocalyptic future scenarios and spectacularisation, often characterised by negative values and negative affects, such as fear and anxiety. Thus, user-generated narratives conveyed in online media platforms open scientific findings to re-interpretations

²⁰ Mike S. Schäfer, “Online Communication on Climate Change and Climate Politics: A Literature Review”, *WIREs Climate Change* (2012).

²¹ Samantha Hautea et al., “Showing They Care (Or Don’t): Affective Publics and Ambivalent Climate Activism on TikTok”, *Social Media+Society* (2021), 1-14.

²² Tina Askanius and Julie Uldam, “Online Social Media for Radical Politics: Climate Change Activism on YouTube”, *International Journal of Electronic Governance*, 4.1-2 (2011), 69-84.

²³ Bhatia, *Analyzing Online Videos*.

²⁴ Aditi Bhatia, “Analyzing Online Videos”, in Camila Vásquez, ed., *Research Methods for Digital Discourse Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 177-196.

²⁵ Saffron O’Neill and Maxwell Boykoff, “The Role of New Media in Engaging the Public with Climate Change”, in Lorraine Whitmarsh, Irene Lorenzoni and Saffron O’Neill, eds., *Engaging the Public with Climate Change* (London: Routledge, 2011), 233-251.

²⁶ Ashley Bieniek-Tobasco et al., *Communicating Climate Change through Documentary Film*.

²⁷ Tobias Brosch, “Affect and Emotions as Drivers of Climate Change Perception and Action: A Review”, *Current Opinion on Behavioral Sciences*, 42 (2021), 15-21.

and multidirectional connections that enhance the transmission of affective public messages and interactions.

4. Methods and Materials

The web documentary *Seat at the Table* highlights the devastating impacts of climate change and sheds light on innovative solutions to mitigate the environmental crisis through interviews to climate activists and underrepresented social actors on the frontline of the climate emergency. Narratives articulated in the web documentary outline how the interviewees experience climate change. Each episode shares environmental stories concerning a specific climate change issue, such as air pollution, extreme weather events and forest wildfires.

Web documentaries are naturally considered a multi-semiotic genre as they are characterised by an interplay of dynamic verbal and non-verbal components: sounds, images, and written and spoken language.²⁸ They are defined as “interactive applications, on or off-line, made with the intention of representing reality with its own mechanisms that we can call modes of browsing or interactivity, relative to the level of participation allowed”.²⁹ Notwithstanding the relevance of multimodal aspects, in the case of *Seat at the Table*, verbal aspects contribute to the construction of climate change dominant and non-dominant narratives. Therefore, the present article considers web documentaries as a hybrid genre in which spoken language plays a prominent part in the construction of meanings, and in this regard, it deserves an in-depth analysis.

The present study analyses the transcripts of the episodes (four hours of audio/video recording released on YouTube) of the web documentary series, amounting approximately 31,000 tokens (3702 types). Episodes (N = 12) were collected and automatically transcribed with Avrio Transcription Software; then followed by a close-reading review. Albeit limited in size, the corpus represents a highly specialised sample for investigating specific instances of climate change representations and discourses articulated by activists and under-represented subjects in the international debate on the environmental crisis. Interviewees in the corpus constitute a heterogenous sample of participants with an intersectional framework conveyed by work, age, gender, class and ethnicity, but united in being climate activists. Based on Flowerdew’s parameters of specialised corpora,³⁰ the *Seat at the Table* corpus (hereafter, SatT corpus) can be defined as a small, specialised corpus according to the following criteria:

- Specific purpose for compilation: e.g., to investigate particular lexical items;
- Contextualisation: particular setting (climate change frontlines), participants (underrepresented social actors and activists) and communicative purpose (inform and mobilise individual/political action);
- Genre: informative and persuasive;
- Type of text/discourse: web documentary, activist discourse, spoken language;
- Subject matter/topic: climate change crisis.

The study focuses on the discursive construction and the appraisal of climate change to understand how voices silenced by institutions and mainstream media take and mobilise action against climate change. In this regard, the present article addresses the following research questions:

²⁸ Andrea Sabine Sedlaczek, “Representations of Climate Change in Documentary Television. Integrating an Ecolinguistic and Ecossemiotic Perspective into a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis”, *Language and Ecology* (2016), 1-19.

²⁹ Arnau Gifreu, “The Interactive Multimedia Documentary as a Discourse on Interactive Non-Fiction: For a Proposal of the Definition and Categorisation of the Emerging Genre”, *Hipertext.net*, 9 (2011).

³⁰ Lynne Flowerdew, “The Argument for Using English Specialized Corpora to Understand Academic and Professional Settings”, in Thomas A. Upton and Ulla Connor, eds., *Discourse in the Professions* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004), 11-33.

(RQ1): How do interviewees represent and appraise climate change?

(RQ2): What kind of AFFECT subcategories emerge in the representation of imaginaries related to climate change?

The article draws upon a methodology that combines Corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis with the Appraisal Framework, to elicit quantitative and qualitative data from the analysis of selected terms in the SatT corpus. The analysis was carried out with the #LancsBox 6.0 concordance tool and investigated concordances and collocations of selected terms to obtain quantitative results that support the qualitative data analysis in the identification, critical analysis and appraisal of climate change in the corpus.

The basic premise in the choice of the suitable approach is the notion of discourse as a form of social practice is particularly suited for activist discourse on climate change. Moreover, self-representations and “narratives told in interviews have become a central tool of data collection ... in a variety of disciplines within social sciences research”³¹ in terms of qualitative analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on human relations, the representation of social actors and on how ideologies, ideas, and discourses are constructed through language in different texts and domains.³² Concurrently, Appraisal theory delves into the evaluative and attitudinal discursive dimensions.³³ The present combined analysis of interviews in the corpus enables the possibility of understanding the nature of the interviewees self- and other- representations, unveiling the constitution and functioning of particular social groups³⁴, and the study of how language is used to manage “individuals’ social personae whilst social relationships” to promote social change.³⁵

5. Findings and Discussion

The present study aims to analyse the discursive representation and appraisal of climate change in the web documentary in order to shed light on the positive and negative emotions explicitly and implicitly expressed by under-represented subjects in the climate debate. The study also considered how social actors in *Seat at the Table* represent themselves as social communities.

The investigation started with the analysis of the term ‘climate*’. The examination identified 99 collocates, many of which are specifically related to climate change impacts and the relationship between social actors and the environment in terms of action to mitigate the climate crisis. Table 1 shows some of the collocates of the search term ‘climate’:

Collocate	Freq coll	Freq corpus	Collocate	Freq coll	Freq corpus
change	86	119	fight	8	13

³¹ Anna De Fina, “Narratives in Interview—The Case of Accounts: For an Interactional Approach to Narrative Genre”, *Narrative Inquiry*, 19.2 (2009), 233-258.

³² Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

³³ James R. Martin and Peter R.R. White, *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁴ Anna De Fina, “Group Identity, Narrative and Self-representations”, in Anna De Fina, Deborah Schiffrin and Michael Bamberg, eds., *Discourse and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2006), 351-375.

³⁵ Bevitore, *Values, Assumptions and Beliefs in British Newspaper Editorial Coverage of Climate Change*, 607; Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio and Miguel-Ángel Benítez-Castro, “The Language of Evaluation in the Narratives by the Magdalene Laundries Survivors: The Discourse of Female Victimhood”, *Applied Linguistics*, 42.2 (2021), 317.

about	29	157	your	7	59
our	19	134	front	7	25
you	18	366	fighting	6	15
have	18	196	impacts	6	14
crisis	18	26	against	6	10
people	16	172	becoming	6	13
do	16	127	talk	6	19
my	16	165	last	6	25
world	15	129	important	6	25
what	14	186	nature	6	39
put	13	27	work	5	43
think	11	104	answer	5	8
they	10	92	thing	5	51
future	9	35	hope	6	41
first	10	36	through	5	36
make	9	65	feel	5	49
them	8	67	us	5	75
leaders	8	43	away	5	22
me	8	120	now	5	76

Table 1. *climate** Collocates in the SatT Corpus (01 - Freq (5.0), L10-R10, C: 5.0-NC: 5.0)

The analysis of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’ points to how interviewees represented themselves in *Seat at the Table*. At closer inspection, social actors in the web documentary employ self-representation strategies in different ways according to the kind of narratives they articulate (for instance, the relationship with world leaders or the Global North and their role in the battle against climate change). Moreover, they express a strong sense of community that results in the frequent use of the pronoun ‘we’.

The analysis of self-representations in the context of interaction with other social groups and the articulation of the narrative ‘climate change as a threat’ suggests that the interviewees position themselves as collective social actors in order to enhance the negative other representation:

1. Our survival is at stake. We are forgotten people.
2. As a community, we have so many challenges. Poverty, drug and alcohol abuse,

gangsterism and now climate change. That's one of the main influences on kids today. I feel like we are a forgotten community.

Instead, the reference to their contribution in the creation of an environmentally friendly society may be regarded as a process of activation of social actors as they represent themselves “as the active, dynamic forces in an activity”.³⁶ Therefore, they have agency and employ positive attitudes and empowering terms in order to persuade people to join the activist movement and encourage action:

3. The people who are worst affected by air pollution tend to be poor, people of colour, and working-class, because they tend to live by the busiest roads in the poorest areas. We are also planning to use CO₂ and then store it in the tile, which essentially means this carbon, which is present in the solid form and in the gaseous form, would be stored in this tile for decades. As architects, we are all dreamers, right? We dream about a certain kind of a city that we live in.
4. If the community here in the Isles of Scilly has taught me one thing, it's that we're stronger when we work together.
5. The tools that I have is landscape architecture, so I should use my tools to make some changes. I think the only way that we can be is positive, and we can't stop because we need the energy to move forward.

The analysis of self- and group representation highlighted a great sense of belonging to local and social categories, for instance, membership categories such as ‘working class’ and ‘forgotten people’ (see examples 1 and 3), and the definition of proactive attitudes to take part in the activist movement (see examples 3, 4 and 5). Social belonging particularly relates to interpersonal attitude and affection which represent key motivations to “affiliate with other people and entities, and to maintain such bonds”.³⁷ Thus, expressions regarding group representations are also intertwined with the use of the inclusive ‘we’ as an instance of cohesive community in search of solutions to climate change:

6. When we are faced with challenges as humans, we're incredibly good at being creative and finding ways to take on those challenges. And it's a reminder of that incredible human spirit that we're gonna need going forward into the future.

Thus, it may be assumed that the relationship between social groups in the context of climate justice results in positive self-representation versus negative other representation (boasting vs. derogation).

Activist discourse regarding climate change involves the demand for climate action by activist communities, which is often articulated in simple narratives. Their use results in civic mobilisation functioning “as an important factor in political decision-making and could influence national and international policies on climate change”.³⁸ In the SatT corpus, call for action is designed through the use of apparently neutral lexemes such as ‘now’ and ‘time’ that invoke the need for immediacy (examples 7, 8 and 9). The latter emphasise the importance of temporality and timescape in climate

³⁶ Van Leeuwen, Theo, “The Representation of Social Actors”, in Carmen R. Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard, eds., *Texts and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2013), 43.

³⁷ Miguel-Ángel Benítez Castro and Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio, “Rethinking Martin & White’s affect taxonomy”, in J. Lachlan Mackenzie and Laura Alba-Juez, eds., *Emotion in Discourse* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2019), 318.

³⁸ Anabela Carvalho, “Media (ted) Discourses and Climate Change: A Focus on Political Subjectivity and (Dis)engagement”, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 1.2 (2010), 172-179.

change discourse also evoking the generational scheme to describe time contours and analyse real and present scenarios.³⁹

7. There's never been a more important time to take action. Our futures are literally being decided behind those walls.
8. We've heard one thing over and over, which is now is time to take action. It's time for world leaders to step up more than anything else.
9. The time to take action is now the eyes of the world are on this conference. Over the last two years, it's been unbelievable to witness the increase in activism, whether it's young people, whether it's groups like Extinction, rebellion, putting public pressure on, and that's what we need. The decisions that they're gonna make here are challenging and they will convene people's lives, but they have to be made. We don't have a choice. We can't skirt around it any longer and I hope that that's the role people play to put on that pressure. Everyday citizen are coming here and saying, and we want you to make these decisions. And the time is now.

The demand for action is foregrounded in the entire web documentary and is boosted in the representation of climate change as a pervasive social phenomenon rather than a mere set of detrimental events (examples 10 and 11), where the use of the word 'crisis' emphasises that climate change is a present-centric issue:

10. I do believe that we are in an existential crisis, and if we don't act now, we will reach irreversible consequences of ecological tipping points.
11. Maldives is one of the flattest countries on the earth, where over 80% of the islands are less than a metre above the main sea level. And we don't have mountains, we don't have hills. Our islands are really, really tiny. So to me, the climate crisis is a humanitarian crisis.

Moreover, the documentary attempts to deconstruct sceptical and denialist discourses regarding environmental issues. It counteracts such imaginaries of climate change and their conceptualisation of climate change future scenarios that "relocate climate change risks in a distant future by presenting them as a non-immediate threat, as not part of our present and not part of our foreseeable future, thus instilling continuity with a human-friendly climate".⁴⁰ Conversely, findings from the SatT corpus shed light on the activists' conceptualisation of climate change as a real, global and present issue (see examples 12, 13, and 14):

12. I didn't really think that the impacts of climate change would happen in my lifetime.
13. I mean, when you look around, if we look at a window ledge there, and you see how dark that is, you don't even need a metre to see that this is an issue. [...] With air pollution, we are the ones who are suffering on the front line. When you think about climate change, people are thinking about polar bears, or they're thinking about sea level rises hitting Bangladesh. And you're looking over there because we've been made to look over there. Whereas if it's, like: "No, no, where do you live? Okay, you're living here, in the borough of Lewisham; this is where you're living, so they're used to introduce... this is our world and here's the South Circular, which was built through our

³⁹ White, *Climate Change and the Generational Timescape*.

⁴⁰ Simona-Nicoleta Vulpe, "Cooling down the Future: A Discourse Analysis of Climate Change Skepticism", *The Social Science Journal* (2020), 9.

area, to kind of, like, personalise the South Circular not as just a destination, but a place where people live.

14. We've looked at people on the continent, in South Africa, in Australia, in America. They were suffering from these wildfires, uh, and yet, I see it now. Like I said, in my career, I've seen it grow and grow. And in this very wet county of Cumbria, we're experiencing wildfires, so that means anywhere is possible.

The demand for climate actions and immediacy by activists is also characterised by the use of lexemes that invoke anger or indignation.⁴¹ The use of strong collocates such as 'fight*' and 'frontline*' implies the metaphor of 'war' (example 15) which is associated with a notably negative evaluation of climate change. Hence, the use of metaphors is another crucial example of the re-contextualisation of climate science, as they are often used in the interaction between scientific knowledge and non-expert knowledge. In particular, war metaphors have been used in the corpus to communicate the seriousness of climate change issues and mobilising action:⁴²

15. This is a fight for climate justice. A fight to make sure that the people who have always been left out or they've not been represented as they're supposed to be, are actually on the frontlines to demand for climate justice.

In this context, the examination of concordance lines regarding climate change imaginaries in regard to the present unveils that climate is largely perceived as a 'threat'. Moreover, along with AFFECT subcategories of dissatisfaction, data show that narratives are pervaded by unhappiness (sadness and frustration) and insecurity (fear and anxiety) occur:

16. Our lives depend on the ocean, the tides, the sea state, the weather. Everything. Everything depends on the ocean. Sea-level rise is a big threat to the Isles of Scilly, and it's showing people that and saying "That's because of climate change".
17. It's dramatic. That's everything from the flora and the animals that go with it. This is the biggest threat that we've got. And... and forget all the other stuff.
18. There's always this fear that we've crossed this chance of reversing it [climate change]. And it is irreversible. And if we've crossed that point, what do we do? What are we going to do as humanity? I think this is something that scares me.

Given the importance of temporality in activist discourse, climate change is also represented as a future-oriented risk. The appraisal of the future-based discursive representation of negative imaginaries is mainly characterised by values of uncertainty and dramatisation. In this context, data show an inclination for the dissatisfaction and unhappiness subcategory of AFFECT:

19. My greatest fear for the future is... there is more flood, that there is heat, that there is starving. Becoming forced to migrate. And becoming climate refugees. We're gonna be fighting for some resources; that's what my mom tells me every time. In the next few years, there are gonna be wars about like, who should get the water, and fighting about land and like resources, basically.

⁴¹ Askanius and Uldam, *Online Social Media for Radical Politics: Climate Change Activism on YouTube*.

⁴² Neyla Kotevko and Dimitrinka Atanasova, "Metaphor and the Representation of Scientific Issues: Climate Change in Print and Online Media", in Elena Semino and Zsófia Demjén, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 296-308.

20. I've had the best home growing up here. I love the childhood that I've had, and I really want my kids to have the same. If we don't do something to stop climate change, at the rate it's going now, then they won't be able to enjoy it the way I have done. Feels unfair, doesn't it? That future generations won't be able to enjoy the same privileges we had growing up.
21. I got scared or worried about how the future of my children would be. Um, and the nature was... kind of in a way that I didn't recognise. Uh, and I didn't know all the connections: Why is the weather like this? What's happening to the ice? I needed to put everything together to get the whole understanding.
22. There's always this fear we've crossed this chance of reversing it. And it is irreversible. And if we've crossed that point, what do we do? What are we going to do as humanity? I think that is something that scares me. - It breaks my heart to think my kids are not gonna experience the same as what I've experienced. It's changing. It is that dramatic.
23. I'm afraid there will be a time when we won't be able to fight by ourselves, and we won't be able to contain it.

In the representation of future gloomy imaginaries, the fear AFFECT is particularly salient and the metaphor of war is employed (examples 19 and 23) through the frequent use of terms such as 'war' and 'fight'.

Notably, interviewees were asked to describe how their innovative and sustainable projects would affect the environment to secure survival for future generations. Hence, despite the representation of gloom imaginaries concerning climate change future characterised by the use of negative emotions, findings reveal that the construction of optimistic future imaginaries is to a greater extent salient in the corpus. Discourses of actions and transformation are pervaded by the emotion of hope and are mainly characterised by satisfaction AFFECT types such as trust and confidence:

24. Every time you plant a seed, you're planting a bit of hope. But even if we're not involved with growing food, as individuals, we all have a choice about what we eat.
25. It's a scary thing to think about, but I'm getting more hope as I'm becoming older and seeing that more young people are stepping in, more young people are trying to do something. Can we fix the climate problems in one generation? My answer would be yes, we have to. We have breath, we have life, and we have the opportunity to create in the present. We shouldn't think about if this thing will be possible in the future. It's actually possible now.

In mobilising action, *Seat at the Table* reflects upon the concept of intergenerational cooperation as a focal point in the path toward environmental sustainability and the care for future generations (see examples 24 and 25). As previous studies in the field of philosophy and economics have suggested, the notion of *generation* with regard to Anthropocentrism and climate change future shed light on "intergenerational obligations to preserve a stable environment for the young and unborn. [Thus,] international agreements have enshrined 'future generations' as stakeholders in the decision-making of the present".⁴³ Moreover, the use of hope in the construction of positive future imaginaries also results in the use of aspirational adjectives. In this case, the following examples show that the keyword 'future' mainly collocates with terms such as 'green', 'bright', and 'better':

⁴³ White, *Climate Change and the Generational Timescape*.

26. I believe that football is a universal game and the climate crisis and deforestation is a universal problem. And I believe that sports and football specifically have the power to change, connect and inspire my generation to create a greener future.
27. If we could actually do something now, maybe the future will look much brighter. There will be hope.
28. Climate change is the last thing that would be on the kids' minds. Not just the kids but everyone's minds. I made it my responsibility to teach others and to show them that climate change is affecting us so that we can have a better future.

The emphasis on positive affect in the discursive representation of climate change future may therefore point to the “intention to perform a subsequent pro-environmental behavior”.⁴⁴ In this context, hope is used as a rhetorical construct to facilitate the engagement of the public in climate activism and social change.⁴⁵

6. Conclusion

The present article highlighted how climate activists recontextualise climate change in web documentaries delivered on online media platforms such as YouTube. It focused on discourses of action and transformation articulated by activists interviewed in the web documentary *Seat at the Table*. The analysis of the SatT corpus uncovered the existence of counter-narratives concerning the representation of climate change and its imaginaries. Moreover, it revealed that self-representation, community-building and emotions are pivotal in activist discourse. Yet, they also imply “a conscious reorientation from a dominant emotional regime through a collective emotion management process that fosters alternative feeling rules”.⁴⁶ In the web-documentary *Seat at the Table*, activists and underrepresented laypeople in the international debate over climate change represent themselves as part of a community that plays a fundamental role in finding solutions to the climate crisis.

The analysis shows that in the web documentary, climate change is aptly reframed with a crucial reflection on present and future imaginaries. The study identified explicit and implicit references to the construction of climate change as present and future scenarios. While the first are rarely found in scientific discourse, the latter are imagined through prevalently positive emotions. In fact, more emphasis was placed on hope and optimism – expressed through *satisfaction subcategories* of the AFFECT subsystem – than on negative emotions in interviewees’ future representation. They were arguably employed in order to propel wider participation in climate actions. Moreover, as the GraphColl tool revealed, the use of positive AFFECT patterns such as ‘hope’ (frequency in the SatT corpus: 41) appears among the shared collocates of both queries ‘climate’ and future’.

Hence, the appraisal of time in activist discourses articulated in *Seat at the Table* sheds light on the shared attitudes of activists in deconstructing apocalyptic and dramatic scenarios about the future by leveraging on positive affect resources such as hope and optimism to promote action and social change in the present. In this light, new media and online platforms such as YouTube are not to be considered mere entertainment platforms but public spheres where the science of climate change is recontextualised to raise awareness and create communities with shared values and attitudes toward environmental issues. As Fløttum et al. argue, proactive attitudes of civil society and the use of positive epithets with regard to the discursive representation of climate change futures “may contribute to an improved basis for

⁴⁴ Brosch, *Affect and Emotions as Drivers of Climate Change Perception and Action*.

⁴⁵ Bieniek-Tobasco et al., *Communicating Climate Change through Documentary Film*.

⁴⁶ Jochen Kleres and Åsa Wettergren, “Fear, Hope, Anger, and Guilt in Climate Activism”, *Social Movement Studies*, 16.5 (2017), 508.

political decision-making on the measures to undertake in order to avoid dangerous consequences as well as to encourage engagement in the shift toward a low-carbon future”.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Kjersti Fløttum et al., “Representations of the Future in English Language Blogs on Climate Change”, *Global Environmental Change*, 29 (2014), 220.