Sole Alba Zollo

Human Rights Discourse and the Environment. Empowering Young Generations through Old and New Media

Abstract: Over the past decade, it has become more and more important for international organisations such as the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (COE) to bridge the knowledge gap between experts and laypeople in order to open a debate about environmental protection as a fundamental human right. By using different media, in particular the Internet, the two organisations have been generating a variety of informative materials in a form that can be easily understood by non-expert citizens, particularly the young generations, to mitigate conflicts and legal disputes and foster a multidirectional dialogue on sensitive issues such as the promotion of a sustainable environment framework.

Following the tradition of Social Semiotics and research on Positive Discourse Analysis, this study has analysed a range of different resources related to the environment available on the EU's and COE's websites, aimed at explaining citizens the two institutions' policies in an understandable and attractive way. The analysis has tried to detect the main verbal and visual discursive strategies of knowledge communication and dissemination in order to communicate the institutional/legal discourse on environmental protection and human rights to non-specialists and develop eco-friendly consciousness, especially among the young.

Keywords: *human rights, environment, legal/institutional discourse, genre hybridisation, positive multimodal discourse analysis*

1. Introduction: The Interrelationship between Human Rights and the Environment

In the last years, the issue of environmental rights has risen rapidly up the political agenda of most countries. Human rights and environmental protection are no longer considered separate matters, but they are interdependent and choices made by governments on environmental challenges affect directly human rights.

The link between human rights and the environment has long been recognised. In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment pointed out the direct relationship between the environment and the right to life. The Preamble of the Declaration stated that:

> Man is both creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth.… Both aspects of man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights – even the right to life itself. [1]

In addition, Principle 1 of the Declaration established a further foundation for linking human rights and environmental protection, declaring that: "Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being".[2] In 1982 the World Charter for Nature acknowledged that "Mankind is a part of nature and life depends on the uninterrupted functioning of natural systems which ensure the supply of energy and nutrients".[3] Ten years later, in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit) stated that "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature".[4] The Declaration also provided for the right of access to environmental information and of public participation in environmental decision-making. In addition, the UN Human Rights Commission adopted several resolutions linking human rights and the environment, such as Res. 2005/60 entitled "Human Rights and the Environment as Part of Sustainable Development". The resolution called on states "to take all necessary measures to protect the legitimate exercise of everyone's human rights when promoting environmental protection and sustainable development".[5] It emphasised the needs of the vulnerable members of society and also encouraged efforts towards the implementation of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. The Aarhus Convention (1998) established a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment. The Convention provided for the right of everyone to have access to environmental information held by governments/states, to participate in decision-making and have access to justice. This means that governments are obliged to disseminate information on environmental issues and citizens can comment on projects or plans related to the environment and review legal procedures and challenge public decisions.

[1] United Nations, "Report on the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment" (Stockholm, 1972), 3, http://www.un-documents.net/aconf48-14r1.pdf, accessed 25 March 2018.
[2] Ibid., 4.
[3] UN General Assembly, "World Charter for Nature" (New York, 1982), 17, available at https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/39295 , accessed 25 March 2018.
[4] United Nations, "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), 1, available at http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/RIO_E.PDF, accessed 25 March 2018.
[5] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "*Human Rights Resolution 2005/60: Human Rights and the Environment as Part of Sustainable Development"* (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2005), 2, https://www.refworld.org/docid/45377c759.html, accessed 25 March 2018.

Over the past few years, the number of international and domestic laws, and academic studies on the interconnection between human rights and the environment has grown rapidly, stressing the importance of procedural rights such as easier access to information and public participation in decision making.[6] As a result, it has become increasingly important for large institutions such as the Council of Europe (COE) and the European Union (EU) to bridge the knowledge gap between experts and laypeople in order to open a debate on environmental protection as a fundamental human right. By using different media, in particular the Internet, the two organisations have been designing different informative materials in a form that can be easily understood by non-expert citizens, in particular younger generations, in order to foster a multidirectional dialogue on sensitive issues such as the promotion of a sustainable environment framework.

2. Data and Research Questions

The analysis has been conducted on a corpus collected from *Compass* and *Teachers' Corner*, the COE's and EU's websites respectively, which contain a wide range of informative resources aimed at describing the two institutions' policies in an understandable and attractive way to young generations both in formal and non-formal education contexts.

Compass – Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People was first published in 2002 within the framework of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe. The programme was created because human rights education is considered of incalculable value in shaping a dimension of democratic citizenship for all young people and in promoting a culture of universal human rights. This study has focused on the Main Page "human rights and the environment" and the pages called "Related Activities" (3 things, beware we are watching, fingers and thumbs, front page, Makah whaling, our futures, tale of two cities, web of life).[7]

The *Teachers' Corner* is a webpage that contains many resources (online games, brochures, booklets, comics, and picture books) aimed at explaining the European Union and its policies to students of different age groups. For this study two booklets addressed to adolescents and young adults

[6] Marc Pallemaerts and Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons, *Human Rights and the Environment* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2002); Donald K. Anton and Dinah L. Shelton, eds., *Environmental Protection and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2011).

[7] Council of Europe, "Human Rights and the Environment" (2018), https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/environment, accessed 25 March 2018.

were investigated, specifically "Our Planet, our Future"[8] and "The EU and energy union and climate action".[9]

The main objective of this research is to detect the main discursive strategies of knowledge dissemination across different genres in order to communicate institutional/legal discourse on environmental protection and human rights to non-specialists and develop eco-friendly consciousness, especially among the young.[10] In particular, the analysis will focus on how specialised discourses – institutional, political and legal – are "translated" for the computer screen and how different modes (words, pictures, colours, typography etc.) are produced and re-produced, particularly for younger generations. In addition, by bringing to light the intertextual and interdiscursive elements which come out of the linguistic and semiotic investigation, this research explores how the EU and COE environmental policies and procedures are recontextualised in the different educational resources. The investigation of the interaction and combination of different modes allows us to verify whether the transfer from legal/institutional language to popularising texts involves any contamination in discursive practices, thus leading to the birth of new text-types, which can help mitigate environmental conflicts and legal debates.

3. From Critical Linguistics to Multimodal Positive Discourse Analysis

In the late 1970s a new approach to the study of language was born in the UK. Roger Fowler and his colleagues at the University of East Anglia coined the term Critical Linguistics.[11] The main concern of this approach was to "demonstrate that grammatical and semantic forms can be used as ideological instruments to make meaning in texts and to categorize and classify things, people and events".[12] Focusing on grammatical features and vocabulary choices one of its central purposes was to reveal biases and points of view that were hidden in texts such as newspaper articles and schoolbooks. For example, one area of investigation was agency, that is how grammatical features determine participants' responsibility, and who has control over communicative events. One of the limitations of

[8] European Commission, "Our Planet, Our Future" (2018), https://ec.europa.eu/clima/citizens/youth_en, accessed 25 March 2018.

[9] European Commission, "The EU and Energy Union and Climate Action", http://publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/energy/en, accessed 25 March 2018.

[10] Guiomar E. Ciapuscio, "Formulation and Reformulation Procedures in Verbal Interactions between Experts and (Semi) Laypersons", *Discourse Studies*, 5.2 (2003), 207-233; Helena Calsamiglia and Teun A. van Dijk, "Popularization Discourse and Knowledge about the Genome", *Discourse and Society*, 15.4 (2004), 369-389; Vijay K. Bhatia, et al., eds., *Variations in Specialized Genres: Standardization and Popularization* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2015).

[11] Roger Fowler, et al., eds., *Language and Control* (London: Routledge, 1979); Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge, *Language as Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1979).

[12] Paul Simpson and Andrea Mayr, *Language and Power*: *A Resource Book for Students* (London: Routledge, 2010), 50.

Critical Linguistics mentioned by Fairclough is that the relationship between language, power and ideology has been too narrowly elaborated, since the whole narrative structure of a text is not taken into account in order to identify ideological implications.[13] Moreover, texts are mainly seen as products without looking at their productive and interpretative processes. Consequently, a theory of language as a social practice was elaborated which has become known as Critical Discourse Analysis. It mainly focuses on "the social and ideological functions of language in producing, reproducing or changing social structures, relations and identities moving away from the investigation of decontextualised texts to identify the sociocultural aspects that lie behind the production of texts.[14] Including many aspects of Critical Linguistics, CDA's main purpose is to critically investigate the so-called 'unequal encounters' such as political speeches and interviews, news texts, advertising, doctor-patient interactions, job interviews etc. in order to unveil ideologies and how power structures are built through discourse. Texts do not occur in isolation. Other texts (intertextuality) and other discourses (interdiscursivity) are weaved within them. CDA aims at deconstructing power inequalities in those texts that could lead to discrimination in some areas such as class, gender, race and recently, with the rise of ecolinguistics, the environment. Since discourse is a tool of power and control, CDA investigates how discriminatory values are mediated through language. "Critical Discourse Analysis is essentially political in intent with its practitioners acting upon the world in order to transform it and thereby create a world where people are not discriminated against because of sex, colour, creed, age or social class'".[15]

In 2004 Martin suggests a complementary perspective on language and semiosis which he refers to as Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA). Through an analysis of genre renovation, evaluative language and narrative in the context of post-colonial relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Martin argues that deconstructive and constructive activities are both necessary in order to reconsider power and how communities renovate discourses that enact a better world rather than focusing on social processes which disempower and oppress. In other words, PDA "analyses the discourse we like rather than the discourse we wish to criticize".[16] Instead of highlighting injustices, this approach aims at identifying and promoting alternatives. It is rooted in CDA that critically looks at how the language system can be used by dominating groups to maintain their power in society but it goes beyond it to detect discourses that can be effective in encouraging the change we desire to see.

[13] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).
[14] Simpson and Mayr, *Language and Power*, 50.
[15] Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard, eds., *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), vi.
[16] Felicitas Macgilchrist, "Positive Discourse Analysis: Contesting Dominant Discourses by Reframing the Issues", *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, 1.1 (2007), 74-94, 74.

According to Bartlett, CDA has been criticised because of its tendency to solve problems by removing the negative rather than promoting positive alternative voices.[17] "Much work has focused on the negative, such as highlighting the propagation of sexist and racist stereotypes in the press or cataloguing the detrimental effects of marketisation on education, while much less attention has been paid to addressing such problems and seeking practical solutions".[18]

PDA aims to look for positive uses of language in order to provide alternatives to what scholars perceive as negative or damaging dominant discourses. Ecolinguistics usually focuses on negative critique, illustrating the mainstream negative discourses on unsustainable societies and ecologically destructive attitudes. For Stibbe it is useless to present the problems without suggesting new discourses that "promote *being more* rather than *having more*, well-being rather than growth and respecting rather than conquering nature".[19] Positive Discourse Analysis within ecolinguistics can help "identify the linguistic patterns from positive discourses that inspire respect and care for the natural world and make them available to those who want to adjust their language to better address ecological issues".[20] Analysing positive discourses can help identify linguistic patterns that can encourage human beings to care about and protect the environment.

> Positive Discourse Analysis is a search for new ways of using language that tell very different stories from those of the current industrial civilization – stories that can encourage us to protect the ecosystems that life depends on and build more socially just societies. New stories are needed to provide alternatives to current stories of consumerism, technological progress, economic growth, the mastery of nature and other dominant ways of conceiving the world that contribute to ecological destruction.[21]

Several scholars have recognised the potential of PDA in different fields, from politics to education.[22] More recently, Hughes proposes Progressive Discourse Analysis as an alternative to Positive

[17] Tom Bartlett, "Towards Intervention in Positive Discourse Analysis", in Caroline Coffin, et al., eds., *Applied Linguistics Methods: A Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 133-147; Tom Bartlett, *Hybrid Voices and Collaborative Change: Contextualising Positive Discourse Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
[18] Bartlett, "Towards Intervention", 137.
[19] Arran Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Stibbe, "Positive Discourse Analysis Rethinking Human Ecological Relationships", in F. Fill Alwin and Penz Hermine, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Ecolinguistics* (London: Routledge, 2017), 309-335, 309.
[20] Stibbe, "Positive Discourse Analysis", 324.
[21] Ibid., 310.
[22] Macgilchrist and Ellen Van Praet, "Writing the History of the Victors? Discourse, Social Change and (Radical) Democracy", *Journal of Language and Politics*, 12.4 (2013), 626-651; Ting Su, "Positive Discourse Analysis of Xi Jinping's Speech at the National University of Singapore under Appraisal Theory", *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7.4 (2016), 796–801; Rebecca Rogers and Melissa Mosley Wetzel, "Studying Agency in Literacy Teacher Education: A Layered Approach to Positive Discourse Analysis", *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 10.1 (2013), 62–92.

Discourse Analysis, since positive discourse is concerned with progress toward a better world.[23] She points out that PDA is not an alternative to CDA but a complement to critically analysing discourse and both approaches are aimed at progressive social change. An alternative term may help analysts "grapple more critically with the question of what constitutes 'positive' social change".[24]

My own research concerns exactly what suggested above. I will examine the way the EU and COE talk about environmental issues to the young providing positive clusters of linguistic features as alternatives such as the use of metaphors, pronouns, positive evaluation, narrative etc. I will specifically look at how the institutions mitigate catastrophic consequences through counter-discursive strategies going against the mainstream environment discourse that tends to emphasise the negative consequences of human beings' attitude towards nature and try to raise awareness through "moral panic".

The COE and EU discourses do not include just verbal texts but visuals too and sometimes they function in a reciprocally reinforcing way that makes them complicated to disentangle. The analysis is based on the combination of a Multimodal Discourse Analysis approach and research on Positive Discourse Analysis.[25]

If discourse is the set of social practices which *make meaning*, then many of the texts produced in this process are multi-modal. Some of the major scholars in critical linguistics have more recently extended discourse analysis to include non-linguistic semiotic systems, developing a Social Semiotics.[26] Social Semiotics tries to find ways of investigating visual images and their relationship with language. In fact, Kress and van Leeuwen underline that the study of visual images may contribute to rethinking the theories of language.[27] Social Semiotics focuses on discourse and its context, that is on "the way people use semiotic 'resources' both to produce communicative artifacts and events and to interpret them – which is also a form of semiotic – in the context of specific social situations and practices".[28] Texts are embedded in the contexts in which they function. Context is not something extrinsic to text. Texts themselves may recontextualise meanings and practices in one modality to some other modality. Social semiotics also focuses on productive and interpretative

[23] Jessica M. F. Hughes, "Progressing Positive Discourse Analysis and/in Critical Discourse Studies: Reconstructing Resistance through Progressive Discourse Analysis", *Review of Communication*, 18.3 (2018), 193-211.
[24] Ibid., 198.
[25] Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1996); Kress and van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (London: Arnold, 2001); Carey Jewitt, *Technology, Literacy and Learning: A Multimodal Approach* (London: Routledge, 2008); Jim Martin, "Grace: The Logogenesis of Freedom", *Discourse Studies*, 1.1 (1999), 29-56; Martin, "Positive Discourse Analysis: Solidarity and Change", *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 49 (2004), 179-202; Stibbe, "Positive Discourse Analysis".
[26] Hodge and Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).
[27] Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*.
[28] Van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 2005), xi.

practices associated with types of text and the notion of genre has become central as well as the concept of intertextuality.

Multimodal discourse analysis is the study of different semiotic modes in a text or communicative event. It is "the combination of different semiotics modes – for example, language and music – in a communicative artifact or event".[29] A mode is not a rigid concept. New modes are continually being created and existing ones are transformed by their users in response to specific communication needs. Since modes are *inseparably integrated* multimodal discourse analysis aims at investigating in which way meaning is made in all the modes independently and how they work together to create a unified text or communicative event.[30] It is usually believed that words are more important than visuals, but according to multimodal discourse analysts there is not hierarchy but difference.

4. Analysis: Reframing Environmental Conflicts through Education

Compass was first published in 2002 because human rights education is considered fundamental to construct democratic citizens. Thanks to it, human rights education has been brought into the curricula of numerous schools.

Many issues and challenges to human rights have characterised these last years, such as an increase of terrorism, different revolutions such as the Arab Spring, the spread of online hate speech, natural disasters such as the tsunami and the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, and more. For this reason, an updated version was published in 2012 and, another reprint in 2015. Furthermore, it was made available online in order to update information and activities constantly. A website was then devoted to this publication.[31] This hands-on manual introduces human rights education for young people and it is suitable for formal and non-formal educational settings. All the activities can be adapted to any context and offer suggestions to put into action what has been learned. The activities are organised in 20 themes, from poverty, to discrimination, to gender, to peace that can be discussed from a human rights perspective. Among them, one section is devoted to the environment.

The main website page is divided in different sections and one of them is titled "The equity issue" where we find a mixture of negative and positive discourses. Negative discourses are given by the use of negative noun phrases, high modality, repetitions, nominalization, and destruction metaphors. For example, in excerpt 1, the noun phrase "threat" is repeated several times contributing to creating an atmosphere of fear, which is reinforced by premodifiers such as the superlative "the greatest", the

[29] Ibid., 281.
[30] Jay L. Lemke, "Travels in Hypermodality", *Visual Communication*, 1.3 (2002), 299-325.
[31] Council of Europe, "Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People", https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/home, accessed 25 March 2018.

adjective "immediate" or modal forms such as the adverb "certainly". The text is full of negative evaluation expressed also by adjectives such as "unfortunate" and adverbs such as "urgently". Moreover, in the first two lines the author's stance is emphasised by the presence of the adverb "undoubtedly" conveying the message that urgent actions are required without any doubt. This text is an example of the conventional discourse that unsustainable industrial societies promote ecologically destructive behaviour reinforced through a list of human beings' irresponsible actions, as a consequence of a consumerist society which treats the nature mechanistically as a resource to be exploited.

Excerpt 1

Climate change may be the greatest threat to long-term human well-being, and undoubtedly needs to be addressed urgently. However, the focus on climate change can have unfortunate consequences: either other environmental problems such as pollution, over-fishing or urban development are not given sufficient attention, or the impacts of these pressures are attributed to climate change when in fact there are other causes that should be addressed. Threats to coral reefs are a good example. Warmer sea temperatures, rising sea levels and the acidification of the oceans due to climate change are certainly a potential threat to coral reefs and thus to the rights of those people who gain their livelihoods or enjoy leisure activities on them. However, the immediate threats of pollution, sedimentation due to excess run-off as a result of changes in agricultural practices, over fishing of reef fish for food, the collection of fish, snails and coral itself for hobby aquarists, and mining the coral for making cement and road-fill, are a few of the immediate dangers that may destroy the reefs long before the effects of climate change take effect in 70 years.

Next to the abovementioned section, on the left-side of the page, we find two quotations (excerpt 2). One quote is by Ban Ki-moon, South Korean diplomat who was the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations from January 2007 to December 2016, and the other citation is by Andrew Simms, who is author, analyst and co-director of the New Weather Institute and a research associate with the Centre for Global Political Economy at the University of Sussex. The topos of authority is here used not only as a persuasive strategy to endorse the information given by the text but also to underpin the dominant negative discourses of an unsustainable society.

Excerpt 2

"Climate change is a real threat to international peace and security". Ban Ki-moon

"Beginning from the stroke of New Year, as they sit down to their evening meal on 2 January, a US family will already have used, per person, the equivalent in fossil fuels that a family in Tanzania will depend on for the whole year". Andrew Simms

From a multimodal perspective this negative approach is also mirrored in the visual elements introduced on the webpage. The white and black image (see figure 1) depicts a man driving a car which is releasing a high level of air pollutant emissions.[32] Pollution is here personified. It is shaped as a monster which, like a contemporary Brutus, tries to kill its own father. The image contributes to reinforcing the message of human beings' ecologically destructive behaviour. Paradoxically, even if this text seems to employ common discursive features linked to the dominant negative discourses, we can also notice a slight attempt to fight against this traditional approach. A more detailed analysis reveals some hidden positive features, revealing the ideologies embedded in the whole manual that will become clearer in other sections, in particular in those which describe the Council of Europe's policies on environmental issues. For example, in excerpt 1 the fixed phrase "climate change" occurs five times rather than the more threatening "global warming".[33]

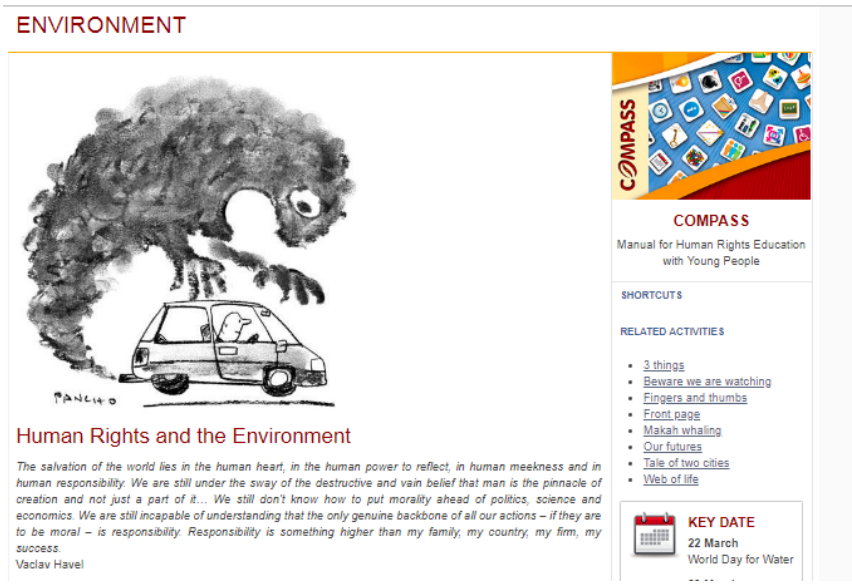

Figure 1. Webpage, "Human Rights and the Environment" (Council of Europe)

Positive discourses are mainly revealed in the section titled "The role of the Council of Europe". Excerpt 3 shows that positive features are expressed by positive noun phrases (development, actions, sustainability, diversity), active verbs, the deontic value of must, and the repetition of the COE as doer. The discourse of preservation and protection is emphasised. Sustainability becomes the keyword and a

[32] Council of Europe, "Human Rights and the Environment" (webpage), available at www.coe.int/en/web/compass/environment, accessed 25 March 2018.
[33] Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics*.

kind of motto for the promotion of the institution itself. This text becomes also a promotional text-type in fact it includes many advertising linguistic strategies such as repetitions (sustainable development), positive evaluative expressions (sustainable development, adequate legal environment, outstanding scientific, cultural or aesthetic qualities) and action verbs (to develop, to preserve, to protect) in order to convey a positive and active image of the organisation. It seems that the manual becomes also an instrument of self-legitimation.

Excerpt 3

The Council of Europe puts sustainable development at the top of its agenda. Its policy is that economic progress must not compromise the key assets of humanity: the quality of the environment and landscapes, human rights and social equity, cultural diversity and democracy. The Council of Europe views climate change as the most serious environmental problem that the world faces today, recognises the implications for human rights and is active on two fronts: preserving natural resources and biodiversity, but also protecting the diversity and vitality of the world's many cultures. The cultural pillar of sustainable development therefore requires parallel efforts to develop a culture of sustainability and to protect cultural diversity.

By its actions, the Council of Europe has helped to shape an adequate legal environment in Europe in favour of biodiversity, spatial planning and landscape management, and sustainable territorial development based on the integrated use of cultural and natural resources. The Council of Europe environment programme launched in 1961 has produced the European Landscape Convention, Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, and the Framework Convention on the value of Cultural Heritage for Society. The Council of Europe also runs The European Diploma of Protected Areas. Created in 1965, it is awarded to protected areas because of their outstanding scientific, cultural or aesthetic qualities; they must also be the subject of a suitable conservation scheme which may be combined with a sustainable development programme….

Participation by young people is a strategy to support positive discourses. As you can see in excerpt 4, a quotation from the Worth Youth Report 2003 is introduced to underline the key role of young people as activists. This is linguistically highlighted by the use of grammatical evaluation such as the use of comparatives such as “stronger”, “greater” and lexical evaluation such as “awareness” and “lead”.

Excerpt 4

“Because youth have a stronger awareness of the issues and a greater stake in long-term sustainability, the environment is one area in which they ought to take the lead.” (World Youth Report 2003).

The popularisation of legal/institutional discourse becomes a tool to enhance young people's participation and activism. Popularisation involves not only a 'reformulation', but especially a 'recontextualisation' of specific discourses – in this case legal and institutional discourses – which are originally generated in specialised contexts to which lay people have limited access.

> Popularization is a vast class of various types of communicative events or genres that involve the transformation of specialized knowledge into 'everyday' or 'lay' knowledge, as well as a recontextualization of scientific discourse, for instance, in the realm of the public discourses of the mass media or other institutions.[34]

On *Compass* main page devoted to the environment we find that the main points of conventions or regulations are briefly explained in separate boxes. On the page we often find interrogative sentences which follow the introduction of a legal action in order to shorten the gap between the institution and the readership. The use of rhetorical questions such as "Is it possible for everyone in the world to live a life with dignity and in adequate conditions of life without devastating consequences for the environment? If yes, how?" helps create a more colloquial atmosphere in order to involve young readers. Examples of knowledge dissemination are also present in some related class activities. For example, *Fingers and Thumbs* is a simulation of a competition to find the "greenest" youth group. One of its objectives is to develop understanding about the value of co-operation and the need for the monitoring and verification of agreements. Students are asked to focus on the UN Climate Change Conference 2009, discussing the weaknesses of voluntary agreements and the pros and cons of government directives and laws.

Concerning the data collected from the *Teacher's Corner* website, popularising strategies are mostly given by the interaction of different modes. In the booklet *Our Planet, our Future*, consisting of thirty-two pages, the interplay of verbal and visual elements (colour, layout, typography, images) creates a positive way of writing about the world inspiring the young to protect nature. As showed in figure 2, the mixture of legal, informative and promotional discourses (use of testimonial, evaluative adjectives, question and answer structure) becomes an instrument of meaning-making and knowledge dissemination among the young.[35] For instance, one section of the booklet focuses on the international treaty called the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) signed in 1992, underling the fact that, in order to reduce risks and impacts of climate change, both citizens and policy makers have an important role to play and together have to take action to limit global warming and protect our planet.

[34] Calsamiglia and van Dijk, "Popularization Discourse", 370.
[35] European Commission, "Our Planet, Our Future: Fighting Climate Change Together" (Luxembourg: European Union, 2018).

The booklet also becomes an educational tool to transform young people into "climate change experts". In order to persuade the young to become activists, we find a message by the actor Leonardo Di Caprio, UN Messenger of Peace, extracted from his talk addressing world leaders at the Paris Agreement signing ceremony in New York in 2016. The message says:

> Our planet cannot be saved unless we leave fossil fuels in the ground where they belong. An upheaval and massive change is required, now. One that leads to a new collective consciousness. A new collective evolution of the human race, inspired and enabled by a sense of urgency from all of you. We all know that reversing the course of climate change will not be easy, but the tools are in our hands – if we apply them before it is too late.

The text includes positive linguistic patterns such as "collective consciousness", "collective evolution" or "inspired and enabled". Transitivity, in particular agency, is exploited. Change and collective evolution become the doers. Interestingly the common metaphorical fixed-phrase "fighting climate change" which can denote conflicts and tensions has been substituted with the more peaceful expression "reversing the course of climate change". Subsequently, being environmental activists does not mean to become fighters which implicitly recalls a battle with winners and losers, but it means to find the right compromise between civilization and nature, progress and natural protection.

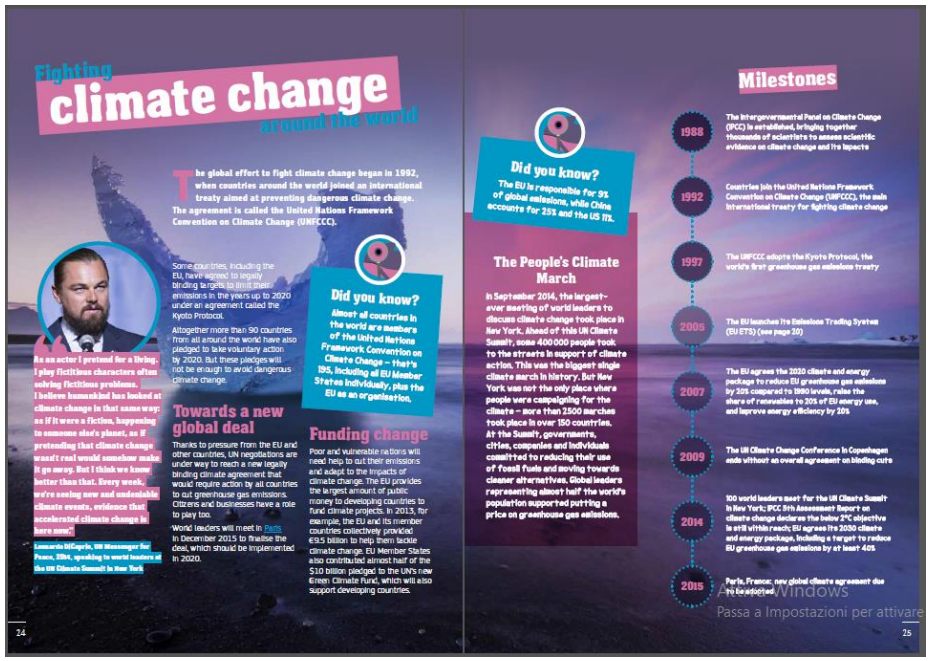

Figure 2. European Commission, "Our Planet, Our Future" (brochure)

The brochure *The EU and energy union and climate action* is composed of four pages and focuses on the role of the EU and its active role. It is very common in the corpus under investigation. Apart from empowering young generations on environmental issues, this text-type becomes a kind of manifesto through which the institution promotes itself and its policies (figure 3).[36] Taking action on climate change is the main message conveyed to the young through this genre, but at the same time it illustrates how the EU takes action on climate change.

Figure 3. The EU and energy union and climate action (website)

This brochure is another example of hybrid text resulting from the mixture of old and new media. New media usually refer to content available on-demand through the Internet, accessible on any digital device, usually containing interactive user feedback and creative participation. In fact, the brochure is also available in electronic/interactive format. Firstly, it is highly multimodal as meaning is given by the interplay of verbal texts and visuals, colour, font, etc. Secondly, videos are embedded in the written texts which through cartoons explain and clarify the content of the written part. The primary benefit of new media is interactivity and active rather than passive participation on the part of the consumer. In this case, readers can immediately express their opinions on environmental issues filling in a questionnaire at the end of the page or share ideas and comments through social networks such as

[36] European Commission, "The EU and Energy Union and Climate Action" (2017), www.op.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/energy/en, accessed 25 March 2018.

Facebook and Twitter. Since many traditional media (newspapers, magazines, broadcast and cable, radio, movies) now have digital forms, the distinction between traditional media and new media is not straightforward and frequently genres tend to innovate through hybridisation. Genres can change, hybridise with and colonise one another. Colonisation is a process that involves invasion of the territorial integrity of one genre by another, often leading to the birth of a new hybrid – both mixed and embedded – genre.[37]

> any text is necessarily shaped by socially available repertoires of genres (for example, the genre of scientific articles, or the genre of advertisements), but may creatively mix genres. There are pressures for texts to follow conventional genres, but also pressures to innovate by mixing genres.[38]

The data under investigation combine different modes and media and the transfer from legal/institutional language to disseminating text-types involves contamination in discursive practices. Accordingly, non-expert citizens have access to new and innovative genres, which can help them understand specialised discourses and contribute to mitigating environmental conflicts and legal disputes.

5. Concluding Remarks

Over the last years, human rights and environment preservation have become more and more interconnected matters and policy makers have recognised that every decision on environmental issues can affect human rights. International institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe have started to highlight the necessity of making citizens participate actively in the decision making process. Consequently, the two institutions have designed informative materials to shorten the knowledge distance between experts and non-experts, in particular among younger generations, and promote a sustainable environment agenda. Through different media the EU and COE have created different resources available online which aim at supporting the current debate on environmental protection as a fundamental human right.

A corpus of different text-types (brochures, leaflets, web pages) was collected from *Compass* and *Teachers' Corner*, respectively the COE's and EU's websites devoted to education and young people, and investigated from a Positive Multimodal Discourse Analysis perspective.

[37] Bhatia, *Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View* (London: Continuum International, 2004).
[38] Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis", in van Dijk, ed., *Discourse as Social Interaction: Discourse Studies, A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, Volume 2 (London: Sage, 1997), 258-294, 262.

The analysis has demonstrated that there is a shift from traditional negative discourses on environmental issues to more positive discourses, providing positive linguistic features as alternatives such as metaphors, pronouns, grammatical and lexical evaluation, etc. Both organisations soften disastrous consequences through counter-discursive strategies going against the typical environmental discourses that usually underline only the destructive consequences of people's selfish behaviour towards nature trying to raise awareness on this delicate issue through "moral panic". Nonetheless, the materials do not omit the threatening consequences of climate change in order to avoid that this softening might have the opposite effect. Both in the written and visual content negative and positive representations often alternate to mitigate the message but also to warn readers to be aware of possible catastrophic situations. The analysis might offer a model of discourse analysis aimed at progressive social change. Negative and positive representations can be useful to critically deconstruct and reconstruct discursive strategies in order to gain a better understanding of problems and possible solutions. In addition, the popularisation of institutional/legal texts is expressed through the interaction of various modes and the hybridisation of media, genres and discourses are responsible for easy-to-read language. Besides, by adopting a self-referential dimension, it seems that the COE and the EU use popularisation as a communicative instrument to promote the institutions themselves and their policies.

Since the interplay between verbal and visual strategies contribute to creating new positive discourses in ecolinguistics, Positive Multimodal Discourse Analysis within ecolinguistics might help find new ways of using verbal and visual language that narrate different stories from the dominant discourses of industrial civilization to move in a progressive direction. These positive stories could encourage citizens, in particular the young, to protect the ecosystems and build a more environmentally friendly society by empowering them as agents of progressive social change.