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Framing Sustainability across Languages: A Corpus-Assisted Metaphor Study of British and Italian Newspaper Discourse

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Abstract

This study investigates the metaphorical framings of sustainability in British and Italian newspaper discourse through a comparable bilingual corpus analysis. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004), and the scenario-based approach (Musolff, 2006, 2016b), the analysis examines a corpus of 1,664,644 tokens compiled from eight national outlets: *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, and *Il Giornale*. Metaphorical expressions were identified within concordances for *sustainab-* and *sostenib-* using an adapted version of MIPVU (Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen et al., 2010), and classified into source domains and scenarios.

The analysis identified 1,976 metaphorical expressions across sixteen source domains. JOURNEY proved by far the most frequent, accounting for over a third of all instances, followed by OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE, COMPETITION, PHYSICAL FORCE, BUILDING, WAR, and PERCEPTION, alongside nine minor domains. The scenario-based analysis revealed that broad domains are elaborated into distinct discursive narratives with specific evaluative and ideological implications. The predominant scenarios construct sustainability as a gradual, forward-directed process compatible with continued economic growth, while narratives of systemic transformation remain largely absent. Creative metaphorical elaborations, though a minority, were employed to challenge dominant assumptions, confirming the capacity of figurative language to both reproduce and contest ideological positions. The study contributes to cross-linguistic metaphor research by providing empirical evidence for shared conceptual patterns and language-specific variation, and reinforces the analytical value of the scenario-based approach as an intermediate level of analysis between broad domains and individual expressions.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Sustainability has become one of the most pervasive and yet most contested concepts in contemporary public discourse. Since the publication of the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), the term has permeated institutional, corporate, and media communication, attaining a degree of prominence with few parallels in contemporary discourse (Krieg & Toivanen, 2021). However, its very ubiquity has not led to conceptual clarity. Rather, sustainability functions as a floating signifier (Catenaccio, 2019): a term that accommodates multiple, and even mutually contradictory, meanings, ranging from calls for radical ecological transformation to business-as-usual strategies repackaged in environmentally conscious language. This conceptual opacity poses significant challenges for communication, particularly when sustainability must be translated from aspirational language into concrete action. Metaphor, as both a cognitive mechanism and a discursive tool, plays a central role in this process of translation. By mapping the structures of familiar, concrete source domains onto the abstract complexities of environmental, economic, and social sustainability, metaphorical framings shape how policymakers, corporations, and broader audiences understand the concept and, consequently, how they engage with it.

Newspaper discourse constitutes a particularly consequential site for the construction of sustainability as a public concept. Despite experiencing gradual circulation decline, broadsheet newspapers continue to exert significant influence over knowledge formation and provide interpretive lens through which readers understand complex issues (Baker et al., 2013; McCombs, 2014). In the case of sustainability, this mediating function is especially significant. Given the abstractness and complexity of the concept (Bonfadelli, 2010), the public relies on mediators that select, synthesise, and evaluate pertinent information. Studies of sustainability in the press have consistently found that media coverage tends to reproduce neoliberal and technocratic frames, presenting sustainability almost exclusively within an economic growth paradigm (Diprose et al., 2018; Lewis, 2000; Yacoumis, 2017). Analysing the metaphorical choices through which newspapers construct sustainability thus provides a window onto the conceptual frameworks that are made available to, and normalised for, their readership.

The present study investigates the metaphorical framings of sustainability in newspaper discourse through a comparative analysis of British and Italian broadsheet press. It examines how metaphors drawn from domains such as JOURNEY, BUILDING, WAR, COMPETITION, and others construct sustainability as a target domain, and what communicative, evaluative, and ideological functions these framings serve. While an extensive body of research has explored metaphor in newspaper discourse (e.g. Hart, 2024; Kövecses, 2018a; Krennmayr, 2011, 2015a; Musolff, 2015; Semino, 2002; Taylor, 2021) and environmental discourse (e.g.,

Atanasova & and Koteyko, 2015; Augé, 2020, 2023b; Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023; Iori, 2024; Nerlich, 2012), metaphor in sustainability discourse has received comparatively limited attention. Existing studies have focused predominantly on corporate sustainability reports and green living blogs, identifying the JOURNEY metaphor as the dominant framing device for sustainability in these genres (Atanasova, 2019a; Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023; Milne et al., 2006) and documenting the role of metaphor in reinforcing weak sustainability paradigms aligned with continued economic growth (Milne et al., 2006; Princen, 2010). However, the metaphorical construction of sustainability in newspaper discourse, where the concept reaches a wider and more heterogeneous audience, remains comparatively underexplored (Frischherz, 2010). Moreover, systematic cross-linguistic analyses of the range of metaphorical source domains in newspaper sustainability discourse remain scarce, and, to my knowledge, no study has yet compared English and Italian data in this context. Furthermore, while studies of metaphor in discourse have attended to properties such as the gradable nature of metaphoricity (e.g., Goatly, 1997; Fuoli et al., 2021b), the role of topic-triggering in media language (e.g., Semino, 2009; Kövecses, 2018), and the signalling function of metaphor flags (e.g., Ahrens et al., 2024; Steen et al., 2010), these features have rarely been examined systematically within corpora and considered in terms of how they interact with one another and with the conventions of newspaper language.

The present research addresses these gaps by combining Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004), scenario-based analysis (Musolff, 2006), and an adapted MIPVU procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen et al., 2010) to investigate a comparable bilingual corpus of newspaper articles. In doing so, the study develops an analytical framework that adapts the MIPVU procedure to the specific demands of bilingual, discourse-oriented metaphor research, additionally incorporating a sub-target taxonomy designed to account for the fragmented representation of sustainability across the multiple issues it encompasses.

Three research questions guide the investigation:

1. What metaphorical framings are used in newspaper discourse about sustainability, and what communicative functions do they serve?
2. What shared patterns and variations in metaphor use emerge across different languages and newspapers?
3. What features of figurative language characterise sustainability discourse, and how do they contribute to shaping it?

The notion of metaphorical framing in RQ1 refers to the function of the metaphors at a discourse level, focussing on how the lens of the source domain selected frames the topic under discussion, shaping perception and evaluations of it, and performing ideological functions, while RQ2 focusses instead on the individual or patterned linguistic realisations of metaphor use that instantiate such framings and can be compared across languages and publications. The grounding for this distinction is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

RQ3 examines instead the features of figurative language, that is, whether they are direct or indirect, topic-triggered, their idiomaticity, how conventional or creative they are and, often related to this, the level of detail in the scenario delineated. These factors are discussed in detail in Ch.4.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical foundations for this study by tracing the development of metaphor theory from its cognitive underpinnings to its discourse-oriented applications, and by reviewing the methodological procedures for identifying metaphor in naturally occurring texts. Chapter 3 contextualises the target domain by examining sustainability as a contested concept. It traces the institutional development of the notion, the conceptual frameworks through which it has been articulated, and the role of corporate and media discourse in shaping its meaning, before surveying prior research on metaphor in sustainability and environmental communication. Chapter 4 presents the research design and methodology, describing the construction of the comparable bilingual corpus, the metaphor identification procedure, and the annotation framework developed for the analysis. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the results of the analysis. Chapter 5 presents a quantitative overview of the full dataset, reporting the distribution of the metaphors identified across sixteen source domains and eight newspapers. The chapter then focuses on the JOURNEY domain (Section 5.2), the most frequent source domain in the corpus, analysing it through the lens of six overarching scenarios. Chapter 6 presents instead the remaining source domains and concludes with a cross-cutting discussion (Section 6.8) of the broader features of figurative language emerging from the corpus. Chapter 7 draws together the findings, discusses their implications in relation to the research questions and the existing literature, acknowledges the limitations of the study, and outlines directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Metaphor: From Cognitive Mechanism to Discourse Practice

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for the analysis of metaphor in discourse, moving from a general introduction to metaphor theory to a detailed account of analytical approach for metaphor in discourse. It begins by introducing Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the cognitive architecture underlying metaphorical thought (Section 2.1), tracing the mechanisms that ground and constrain mappings (Section 2.1.1), the body of cross-linguistic research that tests the interplay of universal grounding and culture-specific variation (Section 2.1.2), and the hierarchical model that integrates embodied, cultural, and contextual motivation (Section 2.1.3). The chapter then turns to the discourse-oriented developments that shifted attention from abstract conceptual structures to metaphor as communicative practice (Section 2.2), examining the functions of metaphor and the mechanism of framing (Section 2.2.1), the evaluative and ideological dimensions foregrounded by Critical Metaphor Analysis (Section 2.2.2), and the analytical categories, from broad conceptual domains to discourse-level scenarios, through which metaphorical framings can be systematically investigated (Section 2.2.3). Section 2.3 addresses the gradable nature of metaphoricity along a conventional-creative continuum (Section 2.3.1) and the specific characteristics of metaphor in newspaper discourse (Section 2.3.2). The final section surveys the methodological approaches to metaphor analysis in naturally occurring texts (Section 2.4) from Conceptual Metaphor Theory's early identification practices through MIP and MIPVU to discourse-driven procedures such as Critical Metaphor Analysis, discussing their respective strengths, limitations, and the challenges involved in bridging the linguistic and conceptual levels.

2.1 The Cognitive Paradigm: Metaphor as a Fundamental Mechanism of Thought

As Julich-Warpakowski and Pérez Sobrino (2023) note, “deciding on what counts as metaphorical is very much influenced by a specific research question and more fundamentally by the theoretical understanding of what *metaphor* is” (p. 6). Consequently, any study intending to analyse metaphor must first engage with the evolution of the concept within linguistic theory and its multifaceted nature as understood from different theoretical perspectives.

The understanding of metaphor that remains perhaps the most immediate layman definition treats it as an ornamental, and therefore noticeable, use of language, as opposed to basic and

conventional literal language (Julich-Warpakowski & Pérez Sobrino, 2023). Interest in the role of metaphor in discourse, however, can be traced back to Aristotle, who, in *The Art of Rhetoric*, already points out that metaphors are frequently used in communication, defining them as “the application of an alien name by transference” (quoted in Mahon, 1999, p. 71). He observes that they “bring things vividly ‘before the eyes’ of listeners or readers” (1999, p. 76), a feature that renders them particularly helpful as a tool of learning and persuasion (Demjén & Semino, 2020). This understanding has informed centuries of scholarship that regarded metaphor not simply as an ornamental device in language, but as a conceptual tool for structuring, restructuring and even creating reality (Kövecses, 2016). Other philosophers, such as Locke, Vico and Kant (see Jäkel, 1999; Mahon, 1999) discuss metaphor in language and its relation to metaphor in thought (Demjén & Semino, 2016). This tradition continued into the twentieth century with, e.g., Richards (1936), Black (1962) and Kittay (1984). However, the paradigm shift in the approach to metaphor is considered to be the introduction of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) with the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The cognitive approach to metaphor they introduce adopts as the underlying principle the notion that metaphor is a fundamental component of cognition, manifesting in language and signalling underlying conceptual structures. Metaphor is not a figure of speech confined to poetic or literary writing and peripheral to serious thought and communication, but rather central to both. Lakoff and Johnson postulate that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). Hence, figurative language should not be seen as separate from ordinary linguistic processing, but rather as contributing to the structure of both language and cognition (Gibbs, 1994).

The theory developed considerably in subsequent work. Lakoff and Turner (1989) extend the framework to poetic metaphor, demonstrating that even creative literary uses build upon the same conceptual foundations as everyday metaphorical language. Lakoff (1993) further elaborates the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphor, arguing that abstract reasoning itself depends fundamentally on metaphorical mappings from bodily and spatial experience. Gibbs (1994) provides experimental evidence supporting the psychological reality of conceptual metaphors, showing that people’s understanding of figurative language is indeed guided by systematic conceptual mappings rather than being processed as anomalous or deviant usage and that human cognition is fundamentally shaped by various figurative processes. He concluded that metaphor, metonymy, irony, and other tropes are not “linguistic distortions of literal mental thought” (Gibbs, 1994, p. 1), but rather the basic schemes by which people conceptualise their experience and the external world. This body of work established CMT as a dominant paradigm in cognitive linguistics, though it also attracted critiques that would eventually prompt methodological refinements and theoretical developments (e.g., Cameron, 2003; Charteris-Black, 2004; Grady, 1997; Kövecses, 2005, 2020; Musolff, 2006), as discussed throughout this chapter.

Metaphora literally means “carrying across” or transference from one point (the source domain) to another (the target domain) (Levin, 1982). Thus, conceptual metaphors operate by drawing systematic sets of correspondences between two domains of experience. This set

of correspondences is usually defined as a mapping, projecting the structure of a source domain (typically more concrete, physical, or familiar) onto a target domain (typically more abstract, complex, or less directly experienced). Domains are conceptual packages including a range of connected elements, based on coherent areas of experience or knowledge, such as JOURNEY, WAR, BUILDING, or ORGANISM (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For example, the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR allows us to understand verbal disagreements through the domain of WAR, which includes a number of components such as opponents, weapons, attack and defence, victory and defeat. These components are mapped onto the participants in the exchange, the claims and ideas they advance, and the outcome of the interaction. We therefore understand verbal disputes through the lens of physical conflict, with expressions such as “Your claims are *indefensible*”, “He *attacked every weak point* in my argument”, or “I’ve never *won* an argument with him”, and this becomes, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note, “the *ordinary* way of having an argument and talking about one” (p. 5, italics in original). The similarities drawn between source and target, which in this case refer to the conflictual nature of the confrontation, are described as “the grounds” of the metaphor (Goatly, 1997). The mappings allow “forms of reasoning and words from one domain [...] to be used in the other [...] domain” (Lakoff, 1996, p. 63), that is, the target is understood in terms of the source. Another feature of mappings is unidirectionality, which refers to the principle that mappings operate from source to target, and not vice versa; we understand arguments in terms of war, and not wars in terms of argument.

2.1.1 Motivations for Metaphors: Image Schemas, Primary Metaphors, Cultural Variation and Context

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that mappings are systematic rather than arbitrary. This systematicity arises because mappings are grounded in fundamental patterns of bodily experience known as image schemas (Johnson, 1987). These schemas provide the structural scaffolding that ensures mappings preserve a coherent topology across domains. As recurring, dynamic patterns emerging from sensorimotor activities, such as orienting ourselves in space, moving through our environment, or manipulating physical objects, they provide coherence and structure to human experience (Gibbs, 1994; Johnson, 1987). Such structures consist of entities like participants, objects, events, states, and goals, which are organised through various relations, including causality, temporal sequences, part-whole patterns, or relative locations (Johnson, 1987). They function as gestalt structures: unified wholes in which individual components are defined by their relationship to the schema itself. These schemas exist at such a high level of generality and abstraction that they serve as consistent templates for an indefinitely large range of experiences, perceptions, and mental images (Johnson, 1987). Rather than being filled with rich propositional content, they are skeletal structures containing only a few basic parts and relations. They are manifestations of experiences that repeat regularly, and thus surface regularly as reliable scaffolding for wider conceptualisations, through schemata such as CONTAINER, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL,

VERTICALITY, and FORCE. Therefore, the same image schemas can provide structure to many concrete and abstract concepts “without giving much meaning to any of them” (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023, p. 36).

The notion of image schema underpins the functioning of mappings by acting as a constraint. This constraint is articulated through the Invariance principle, which posits that metaphorical mappings must preserve the cognitive topology (the image-schematic structure) of the source domain in a way that is consistent with the target domain (Lakoff, 1993). This principle explains why certain mappings are possible while others are not. Image schemas motivate metaphors at a foundational level, with many primary metaphors relying on these structures (Kövecses, 2020). Primary metaphors, first proposed by Grady (1997), are mappings based on primary scenes, that is, minimal, recurring episodes of subjective experience characterised by a tight correlation between two distinct dimensions. A physical circumstance such as feeling the weight of an object is associated with a cognitive response, which is, in this case, experiencing the strain of effort, instantiating the primary metaphor DIFFICULTY IS HEAVINESS. Primary metaphors are combined to produce more complex compound metaphors: for instance, the primary metaphors ORGANISATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE and VIABILITY IS ERECTNESS combine in the complex metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS. This compositional nature accounts for apparent gaps in metaphorical mappings. Because a compound metaphor is the sum of its primary parts, it only inherits the logic of those specific parts. This is why we do not conventionally speak of “windows” or “tenants” of a theory; while these are essential elements of a physical building, they are not present in the underlying primary metaphors that relate structure and persistence to logical viability. Thus, the complex metaphor is selective, projecting only what the primary scenes allow. The stability of these mappings is due to the fact that primary metaphors rely on associations grounded in universal aspects of human experience. Consequently, learning them is not a choice: “universal primary experiences produce universal primary metaphors” (Kövecses, 2005, p. 3).

Furthermore, the introduction of primary metaphors problematised the notion of directionality in mappings as proceeding from concrete to abstract domains. Research on primary metaphors, such as MORE IS UP, suggests that, already at this level, the selection of a suitable source domain is more accurately explained through notions of specificity and accessibility (Grady, 1997; Johnson, 1987). MORE IS UP combines a domain where experience can be judged more easily and reliably (vertical extension) with one where assessment is less consistent across speakers (quantity), thus less readily ensuring the shared frame of reference that successful mappings require. The selection of source domains therefore appears to be linked to their intersubjective accessibility (Sweetser, 1990), and it is this cognitive “asymmetry of accessibility” (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 65) that often logically leads to more concrete domains being selected as sources.

Given their grounding in universal bodily experience, we might expect metaphor to be relatively uniform across languages and cultures. However, empirical research reveals considerable variation in metaphorical conceptualisations (Kövecses, 2005; Mueller, 2016;

Musolff, 2016a). Accounting for this variation requires integrating cultural dimensions into the cognitive framework. Metaphors, although grounded in shared bodily experience, “are forged by cultural layers of knowledge” (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023, p. 39)

Kövecses (2005; 2010) addresses this dimension and extends CMT by introducing a focus on cultural background, demonstrating that variation in metaphor appears to be as important and common as universality. Cultural variation occurs at several distinct levels. For instance, while the target domain of LOVE is conceptualised as JOURNEY, UNITY, or HUNTING in many languages, such as English and Hungarian, specific dialects of Chinese conceptualise LOVE as FLYING A KITE (Yang, 2002); this is the conceptual level. Variation also appears in the lexis used to instantiate a metaphor; Goatly (2007) notes that even with emotion metaphors grounded in metonymic mappings derived from physical responses, variation is present both at the level of the mappings themselves, and in the particular lexis used to instantiate the conceptual metaphor, at the linguistic level. Additionally, variation often occurs at the level of frequency, since languages may share conceptual mappings and lexicalisations but vary considerably in terms of how often the linguistic metaphors are used. Finally, variation is also evident in the decoding of meaning, as seen in Musolff’s (2016a) observation that even for a seemingly stable metaphorical expression such as the *body politic*, students from different countries provided different interpretations.

These patterns of variation, Kövecses proposed, are caused by several distinct factors. First, bodily experience can be used selectively, with different aspects being selected as relevant in metaphorical conceptualisation. Second, primary metaphors, although shared across cultures, may be combined differently in different languages and cultures, therefore leading to different complex metaphors. Third, culture and cognitive processes can override bodily experience itself. As Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2019) observes, cultural knowledge functions as a “culture-specific sieve” (p. 46), filtering and shaping which aspects of source domains are activated and which conceptual mappings become conventionalised within particular linguistic and cultural communities. The observation that metaphors exhibit both universal tendencies and culture-specific variations points to the existence of multiple motivational bases underlying metaphorical thought. Grady (1999) proposed a foundational distinction between correlation and resemblance as two fundamental mechanisms grounding metaphor. Correlation explains image schemas and primary metaphors, being based on experiential co-occurrence. This experiential grounding means that correlation-based metaphors tend to be universal, emerging from shared aspects of human embodiment. Resemblance, by contrast, represents the more traditional view of metaphor, suggesting that mappings arise from perceived likeness between two things or events. The similarity can be real and objective, as in “*roses on one’s cheeks*” (Kövecses, 2016, p. 17), or rather perceived, when certain actions in life and their consequences are considered as gambles with a win-or-lose outcome. It can also be situated at the generic level, as in the conceptual metaphor HUMAN LIFE CYCLE IS THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PLANT, where both domains share a generic-level structure regarding an entity that comes into existence, begins to grow, reaches a point in its development when it is strongest, then begins to decline, and finally goes out of existence (Kövecses, 2016).

As previously discussed, in addition to these two basic mechanisms, correlation and resemblance, culture plays a central role. Shared knowledge and history within a discourse community can determine which source domains are salient and which mappings become conventionalised. These three types of motivation (correlation, resemblance, and culture) are not mutually exclusive but work together, with the relative contribution of each varying across metaphors. Primary metaphors show the strongest correlation-based motivation, complex conventional metaphors show more cultural motivation, and creative metaphors often foreground resemblance.

Furthermore, metaphor theory has increasingly recognised the critical role of context in shaping metaphorical meaning. The communicative situation in which a metaphor is produced can influence the elements perceived as salient in the mapping and thus its interpretation (Kövecses, 2010, 2020; Semino, 2008). For instance, while a mother is not inherently defined by strictness, the *Mother Nature* metaphor in climate change discourse can emphasise the STRICT behaviour of a metaphorical MOTHER (Augé, 2019b). Consequently, the grounds of the metaphor are contextually tailored to meet specific communicative goals; in this instance, mapping maternal authority onto Nature's power over environmental resources. This process introduces novel features that shift the perspective of the recipient on the target domain (Augé, 2019b). The context of production is therefore vital for metaphor interpretation, as it accounts for significant variations in meaning across different settings. This recognition of contextual influence suggests a cline of metaphors, ranging from universal primary metaphors to non-universal context-induced ones (Kövecses, 2016).

2.1.2 Cross-linguistic Metaphor Studies

The theoretical claims regarding the interplay of universal embodied grounding and culture-specific variation are empirically tested in a substantial body of cross-linguistic metaphor research. Such studies investigate whether metaphorical conceptualisations, and their linguistic realisations, are shared across languages or diverge in systematic ways, and what factors account for similarities and differences.

At a broad typological level, Kövecses (2005) identifies several conceptual metaphors as near-universal across unrelated languages, including English, Chinese, and Hungarian. These shared mappings operate primarily at a high level of schematicity: HAPPINESS is conceptualised through UP, LIGHT, and FLUID IN A CONTAINER; ANGER is understood as a PRESSURISED CONTAINER. Crucially, however, languages fill these shared generic-level schemas with culture-specific content. Matsuki (1995) demonstrates this clearly in the case of anger: while all the metaphors identified for anger in English by Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) are also attested in Japanese, Japanese additionally groups a large set of anger-related expressions around the concept of *hara* (literally, 'belly'), a culturally specific locus that produces the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS (IN THE) HARA, which is limited to Japanese. Similarly, Yu (1995) finds that Chinese anger metaphors are grounded in heat and pressure, as in English, but

specify gas rather than fluid as the medium. These findings illustrate a recurring pattern: a shared schematic structure at the generic level, with variation in the specific content that instantiates it.

Contrastive studies of metaphor in press discourse yield a consistent picture. Charteris-Black and Ennis (2001) analysed English and Spanish financial reporting during the 1997 stock market crash, finding strong similarities in conceptual metaphors across both languages, including ECONOMY AS ORGANISM, market movements as PHYSICAL MOVEMENTS, and sharp downturns as NATURAL DISASTERS, alongside subtle differences in linguistic realisation: Spanish reporting showed a preference for ORGANISM metaphors foregrounding psychological mood, possibly linked to the socio-cultural influence of religion, while English reporting favoured nautically based PHYSICAL MOVEMENT metaphors, reflecting Britain's historical identity as a maritime power. Charteris-Black and Musolff (2003) compare British and German press coverage of the euro, finding that both languages draw on UP/DOWN MOVEMENT and HEALTH metaphors, but that English reporting additionally employs COMBAT metaphors in which the euro is an active agent, whereas German reporting characterises the euro as a passive beneficiary of institutional action. Wang et al. (2013) extend this type of analysis to British and Russian economic press during the 2008 financial crisis, again finding shared high-level domains (LIVING OR SICK ORGANISM, PHYSICAL MOVEMENTS, DISASTER, WATER) but differences in frequency, frame structure, and specific imagery. Russian reporting, for instance, included a distinct frame in which the crisis is personified as a "Doctor Crisis" who administers a necessary cure; additionally, while English draws on Hollywood monster imagery, Russian draws on national folklore figures and World War II events. As several of these studies note, the dominance of English as the language of international business may also exert pressure on the metaphorical conventions of other languages, a dynamic that is relevant when comparing a major international language with a nationally bounded one.

Four studies focus specifically on English and Italian. Semino (2002) examines metaphors used to represent the euro in British and Italian broadsheet press around its introduction on 1 January 1999. The most frequent source domains (BIRTH, JOURNEY, CONTAINER, and SPORTS) are shared between the two languages, a finding she attributes to similarities in the underlying conceptual metaphorical systems and to the cross-border circulation of reporting. Differences in linguistic realisation, however, reflect both cultural specificity and divergent attitudes toward European monetary union. Italia-specific domains are the BIRTH domain, realised through the lexicalisation *battesimo* ('christening') and reflecting the greater salience of the religious ceremony in Italian culture, and the SPORTS domain, drawing on cycling, a sport with considerably higher cultural prominence in Italy than in the UK. English-specific expressions, by contrast, encode scepticism toward the euro: the verb *lock* characterises the fixing of exchange rates in terms of constraint, while the idiom *one size fits all* frames common interest rates as an inflexible and ill-fitting imposition. Deignan and Potter (2004) take a different approach, examining metaphorical uses of body-part terms across large reference corpora of English and Italian. They find substantial overlap, based either on universal bodily experience (e.g., equating sight with paying attention) and seemingly traceable to the body-mind mappings (Sweetser, 1990) or on shared cultural history, with

roots in folk beliefs. In particular, some common metaphorical expressions are grounded in shared notions about the connection between a particular body part with particular emotions (e.g., expressions comprising English *heart* and Italian *cuore* referring to the quality of generosity, such as *have a heart* and *heart of gold*, translatable as *essere di buon cuore* and *cuore d'oro*). Differences emerge instead in relation to the particular non-literal senses each language has conventionalised around individual terms: Italian has a wider range of expressions than English in which *bocca* ('mouth') stands for eating, and by extension stands metaphorically for feelings and behaviour. The authors nonetheless note how such differences seem slight in comparison with the huge numbers of similarities found.

Philip (2006) analyses metaphorical uses of eleven basic colour terms in English and Italian corpus data. Both languages ground colour metaphors in universal physical experiences, for instance linking red, the colour of blood, to anger and passion, and share connotative associations, linking black to illegality. However, colour terms are substantially less frequent in Italian than in English, and Italian has conventionalised connections between colour terms and literary and media genres (*giallo* for detective fiction, *rosa* for romance and celebrity gossip) that are absent in English. Ponterotto (2017) uses instead a questionnaire-based approach to examine how English and Italian speakers associate motion verbs with happiness. While both languages associate jumping with the emotion, English speakers draw on a richer set of motion verbs (e.g., *bounce*, *jump*, *skip*, and *hop*), and Italian speakers identify a larger set of labels for the emotion (e.g., *gioia*, 'joy' or *allegria*, 'glee/mirth'). Across these four studies, the evidence points to a wide shared conceptual framework, with differences emerging at the levels of frequency, linguistic realisation, cultural associations conventionalised in each language, and context-specific communicative functions.

Contrastive work in environmental and sustainability-related discourse is more limited, but the same broad pattern holds. Yu (2020) analyses 180 CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) reports from Chinese, American, and Italian companies, finding three conceptual metaphors shared across all three languages, MANAGER, PROTECTOR, and TRAVELLER, attributed to the standardisation of global business discourse. However, language-specific metaphors were also found: the BEE metaphor in Chinese, the STEWARDSHIP metaphor in American English, and the FIGHTER metaphor in Italian, utilised to represent the company's good intentions, caring attitude, and responsible behaviour, contributing to building an environmentally responsible corporate image. Augé (2019b) examines the MOTHER EARTH/NATURE metaphor in British, American, Spanish, and French press coverage of climate change across a forty-year period, finding that journalists from all four cultures draw on three frames rooted in mythological characterisations of the mother figure: NURTURING, VICTIMISED, and STRICT. The relative frequency of these frames, however, varies across languages: the NURTURING dimension is less prominent in Spanish reporting, while the VICTIMISED MOTHER is less foregrounded in French. Thus, while there is a shared use of the MOTHER metaphor, exploiting the STRICT FATHER and NURTURING PARENT frames (Lakoff, 2004), language and culture determine differential foci in the features that are foregrounded.

2.1.3 The Schematicity Hierarchy: Integrating Body, Culture, and Context

The recognition that metaphors derive from multiple sources of motivation (correlation, resemblance, culture and context) raises a crucial question concerning the relationship between these different motivational forces and the conceptual structures that constitute metaphors. Kövecses (2020) addresses this tension through his Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which proposes that the varying types of motivation operate at different levels within a schematicity hierarchy consisting of four interlocking levels: image schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces. Two fundamental distinctions structure this hierarchy. First, image schemas constitute “analogue conceptual structures” grounded in continuous patterns of bodily experience, whereas domains, frames, and mental spaces are propositional in nature. Second, image schemas, domains, and frames represent decontextualised static structures stored in long-term memory (operating offline), whereas mental spaces function online in working memory during actual discourse production and comprehension.

At the most schematic level, image schemas provide what Kövecses (2020) terms “meaningfulness” (p. 157): the embodied foundation for metaphorical conceptualisation. As previously established in Section 2.1.1, these skeletal structures (e.g., CONTAINER, VERTICALITY, FORCE) emerge from recurring sensorimotor experience and constrain metaphorical mappings through the Invariance Principle, ensuring that metaphors preserve coherent topology across domains.

Domains, defined by Langacker (1987) as “coherent areas of conceptualisation relative to which semantic units may be characterised” (p. 488), occupy the second level. Domains such as JOURNEY, BUILDING, or BODY are propositional and contain considerably more elements than image schemas, making them more information-rich while remaining relatively schematic. Distinguishing domains from the next level proves challenging precisely because both share similar definitional characteristics; the distinction rests primarily on degrees of schematicity.

Frames provide less schematic, more conceptually specific information than domains. A single domain can be elaborated through multiple distinct frames, each highlighting particular aspects of the domain through roles and relations within it. For instance, the BODY domain includes frames such as INGESTION (*digest an idea*), MANIPULATION (*grasp an idea*), or EXERCISING (*a mental exercise*) (Sullivan, 2013). Together, these frames instantiate the generic-level metaphor THE MIND IS THE BODY (Sweetser, 1990).

Mental spaces represent the most granular level of cognitive structure, functioning as transient, partial assemblies formed during thought and speech to facilitate immediate understanding and action (Fauconnier, 1994). Mental spaces borrow their structure from frames but elaborate said structure with specific contextual information. Crucially, they can be structured by a single frame or draw simultaneously on roles and relations from several distinct frames. Musolff’s (2006) notion of scenario, which will be discussed further below, operates at the same level, capturing how speakers and hearers metaphorically conceptualise their experiences in situated, context-dependent terms.

Kövecses (2020) emphasises that conceptual metaphors cannot and should not be linked to a single conceptual structure; rather, any given conceptual metaphor consists of image-schema, domain, frame, and mental space forming an interlocking hierarchy. Image-schema level metaphors (including primary metaphors) define generic-level meaningfulness; domain- and frame-level metaphors provide decontextualised meanings; mental space metaphors capture contextual meanings in ongoing discourse. This hierarchical model also clarifies how different types of metaphorical motivation operate at different levels of conceptual structure. Correlation-based motivation operates primarily at the image schema level, where recurring bodily experiences constrain mappings through the Invariance Principle. Resemblance-based motivation becomes more prominent at the domain level, where perceived similarities between coherent areas of conceptualisation enable systematic correspondences. Cultural motivation is central at the frame level, where shared knowledge within discourse communities determines which aspects of domains receive elaboration and which remain backgrounded. Finally, contextual factors exert their strongest influence at the mental space level, where specific communicative goals and immediate discourse contexts shape how generic roles are filled with specific referents. The schematicity hierarchy thus offers a principled account of how bodily experience, culture, and context interact to motivate metaphorical conceptualisation.

The prominence of context at the mental space level points to a central dimension of metaphor that requires further examination: how metaphors function in actual discourse. While the conceptual structures discussed thus far (image schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces) provide the cognitive architecture underlying metaphorical thought, metaphors ultimately manifest and operate within specific communicative situations. The mental space level, where contextual factors exert their strongest influence, represents the point at which abstract conceptual structures intersect with the pragmatic realities of language use. Understanding this intersection requires shifting attention from metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon to metaphor as a discourse practice.

It should be noted that in the present study culture is understood in the specific sense that the schematicity hierarchy assigns to it: a frame-level factor that conditions which aspects of a shared source domain are selected for elaboration and which are left in the background. The cases of cross-linguistic divergence in conceptual mapping (such as the conceptualisation of LOVE as FLYING A KITE) describe variation at the level of whole target concepts. The variation documented in the present corpus operates at a finer grain: British and Italian sustainability discourse draws on the same repertoire of source domains and scenarios, and differs predominantly in the relative weight assigned to each and in the particular lexis that instantiates them.

2.2 The Discourse Turn: From Conceptual Structures to Language in Use

The cognitive perspective, though essential for understanding how metaphor works in the mind, does not offer a comprehensive account of all significant aspects involved in the production of metaphors (e.g., Augé, 2023b; Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023; Cameron, 2003; Deignan, 2005a, p. 200; Musolff, 2016a). Metaphors do not occur in isolation as abstract cognitive structures, but are utilised in actual discourse contexts, shaped by communicative purposes, social relationships, and rhetorical goals.

In their initial introduction of CMT, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) relied overwhelmingly on linguistic examples as evidence to argue that metaphor is fundamental to human cognition. However, cognitive approaches to metaphor prioritise the underlying conceptual structure over its “accidental linguistic form” (Musolff, 2004, p. 1). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) articulate this position in *Philosophy in the Flesh*: “Metaphorical thought, in the form of cross-domain mappings is primary; metaphorical language is secondary” (p. 123). This assertion establishes an unequivocal hierarchy, that subordinates verbal expressions to underlying cognitive mappings. Variation in linguistic realisation is not considered a phenomenon for independent study; rather, it merely serves to provide empirical evidence substantiating the existence of specific conceptual metaphors, which manifest in language through different expressions (Demjén & Semino, 2016). Yet, metaphor occurs when “a unit of discourse is used to refer to an object, concept, process, quality, relationship or world to which it does not conventionally refer, or colligates with a unit(s) with which it does not conventionally colligate” (Goatly, 1997, pp. 105–106). Hence, the evidence for the existence of conceptual metaphors relies upon their linguistic realisation. Additionally, as Cameron (2003) observes, the focus on decontextualised conceptual mappings risks overlooking crucial aspects of how metaphor functions in real language use. Linguistic metaphors evidently do not occur in a vacuum, but are produced and interpreted within specific communicative situations shaped by participants, purposes, and social contexts. Therefore, a complete theory of metaphor must also incorporate a pragmatic perspective, interpreting metaphorical choices in relation to their specific discourse contexts (Charteris-Black, 2004; Forceville, 1996).

When people employ metaphors in conversation, journal articles, political speeches, or scientific writing, they do so not merely to make abstract concepts comprehensible through more concrete domains, but to present and construe issues in particular ways. This recognition has prompted a shift towards discourse-oriented approaches that examine metaphor as it emerges in naturally occurring texts and interactions. Where cognitive approaches focus primarily on the conceptual structures underlying metaphors, discourse approaches attend to how metaphors are actually used, the communicative work they accomplish, and the interests that particular metaphorical framings serve. As Julich-Warpakowski and Pérez Sobrino (2023) observe, “the discourse turn [...] revolutionised the study of metaphor in that it re-emphasised the specific (linguistic, socio-cultural) aspects of metaphor in concrete usage events” (p. 3). This shift challenged early practices of interpreting linguistic usage as mere “surface manifestation of conceptual metaphor” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 244), prompting recognition that discourse metaphors constitute an analytical level in their own right, whose relationship to conceptual metaphors requires explanation rather than assumption (Zinken, 2007; Zinken et al., 2008). These approaches recognised that while

conceptual structures may constrain metaphorical language use, the actual realisation of metaphor in discourse involves contextual factors, rhetorical purposes, and dynamic meaning negotiation that cannot be captured by conceptual mappings alone.

This approach requires attention to the immediate co-text, the broader discourse context, the genre and medium of communication, the identities and relationships of interlocutors, and the sociopolitical circumstances surrounding language use. A substantial body of research has adopted a (critical) discourse analytic approach to the use of metaphor and its framing effects, collecting authentic linguistic data and systematically analysing the metaphor choices and patterns found within them (Demjén & Semino, 2020).

2.2.1 Communicative Functions and the Mechanism of Framing

In a discourse-oriented perspective, it is fundamental to examine why speakers employ metaphors in communication. Ortony (1975) proposed three hypotheses regarding the communicative functions of metaphors, which were then tested empirically by Fainsilber and Ortony (1987) in the context of emotional expression: the compactness hypothesis, the vividness hypothesis, and the inexpressibility hypothesis. The compactness hypothesis holds that metaphors offer highly efficient means of communication, conveying dense information more economically than literal prose; this explains their utility in filling lexical gaps and in enabling the quick establishment of common ground (Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023; Gibbs & Colston, 2012). The vividness hypothesis posits that metaphors produce richer, more evocative accounts of experience that better capture the subjective intensity of experience than literal prose (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987; Gibbs, 1994; Ortony, 1975). The inexpressibility hypothesis argues that metaphors enable communication of ideas that would be difficult or even impossible to articulate through literal language (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987; Gibbs, 1994; Ortony, 1975). A more comprehensive framework of the discursive functions of metaphor draws on Halliday's (1978) model, which distinguishes between the textual, interpersonal, and ideational roles of language (Charteris-Black, 2004; Goatly, 1997; Semino, 2008). The textual function concerns the contribution of metaphor to discourse organisation and coherence: metaphors may summarise content, enhance internal cohesion, or foreground specific elements within a text. The ideational function refers to the use of metaphor to explain, reason, persuade, and influence how reality is represented. The interpersonal function encompasses the use of metaphor to convey emotions and attitudes, entertain, and evoke humour, contributing to the construction of personal and social relationships. These functions are not mutually exclusive, with metaphors fulfilling more than one simultaneously (Goatly, 1997). Underlying all of these functions is the fundamental mechanism that metaphor enables: framing.

The term frame, introduced in linguistics by Fillmore (1982), denotes a “‘prefab” chunk of knowledge structure” (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 17). It is the schematic representation of a situation, incorporating the participants, objects, processes, and relationships typically

associated with that situation. For instance, the COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION frame includes buyers, sellers, goods, money, exchange, and so forth. Understanding the meaning of a word entails accessing the frame it evokes, along with the roles, relations, and expectations inherent to that frame (Fillmore & Atkins, 1992). The frame evoked can be structured on the basis of “general knowledge, knowledge that exists independently of the text at hand, or from the ongoing text itself” (Fillmore, 1982, p. 386). The FrameNet project (Ruppenhofer et al., 2010), an attempt to inventory the frames and event-frames that receive expression in English, divides the frame elements into core and non-core. Although the distinction can occasionally prove ambiguous (Hart, 2024), it usefully differentiates between core elements, which are essential to the meaning of the frame and uniquely characterise it, and non-core elements, which may participate in the frame without being definitionally necessary.

As Lakoff and Wehling (2016) note, “facts” only “become meaningful as our minds integrate them into larger interpretative templates” (p. 75). Frames provide such templates, fulfilling the fundamental role of organising principles that enable individuals to make sense of issues by turning “meaningless” aspects “into something that is meaningful” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). The templates, however, are not neutral representations of events; to frame, as Entman (1993) maintains, is to select “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). This capacity of frames to shape interpretation carries significant implications for how meaning is constructed in discourse.

In cases where an appropriate cognitive frame is unavailable or a new schematisation is desired, a speaker can project the structure of a familiar frame onto the new situation (Fillmore, 1982). Metaphor can be seen as a cognitive process of “frame-projection” (Hart, 2024, p. 312), whereby the source domain, and the framework of entities, processes, relationships and entailments it provides, are mobilised to provide a template to understand and evaluate the target, facilitating some inferences while making others unlikely (Demjén & Semino, 2020; Entman, 1993; Musolff, 2024; Semino et al., 2018). Metaphors activate entire structured knowledge systems, complete with their associated evaluations, typical sequences of events, and normative expectations. They narrow the range of assumptions that are usually associated with the topic, present a coherent interpretation and suggest a seemingly promising course of action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Selecting a particular source domain to describe and discuss a topic entails framing it through the lens of that domain, which highlights some aspects of the target domain (the similarities that can be established between the two) and hides others (the differences that would not fit the comparison) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Semino et al., 2018).

Consequently, metaphors function argumentatively by establishing premises through frame activation, structuring reasoning through the logic inherent to the source frame, and implying conclusions through the typical outcomes of the frame (Burgers et al., 2016). In other words, as figurative language is shaping cognitive construals in discourse, it typically moulds viewpoint on the relevant content as well (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). Metaphors are

frequently utilised in conceptualising political issues, often carrying embedded attitudes and values that influence public perception (Charteris-Black, 2004; Krennmayr, 2015; Musolff, 2004, 2006; Semino, 2002). The selective focus they enable allows speakers to mobilise a frame-coherent perspective, effectively steering the manner in which others reason about a given topic (Hart, 2018). By framing an issue through a specific source domain, a speaker implicitly invites the audience to adopt the values and expectations associated with that domain, making the resulting viewpoint appear as a logical necessity rather than a subjective preference (Burgers et al., 2016; Charteris-Black, 2013; Koller, 2004; Musolff, 2016a). Consequently, metaphorical framing does not simply describe a pre-existing reality; instead, it actively constructs the parameters of how that reality can be understood. This dual function of metaphor, combining cognitive efficiency and persuasive force, explains their prevalence in public discourse and media, where they are deployed to frame specific topics figuratively (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023).

This capacity to shape understanding through framing has profound implications for how metaphors function persuasively and ideologically in discourse. An awareness of these affordances of metaphors has shaped scholarly attitudes towards metaphor, with philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke characterising it as an abuse of language that threatens to distort judgement and contaminate scientific truth (Musolff, 2004). This sceptical tradition has been echoed more recently by Susan Sontag (1979), who criticised the negative implications of military metaphors for illnesses such as cancer for the morale and self-esteem of patients, and proposed eliminating all metaphors from communication about illness. This preoccupation can be countered by recognising that frame activation does not necessarily guarantee frame acceptance or alignment (Musolff, 2016b). Recipients may recognise a framing while rejecting its implications, engaging critically with the underlying assumptions of the frame, or reframe the issue through alternative metaphors. Metaphors propose framings, but their success in shaping understanding depends on contextual factors including source credibility, compatibility with existing beliefs, and the availability of alternative frames (Charteris-Black, 2011; Koteyko & Atanasova, 2016; Musolff, 2016b). Questioning a discursive framing is, however, cognitively demanding (Porto, 2024). As Musolff (2024) observes, processing information as non-fitting with a familiar scenario requires heightened “epistemic vigilance” (Sperber et al., 2010), in order to deconstruct the figurative framing. Metaphors usually tend to remain largely unnoticed, reproducing ideological assumptions in covert ways that escape critical examination (Charteris-Black, 2011; Goatly, 2007; Koller, 2014; Romano, 2024). Furthermore, when a metaphor aligns with recipients’ existing attitudes and political orientations, critical engagement becomes even less likely (Romano, 2024).

Theoretical considerations on the normative role of metaphor find empirical support; several studies have shown that metaphor can have a powerful influence over people’s reasoning, particularly about problems and possible solutions (Thibodeau et al., 2017). Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) demonstrated that framing crime as a VIRUS prompted participants to favour investigating root causes, whereas framing it as a BEAST led to a preference for punitive measures. Hauser and Schwarz (2015) found that WAR metaphors for cancer reduced

intentions to engage in preventive lifestyle restrictions, such as quitting smoking, since the concept of self-limitation is not conceptually associated with the act of fighting an enemy. Furthermore, these framing effects are amplified by non-verbal cues. Hart (2017) observed that combining verbal fire metaphors with images of fire in reports on social unrest increased public support for aggressive police interventions, such as the use of water cannons. Whether through text or image, metaphors function as powerful legitimating tools that steer public opinion toward specific attitudes and manners of reasoning.

2.2.2 Critical Metaphor Analysis: Ideology, Evaluation, and Power

Within cognitive metaphor theory, it is widely agreed that metaphor is inherently evaluative, persuasive, and therefore potentially ideological (Deignan, 2010). Metaphorical language serves ideological goals by representing actors and events from a particular perspective, thereby privileging certain understandings of reality over others (Chilton, 1996). However, evaluation itself requires careful scrutiny. As Taylor (2021, 2022) argues, understanding the evaluative dimension of metaphor necessitates considering perspective. This means determining to whom something is positive or negative, and whether the evaluation is expressed from the speaker's viewpoint or attributed to the object of discussion. A metaphor may simultaneously convey evaluation and distance the speaker from that evaluation, particularly in reported speech or when attributing views to others. A single metaphor may be attached to a plurality of arguments (Augé, 2023b), and the specificities of the context can project new properties onto the metaphorical mapping (Reijnierse et al., 2020). Consequently, this complexity means that identifying evaluative stance and argumentation requires attention to the discursive environment and the wider context of production, including the socio-cultural and socio-political context (Augé, 2023b; Taylor, 2022).

An awareness of these fundamental functions of metaphor led to the development of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). This approach emerged from the recognition that metaphor not only reflects conceptual structures but also serves normative functions, shaping how social reality is perceived and legitimising particular perspectives while marginalising others. Initially proposed by Charteris-Black (2004), this approach integrates insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory with the analytical frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough (2001) argues that metaphors merit critical attention because different figurative framings carry different ideological attachments. From this perspective, metaphors provide direct access to conceptual structures, including sociopolitical ones, which CDA aims to uncover and explain. By exposing these ideological dimensions, CMA seeks to render metaphors less opaque for politicians, journalists and members of the public who use and receive them, potentially without fully recognising their ideological bias and manipulative potential (Musolff, 2016b). The central argument is that speakers employ such figurative devices as rhetorical tools to frame issues, highlight specific features, persuade audiences, and advance specific ideological positions. Cognitive semantics alone cannot reveal this dimension of language; it is CMA that demonstrates how metaphor selection in particular

types of discourse is often governed by the rhetorical aim of persuasion and, in many cases, motivated by specific worldviews (Charteris-Black, 2004).

2.2.3 Analytical Categories: From Domains to Scenarios

Conducting such critical analysis effectively, however, requires analytical categories at an appropriate level of specificity, since framing effects can differ substantially even within what might be considered the same broad conceptual category (Demjén & Semino, 2020; Musolff, 2006). This specificity poses a challenge for the original formulation of CMT, in which Lakoff and Johnson (1980) applied the term “domain” to a wide array of broad concepts. Source domains represent a fundamental entry point into the analysis, capturing wide-ranging patterns and allowing for an overview of the narrative frames dominant in discourse. They can act as a discourse frame allowing for the abstraction above the lexical level to compare findings (Taylor, 2022). However, a critical challenge in determining appropriate levels of abstraction is what Musolff (2016b) identifies as the “arbitrariness” (p. 15) problem. He argues that there is often no logical stopping point when abstracting a metaphor; one could theoretically continue until reaching a level of generality so high that the resulting posited conceptual metaphor becomes an almost tautological proposition, revealing little about conceptual structures or culture-specific world views. Therefore, analysing metaphors solely at the level of domains risks overlooking the situated, dynamic ways in which they operate in context. Indeed, several studies have found that the traditional notion of conceptual domains proves too broad to account for the complexity and variety of metaphor manifestations in discourse (Demjén & Semino, 2020). As Semino et al. (2016) note, “conceptual domains of CMT tend to be postulated at a very high level of generality” (p. 636) which can obscure the framing implications of specific patterns in the data.

Metaphors function simultaneously as entrenched patterns of thought and as dynamic, context-sensitive tools of social interaction. Linguistic manifestations of conceptual metaphors are “a phenomenon which is cumulative in nature” (Taylor, 2021, p. 465), where their meaning does not usually reside in isolated expressions, but emerges when multiple related linguistic forms co-occur, revealing non-obvious meanings (Partington, 2017) that share “the same underpinning idea” (Taylor, 2021, p. 465). This cumulative property makes it essential to establish clear, replicable parameters in terms of what pertains to a specific source domain, considering semantic similarities, specificity and prototypicality. As Demjén and Semino argue (2020), metaphor requires investigation at different levels of abstraction, in order to better account for the specific implications that metaphorical choices carry within the contextual discourse in which they are deployed. To address the issue of the lack of specificity of domains, Musolff (2003) introduced the notion of scenario as a specific sub-domain category. This model provides a framework for explaining metaphorical patterns that require more granular detail than general conceptual domains can offer.

The scenario-based approach, proposed and developed systematically by Musolff (2003, 2004, 2006, 2015, 2016b, 2024), is meant to capture how metaphors operate in the construction of discourse-level narratives. It represents a central model for critically analysing metaphor in discourse, bridging discourse-based and cognitive approaches to metaphor (Koller, 2024; Semino et al., 2018). A scenario consists of a set of assumptions shared by discourse participants about typical aspects of a source situation: its participants, roles and relationships, expected storylines, actions and events, and positive or negative evaluations of outcomes as successful or unsuccessful, normal or abnormal, permissible or illegitimate (Musolff, 2006, 2016b; Semino et al., 2016). It provides a coherent scene “reminiscent of standard situations, which the users are familiar with as part of their shared cultural knowledge” (Musolff, 2004, p. 38). To conceptualise the relationship between domains and scenarios, one may view the domain as the “stage on which the scenario plays out, with the stage design and props suggesting particular actors to appear, making certain actions possible or likely, and casting some plot lines as desirable or not” (Koller, 2024, p. 84). Unlike broad conceptual domains (e.g. WAR, JOURNEY, FAMILY), scenarios provide more specific storylines such as a ship needing a captain, a couple debating marriage, or a family supporting or abandoning its members. These scenarios have “an exemplary default ‘lesson’ built into them” (Musolff, 2024, p. 161).

They are tools for critically analysing metaphor (Koller, 2024), acting as an intermediate analytical category bridging the gap between the abstract conceptual level and individual metaphorical tokens (Musolff, 2004). Through this intermediary role, scenarios link “the conceptual side of metaphor to its usage patterns in socially situated discourse” (Musolff, 2006, p. 36). This analytical level traces the co-occurrence of metaphor tokens across texts forming metaphor clusters or chains (Koller, 2003), which combine into coherent “mini-narratives” (Musolff, 2015, p. 44). This enables a more nuanced account of “lexical variation and collocation patterns” (Musolff, 2015, pp. 44–45), avoiding the over-generalisation that can result from merely treating all lexical instances classified under one broad domain as instantiating the same mapping. For example, while the domain WAR may encompass a range of mappings, a scenario depicting an army mobilising against an invader specifies roles, processes, and expected outcomes, giving the metaphor dynamic and evaluative depth.

A range of studies across different discursive contexts illustrate how scenarios are instantiated in practice. In migration discourse, for example, Koller (2024) identifies a WATER-CONTAINER scenario in expressions such as “Ukrainian refugees pouring into Europe,” where processes like *pouring* and *being forced into* structure the movement of refugees as liquid displaced by external force, while words like *support* activate a complementary HOLDING-UP scenario, in which host nations physically sustain the incomers. In economic and political contexts, EU membership debates have been framed through MARRIAGE or JOURNEY scenarios, where *pre-nuptial dances* or *missing the train* supply evaluations of timeliness, commitment, and legitimacy (Musolff, 2006, 2016b). Health communication provides further examples: in UK press coverage of avian flu, metaphor clusters around “frontline,” “fight,” and “weapons” gave rise to a full WAR scenario of humans battling disease (Koteyko et al., 2008), while during the COVID-19 pandemic, Serbian pro-vaccination discourse drew heavily on WAR and

MEDIEVAL CASTLE scenarios to evoke the image of the immune system as a fortress under siege, vaccines as weapons or commanders, and antibodies as soldiers (Đurović & Silaški, 2024).

Setting up a scenario naturally leads to foregrounding specific “snippets of encyclopaedic knowledge” (Musolff, 2015, p. 44) and consequently encourages default conclusions (Musolff 2015). For instance, becoming healthy again after an illness is desirable, so a state should recover from a crisis; catching a train on time is better than missing it, so a country should not delay joining the EU; an army facing an enemy must fight back, so a society must combat a pandemic; a family should stick together, so a state needs greater cohesion. These common-sense assumptions, which appear self-evident in the source domains, are mapped onto the target notion, and they “spin out” detailed narratives that consolidate into “emergent discourse traditions” (Musolff, 2006, p. 36), which are then relied upon to conceptualise and assess sociopolitical issues. While these conclusions are not “logically binding”, they tend to assume the status of default, with deviations coming to be perceived as “marked” cases (Musolff, 2015, p. 44). Scenarios weave themselves into language, being possibly realised by both metaphorical and non-metaphorical lexis referring directly to the target domain, integrating both in a coherent image. For instance, in debates about immigration, phrases like “border controls” and “into the country” combine with metaphors of containment and movement to produce a unified storyline of control and flow (Musolff, 2015, p. 44). This demonstrates that scenarios function as flexible cognitive and discursive frames, structuring meaning through the interplay of metaphorical and non-metaphorical elements alike. Thus, once such scenarios become entrenched in public debate, they acquire salience to the point of being almost unavoidable, and the conclusions they suggest come to be perceived as practically self-evident and unproblematic (Musolff, 2003). These narrative structures guide reasoning by establishing what counts as a natural progression, what interventions appear appropriate, and what outcomes seem desirable or inevitable. They can be dynamically modified, extended and developed through “reuse-cum-reinterpretation” (Musolff, 2016b, p. 43), where an established metaphorical usage is invoked and subsequently adapted or altered to suit a specific political or argumentative context. Musolff’s (2016b) work also introduces the notion of “embryonic scenarios” (p. 52), defined as foundational phases of metaphor scenarios that carry narrative and evaluative potential for future development while not yet being fully elaborated. For instance, the notion of Britain being “at the heart of Europe” functioned as an embryonic scenario that was later developed through intertextual referencing into more fully elaborated narratives (Musolff, 2016b).

2.3 Metaphoricity and Newspaper Discourse

2.3.1 Metaphoricity as a Gradable Phenomenon: The Conventional – Creative Cline

Metaphoricity should not be conceived as a binary distinction between literal and metaphorical uses, but rather as a gradable phenomenon (Julich-Warpakowski & Pérez

Sobrinho, 2023). On the one hand, it refers to a static property of linguistic and conceptual structures, with entrenched mappings and lexicalised meanings, while on the other hand, it captures the dynamic contextual activation of metaphor in discourse, where recognition and interpretation depend on context, speaker intention, and audience uptake (Tan, 2023). It is shaped by features such as frequency, conventionality, context, and interpretive effort, which a dichotomy such as “live” versus “dead” metaphors proves inadequate to capture. Metaphoricity becomes less noticeable the more a metaphor is conventionalised, that is, the more its figurative meaning has become officially codified and socially established (Charteris-Black, 2004). A recurring challenge in metaphor identification lies in defining the boundaries of conventionality, with the figurative force in the synchronic language system of very conventionalised metaphors being a point of contention.

To adequately deal with the nuances of conventionalisation, various classifications have been proposed: for instance, Black (1979) distinguished extinct metaphors (accessible only etymologically), dormant metaphors (linguistically conventionalised), and active metaphors (experientially salient), while Goatly (1997) proposed a finer-grained taxonomy comprising dead, buried, sleeping, tired and active metaphors, relying primarily on their etymologies and dictionary entries. As an alternative account, Kyratzis (1997) represented metaphors as ranging on a gradient from frozen to fresh, with the possibility of them being “defrosted” (p. 85) in context. When metaphors become conventionalised and thus the figurative meanings become lexicalised, interpretation requires a mechanism of sense retrieval, inasmuch as this figurative meaning is already stored in the mental lexicon and easily accessed; conversely, novel metaphors require sense creation, where the semantic incongruity is resolved by comparing source and target domains and establishing a contextually coherent figurative sense, drawing parallels among elements in both (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005; Genovesi, 2023; Giora, 1997). Thus, the latter demand more interpretive effort, and have empirically been shown to take longer to process than both literal and conventional metaphorical items (Blasko & Connine, 1993). The framing power of metaphor, then, is particularly relevant in the case of conventional metaphors; due to them being so familiar, they are processed more rapidly and with less critical friction than creative ones (Romano, 2024). As discussed in Section 2.2.1, recipients may recognise and reject a metaphorical framing, but doing so requires considerable epistemic vigilance, a cognitively demanding effort that conventional metaphors, precisely because of their invisibility, are unlikely to trigger.

Conventionality is not a fixed status but the outcome of diachronic and cognitive processes through which metaphors become entrenched. These processes entail novel metaphors evolving into conventional ones, and the status of conventional metaphors shifting across registers, genres, or communities of practice. A key mechanism of conventionalisation is the gradual development of polysemy. As metaphors are repeatedly used, the figurative sense of a lexical item becomes established alongside the literal one, producing a new entry in the semantic network of the term and developing into what might be called from the synchronic aspect “a faded metaphor” (Patekar, 2022, p. 35). Metaphors may therefore be seen as dynamic entities whose life history progresses from novelty, through phases of discourse salience and codification, to eventual fossilisation, when words with both basic and figurative

meanings are used more frequently with the latter rather than the former (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023; Deignan, 2005). Repeated use of a metaphor not only entrenches its figurative sense, but also diminishes awareness of its origin, inasmuch as “frequency breeds literalness” (Hanks, 2006, p. 21). Therefore, as a metaphor becomes part of the mental lexicon, it starts to undergo a process of “semantic drift” (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 204) that weakens and eventually may obscure its metaphorical origins. Yet this cycle is not irreversible: metaphors may be revitalised in new contexts, regaining discursive force through reactivation or recontextualisation (Goatly, 1997). This is especially relevant at the level of scenarios: while with “background usage” (Musolff, 2016, p. 52), source-lexical material is mentioned briefly, extended scenarios provide further elaboration and more detail in the image that is being evoked, conveying a more noticeable narrative structure and evaluative bias. This emerges, for instance, when considering how the well-established *body-politic* metaphor may still produce original lexicalisations and meta-discussions, indicating a collective awareness of the historical role of the metaphor (Musolff, 2016).

This theoretical understanding of metaphoricity as gradable has significant methodological implications. Any analysis of metaphor in discourse must attend not only to identifying metaphorical expressions, but also to characterising their degree of conventionalisation, their creative elaboration, and their likely salience for readers or hearers, issues that the present thesis seeks to address.

2.3.2 Metaphor in Newspaper Discourse: Density, Functions, and Framing

Properties of metaphoricity have direct implications for how metaphors function in specific discourse contexts. The metaphors deployed in press media are not arbitrary linguistic choices but rather strategic selections made according to criteria of newsworthiness, interest, and accessibility, taking into account the estimated metaphoric competence of the target readership (Charteris-Black, 2004). Metaphor constitutes a fundamental component of newspaper language, with research indicating that approximately 16.4% of all lexical units in news texts are metaphors (Krennmayr, 2011). This frequency, though slightly lower than in academic discourse, significantly exceeds that found in fiction or spontaneous conversation. The comparatively high metaphor density in news discourse reflects the status of the register as a site of “informational production” (Krennmayr, 2011, p. 123), where complex, abstract socio-political realities must be made tangible for non-expert audiences. Metaphor distribution varies systematically across newspaper sections. Hard news, covering topics such as commerce and world affairs, demonstrates significantly higher metaphor density (18.1%) than soft news, reflecting communicative demands (Krennmayr, 2011; Krennmayr, 2015). Hard news requires more metaphors to explain complex, abstract concepts, whereas soft news often describes more tangible subjects, such as travel or book reviews, that require less metaphorical scaffolding. This can be connected to the ideational function of metaphorical language (see Section 2.2.1). Journalists employ figurative language with an explanatory aim, and, in choosing particular metaphors, they can reinforce or even create

particular mental models in the readers' construction of reality (Koller, 2004; Krennmayr, 2011). With regard to the interpersonal function, metaphors help journalists sustain reader engagement and keep their audience attentive in an environment where direct interaction proves impossible (Koller, 2004; Krennmayr, 2011). Lastly, as for the textual function, metaphor serves to enhance organisation and coherence within news articles. Intratextual coherence, however, must be balanced against the necessity for multiple source domains to conceptualise complex topics. This often results in metaphorically heterogeneous rather than homogeneous discourse, inasmuch as "people mix their metaphors" (Kövecses, 2018, p. 131). Beyond the individual article, metaphors provide intertextual structure by constructing consistent narratives across various publications and time periods, creating shared conceptual frameworks that readers encounter repeatedly (Kövecses, 2018).

Most metaphors in news are conventional and entrenched, used routinely and often going unnoticed (Krennmayr, 2011; Krennmayr, 2015). Conventional metaphors facilitate concise text production and ensure communicative efficiency, streamlining communication under constraints of time and space (Eubanks, 2000; Koller, 2004). They provide shared, readily interpretable frames that can be activated with minimal effort, having been normalised through repetition across genres and outlets. Their conventionalisation allows them to pass unnoticed (Krennmayr, 2015), but it is precisely this invisibility that makes them "insidious" (Taylor, 2021, p. 467), powerful framing devices that are rhetorically effective in naturalising particular ways of construing social reality (Charteris-Black, 2004). When journalists or commentators invoke such metaphors, as when discussing "the battle against cancer", the underlying conceptual metaphor of DISEASE MANAGEMENT IS WAR may escape conscious recognition, yet its repeated deployment shapes public understanding through cumulative effects. Certain metaphorical frames prove particularly pervasive across news discourse. The WAR frame, for instance, appears ubiquitously, not just in relation to disease management, but also politics and social issues, evoking emotional responses, and helping legitimise aggressive policy responses (Flusberg et al., 2017; Hart, 2018, 2024). Similarly, NATURAL DISASTER metaphors frequently frame issues such as migration through "liquid" imagery (e.g., "flows", "floods", "waves"), contributing to dehumanising migrants by portraying them as an uncontrollable natural force that must be contained to avoid damage (Porto, 2022; Taylor, 2021). Such examples illustrate how metaphors create what Kövecses (2018) terms "virtual realities" (p. 137): metaphorically constructed frames that can manipulate, deceive or distort the representation of reality. These virtual realities prove particularly powerful because they often operate below conscious awareness, with their conceptual architecture shaping understanding without explicit acknowledgement. However, journalists also deploy creative metaphors as a conscious strategy to force readers to adopt alternative perspectives (Krennmayr, 2011). This is achieved because creative metaphors interrupt the automatic flow of interpretation and produce interpretative friction, drawing attention to the figurative mappings being delineated (see Section 2.3.1). Creativity can be correlated to genre-specific discursive features, with creative metaphors often appearing in headlines or opinion pieces, where they can serve to attract attention, provoke reflection, or contest dominant frames (Semino, 2002; Kövecses, 2018).

While these features of metaphor use in newspapers have been documented across a range of national presses, the present study draws specifically on the British and Italian ones. Hence, a brief characterisation of the two systems, and of the principal respects in which they differ, is warranted. Newspapers in the United Kingdom and in Italy operate within media systems that comparative scholarship has long treated as distinct. In the influential typology of Hallin and Mancini (2004), the British press exemplifies the Liberal (or North Atlantic) model, characterised by the early development of a commercial, mass-circulation press, relatively strong journalistic professionalisation, and a limited role of the state, whereas the Italian press is the paradigmatic case of the Polarised Pluralist (or Mediterranean) model, marked by lower circulation, an elite and politically engaged readership, strong ties between media and political actors, and a tradition of commentary-oriented journalism. The two systems are conventionally distinguished by the journalistic styles they favour: British and American journalism are credited with “fact-centred discursive practices” (Chalaby, 1996, p. 310) that foreground information over opinion, while the Italian tradition has historically privileged the exposition of ideas and advocacy. However, this contrast should not be overstated. Hallin and Mancini (2004) themselves identify the British national press as a notable exception within the Liberal model, since it retains a high degree of external pluralism, with individual titles openly reflecting party-political divisions, and a culturally powerful tabloid sector that has no direct equivalent in Italy (see also Mancini et al., 2016; Taylor, 2014; and Section 4.1.1). In the Italian case, by contrast, the closeness of press and politics has often taken the form of instrumental uses, with outlets used by industrial or political owners to intervene in the political arena (Mancini et al., 2016).

Subsequent comparative work has questioned whether the Liberal model applies uniformly across countries, documenting instead the resilience of national differences (Hallin & Mancini, 2017). A recent study suggested that the British system is drifting towards a hybrid “Polarised Liberal” configuration, in which editorial coverage of contested issues such as migration or Brexit can be more sharply polarised than in systems traditionally classed as pluralist (Maniou & Moutselos, 2023, p. 623). Additionally, despite its more professionalised tradition, the British press records comparatively low levels of public trust, whereas Italian readers tend to express greater confidence in their news institutions (Curini et al., 2024). Across both countries, finally, the shift of news consumption towards digital and social platforms is reshaping audience loyalties and business models, fostering a broadly hybrid news ecology (Marques & Vos, 2024).

This overview of the two media landscapes and the overarching tendencies characterising them provides the backdrop for the corpus design, whose guiding parameters are set out in Section 4.1.

2.4 Methodological Approaches to Metaphor Analysis

The preceding sections established the theoretical framework for the study of metaphor in discourse, tracing the cognitive architecture underlying metaphorical mappings (Section

2.1), the discourse-oriented developments that attend to the communicative, evaluative, and ideological functions of metaphor in use (Section 2.2), and the properties of metaphoricity and the features of metaphor use in newspaper language (Section 2.3). Throughout these discussions, a persistent tension has emerged between metaphor understood as a cognitive phenomenon, operating at the level of conceptual structures, and metaphor as realised in the variability and complexity of naturally occurring language. Section 2.4 addresses the methodological consequences of that tension, offering a comprehensive overview of methodological approaches to metaphor identification and analysis, examining how the shift from cognitive abstraction to discourse-based inquiry has been translated into practical procedures. The approaches discussed here address two fundamental challenges: first, how to reliably identify metaphorical language in naturally occurring texts; and second, how to move from linguistic identification to claims about underlying conceptual structures. These two levels of analysis, the linguistic and the conceptual, organise the methodologies reviewed, while a central tension between methodological rigour and interpretive depth informs all approaches. First, Section 2.4.1 establishes the context by foregrounding the shift from CMT to discourse-based approaches. The following section presents the establishment of standardised procedures for linguistic metaphor identification, introducing Cameron's Discourse Dynamics approach and the notion of metaphor identification through vehicle terms (2.4.2), the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP, 2.4.3), and its development MIPVU (2.4.4), before presenting the main criticisms raised against these approaches (2.4.5). The chapter thus subsequently examines two attempts to operationalise the transition from linguistic to conceptual metaphor analysis (2.4.6): Steen's early five-step procedure, and the more recent Metaphorical Source Domain Identification Procedure (MSDIP). Four studies within the CMA tradition, and their approach to metaphor identification, are then discussed (2.4.7). Finally, two alternative frameworks that explicitly challenge the focus of MIP(VU) on lexical units are presented (2.4.8): The Procedure for Identifying Metaphorical Scenes, and De Backer et al.'s proposals. Concluding remarks (2.4.9) synthesise the key methodological tensions and trade-offs identified across these approaches, particularly the persistent challenge of balancing systematic procedures with sensitivity to discourse context. This comprehensive overview provides the foundation for the methodological framework adopted in the present study, which adapts and combines elements from the approaches discussed here.

2.4.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the Shift to Discourse

As established in Section 2.2, when CMT was first established, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) postulated the existence of underlying conceptual mappings in language on the basis of *ad hoc* examples, which provided evidence of linguistic instantiations of the conceptual metaphors they proposed. Within this cognitive approach, the focus of attention was on the conceptual, rather than the linguistic level of metaphors (Musolff, 2004; Semino et al., 2004), proposing static, pre-existing mappings residing in conceptual structures across speech

communities (Cameron et al., 2009). While Lakoff (1993) emphasised the relevance of linguistic metaphors that share systematic correspondences as the basis for generalising on conceptual mappings, previous claims concerning the existence of specific conceptual metaphors in classical metaphor theory have tended to rely on decontextualised sentences (Semino et al., 2004). Such approaches frequently assume a language to be a homogeneous whole, thereby overlooking the significant variations that arise across different media, registers, or genres (Demjén & Semino, 2016). This tendency to rely exclusively on the intuition of the researcher (Kövecses, 2011) or direct elicitation from informants as a means to validate theoretical claims has been criticised and highlighted as a limitation in CMT (Cameron, 2008; Charteris-Black, 2004; Deignan, 2005; Winter, 2019). It has been shown that speakers' intuitions can be an unreliable source of information on natural language use (Sinclair, 1991), and elicited examples may actually not be very widespread in authentic interactions (Deignan, 2005). Therefore, a different approach emerged within the discipline, focussing on the study of discourse, with the aim of using naturally occurring language and linguistic metaphors as the basis for claims on the nature and "ubiquity" (Cameron, 2003, p. 2) of metaphors and establishing empirical foundations for its theoretical claims (Stefanowitsch, 2006). The assumption underlying this approach is that naturally occurring language is preferable to elicited or invented language (Deignan, 2005), and that in order to buttress claims on the relevance of metaphorical language, so called "metaphor in the wild" (Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 1), actually produced by speakers and writers in a variety of contexts, needed to be studied systematically. To advance any statement on the frequency of linguistic metaphors, their distribution in discourse, and their link to conceptual metaphors, empirical data needed to be gathered and examined (see e.g. Cameron, 2003; Semino et al., 2004).

However, the adoption of a discourse perspective on metaphor use entailed facing the issue of defining precise and shared criteria in order to identify metaphors in authentic discourse, inasmuch as CMT's reliance on intuition did not offer a reliable and replicable method (Semino, 2008), oftentimes drawing the line between literal and non-literal uses discretionarily (Gibbs & Colston, 2012). While *ad hoc* examples were chosen as unquestionably figurative (Cameron, 2003), discourse posed a series of challenges in terms of the rules on which to base the categorisation of lexical items as either metaphorical or not. The need for an explicit method for the identification of metaphors, which could be replicated and verified, became widely recognised (see Cameron, 1999, 2003; Charteris-Black, 2004; Semino et al., 2004; Steen, 2002b; Steen, 1999). Such a method would have to deal with the "fuzziness" characterising the boundary between literal and metaphorical language, recognising that in many cases metaphoricity can be "a matter of degree" (Semino et al., 2004, p. 1277) and attempting to minimise the risk of subjectivity in such cases (Koller 2004). Although it might seem intuitively easy to comprehend and recognise, the notion of metaphor can be remarkably difficult to operationalise (Cameron, 2003). These factors made the standardisation of the process of metaphor identification both urgently needed and quite challenging. It was clear that, as long as there was a lack of clarity on the criteria applied in the study of metaphors, this would hinder the replicability of such studies and render results

difficult to either validate or falsify. This inconsistency would in turn render reliable generalisation on metaphor usage in language unattainable.

The shift to discourse-based approaches necessitated addressing several interconnected methodological challenges. Most fundamentally, researchers needed to establish reliable criteria for identifying metaphorical language in authentic texts, distinguishing metaphorical from literal usage in a systematic and replicable manner. Beyond this linguistic level of identification, a second challenge concerned the annotation of metaphors, that is, how to move from the linguistic metaphors identified to claims about underlying conceptual structures. These two levels of analysis, the linguistic and the conceptual, are discussed in the following sections.

2.4.2 Metaphor Identification through Vehicle Terms and the Discourse Dynamics Approach

Cameron (1999, 2003, 2010) developed the discourse dynamics approach to metaphor, firmly rooted in the analysis of discourse data and which viewed metaphor as emerging and developing throughout the talk or text under examination, a process shaped by the specific contexts of use rather than a static mapping. Through a “metaphor-led discourse analysis” (MLDA) (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 69), the discourse dynamics approach identifies, codes, and finds patterns in linguistic metaphors within discourse. From this perspective, the approach proposed two determining principles to identify figuratively used language. The first principle pertained to the notion of incongruity between two elements: the topic, which is the content of the ongoing discourse, and the vehicle term, whose meaning does not directly relate to the topic and results “anomalous, incongruent or ‘alien’” (Cameron & Maslen, 2010, p. 103). The terminology proposed diverges from the classical approach, substituting the notion of vehicle terms for “what cognitive metaphor theory calls *source domain terms*” (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 71). The second principle requires such incongruity to be solvable through a “transfer of meaning” (2003, p. 60), where the meaning of the vehicle is understood by applying it to the current discourse and selecting an interpretation that allows it to fit coherently into the discourse. For instance, when politician Tony Blair states that “the people – have given me strength and support”, the contextual meaning referring to “positive mental energy” is contrasted with the basic meaning of “muscular capacity to exert force on objects” (Cameron & Maslen, 2010, p. 106). The latter would be incongruous in the context of a political speech, suggesting that a metaphorical interpretation is needed to interpret the sentence under examination. Crucially, Cameron (2003) defined the category of linguistic metaphor broadly: membership is established through the potential for incongruity between two domains as interpretable from surface lexical content, without requiring either “metaphorical intention” on the part of the producer or conscious “metaphorical interpretation” (p. 25) on the part of the recipient. A given expression may thus be classified as metaphorical regardless of whether it has been produced or processed as such. This

deliberately inclusive definition allows the analyst to adopt what Cameron (2003) describes as a prosaic approach in which “discourse is trawled for possible metaphor using a net with small holes” (p. 25). As discussed in Section 2.3.1, it is precisely such expressions that are most likely to operate below conscious awareness, making an identification procedure that does not depend on perceived metaphoricity particularly valuable for discourse-analytic purposes.

The Metaphor Identification through Vehicle terms (henceforth MIV) considers both single words and multi-words at the phrase level as possible candidates for vehicle terms, treating metaphor as situated in specific communicative situations. This perspective highly differs from the one suggested by the Metaphor Identification Procedure (henceforth MIP) (Pragglejaz Group¹, 2007), as Cameron et al. (2009) explicitly note when presenting their approach: “unlike the praggelaz procedure we underline vehicle terms rather than individual words” (p. 72). This methodology thus allows for “chunks or stretches of language” (Cameron & Maslen, 2010, p. 105) to be one single vehicle term. The underlying assumption is that “neither language nor metaphor is seen to work only at word level” (Cameron & Maslen, 2010, p. 105). Instead, metaphors can extend to “surrounding language” (p. 108), and thus would be best captured by determining *a priori* the lexical unit to be considered. For example, something like the phrase “flaw in [the] system” would be analysed as three metaphorical words by the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (*flaw, in, system*), but as a single metaphor vehicle by the Metaphor Identification through Vehicle terms (MIV) (Cameron & Maslen, 2010), relying on the coder’s knowledge of the specific discourse. Notably, this approach also includes simile, considered to be a kind of metaphor that is “tuned” (Cameron & Deignan, 2003, p. 110) by the presence of the word *like*. While the MIV approach is characterised by more flexibility, MIP and its subsequent development MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010) instead offer a more methodologically structured and exhaustive procedure, establishing specific criteria for all issues presenting themselves at each step, which has endured and become a widespread standard in studies on metaphor in discourse. MIP and MIPVU are presented in more detail in the following sections.

2.4.3 The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP): Contrasting Basic and Contextual Meanings

On the one hand, similarly to MIV, MIP is a tool meant for the identification of linguistic metaphor in natural discourse, focussing on the notion of a stretch of language that appears to be incongruous with the surrounding text. On the other hand, the main differences lie in the unit of analysis that is established, and the accuracy with which MIP articulates the set of steps to identify metaphors. The difference in the treatment of the unit of analysis already

¹ Peter Crisp, Raymond Gibbs, Alan Cienki, Graham Low, Gerard Steen, Lynne Cameron, Elena Semino, Joseph Grady, Alice Deignan, Zoltán Kövecses

emerges in the steps needed to determine linguistic metaphor. MIP suggests determining the lexical unit in the text-discourse before any consideration with regard to the possible incongruity. The determination of meaning in context therefore follows the segmentation of the text into lexical units. MIP additionally offers some parameters to apply in order to consider what is the basic meaning, which they characterise as generally being:

1. more concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste
2. related to bodily action
3. more precise (as opposed to vague)
4. historically older

(Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 3)

The first two criteria in particular, concreteness and relatedness to bodily action, reflect the theoretical premises discussed in Section 2.1.1, where embodied experience and image-schematic structures were identified as grounding mechanisms for conceptual metaphor. These parameters do not directly relate to the most frequent usage in language; MIP is meant to capture linguistic metaphors along a spectrum of metaphoricity, and consequently, frequency can be considered as a useful indicator of the conventionality of a metaphor in language, rather than a marker of metaphoricity itself. A researcher's intuition with regard to metaphoricity might be heavily biased by awareness of frequency in language use. Hence, the researcher may instinctively categorise as basic the meanings that are encountered more frequently in language usage, but in fact do not satisfy the criteria for being considered as more basic. Therefore, the basic meaning against which the contextual meaning should be measured needs to be determined by relying on other means. The Pragglejaz Group selected the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (Rundell & Fox, 2002), based on an – at the time of publication – fairly recent and adequately large (220 million words) corpus of contemporary English. Although the goal of creating a dictionary that is truly representative of contemporary language use as a whole is probably empirically unattainable, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the use of metaphorical language it is fundamental to rely on a large and varied amount of data. Therefore, when necessary, the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (SOEDHP; Little et al., 1973) was also consulted by the Pragglejaz Group to provide supplementary information about etymology.

The notion of how to determine the limit of a lexical unit is discussed extensively in the paper, with the overarching rule that each dictionary headword is considered to be a single lexical unit. Problematic cases that go beyond the intuitive idea of a word as being limited by blank spaces on either side, and the respective solutions, are listed and discussed (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). In general terms, the analyses of what are termed as multiword units are based on the main criterion of “decomposability” (Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 26), that is, whether the unit can be understood as the sum of the meanings of each of its constituent parts, or whether it can only be understood as a whole. Therefore, polywords (e.g., *of course*, *all right*) and phrasal verbs (e.g., *take off*, *get on with*) are considered as a single lexical unit, with a non-decomposable meaning which can only be constructed by considering all elements in the

expression. On the other hand, both fixed collocations (e.g., *staking a claim* and *suffering many blows*) and idioms (e.g., *have a bee in one's bonnet*, *pop the question*) are instead classified as decomposable and as such each element is treated as a single lexical unit. This is justified by the fact that, though some completely fixed collocations might border on idioms, they still do not display semantic opacity. In these cases, the meaning of each element in the fixed collocations is easily retrievable to reconstruct the meaning of the whole expression, while idioms exhibit instead varying degrees of semantic opacity. Using as an example *pop the question*, Gibbs (1994) maintains that psycholinguistic evidence shows how metaphoricity can be found at the level of the single word *pop*, which can be interpreted according to the appropriate contextual meaning of “ask”. Therefore, since at least to some individuals the meaning of an idiomatic expression might be decomposed down to the individual elements, each component of the idiom is treated as a single lexical unit.

In addition to the treatment of idioms, another methodological issue relates to word class; the MIP procedure crosses word-class boundaries, considering as possible meanings of the word all those found in the different dictionary entries related to one lexeme. This is in consideration of the fact that metaphorical uses can be unevenly distributed across parts of speech, that is, many metaphors do not have identical grammatical characteristics to their literal counterparts (Deignan, 2005), but a link between the two can nevertheless be expected to be evident to many speakers. For example, a corpus-based investigation of the verb *to cement* reveals that it is more frequently used metaphorically, as in “to make a relationship between people, countries, or organisations firm and strong” (Longman), while the noun form *cement* is predominantly used literally (Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 27). While in this case the verb is used both literally and metaphorically, in other cases different forms are used either in one sense or the other. This is the case for the verb *to squirrel (away)*, denoting the behaviour of hoarding items or saving money, and the noun *squirrel*, referring to the animal. Despite the absence of a conventional literal verbal form, a convincing argument can be presented for a clear link between the hoarding behaviour typically displayed by the animal and the behaviour described by the verb and attributed to human beings (Pragglejaz Group, 2007).

2.4.4 MIPVU: Toward Comprehensive Identification of Metaphor in Discourse

The importance of MIP should not be understated, inasmuch as it provided a step-by-step comprehensive methodology for the identification of metaphor, applicable across a variety of research contexts. Furthermore, it significantly helped overcome the issue of replicability, offering a valid and transparent framework, at least for the English language.

This approach was then further developed and articulated into the MIPVU procedure (Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit, Steen et al., 2010). While retaining the basic notion of considering the contrast between a basic and a contextual meaning as the fundamental indication of metaphoricity, this methodological development set out to expand

and improve on what were considered to be limitations of the original procedure, since the focus on metaphorically used words was deemed to render the coverage of MIP “not exhaustive” (Steen et al., 2010, p. 4). Firstly, while MIP focussed on metaphorically used words, MIPVU extends the scope of the research to all metaphor-related words (MRWs), with the aim of identifying all words in discourse that can be considered to be “lexical expressions of underlying cross-domain mappings” (Steen et al., 2010, p. 25). This is meant to include two additional categories of metaphors that are left out in the MIP approach, namely, direct and implicit metaphors. Key to this revision is the shift in the criterion of indirectness from linguistic signs to conceptual structures (Steen, 2007, p. 323). Metaphor is not always based on indirectness, as in “the argument *collapsed*” (Steen et al., 2010, p. 10), where a semantic transfer is realised on the basis of the similarity between physical structures and buildings. Metaphor can also be realised directly, when the cross-domain mapping is expressed straightforwardly, with each word retaining its basic meaning. In these cases, the mapping can be explicitly indicated by linguistic markers such as *like*, which are marked in MIPVU as metaphor flags (MFlag, Steen et al., 2010, p. 26), as in “he’s *like a ferret*” (KBD-fragment21, British National Corpus). In both cases, there is a lack of coherence that arises from the use of language that is apparently anomalous with respect to the surrounding discourse context, and this is resolved through a cross-domain mapping. The difference lies in how the language is employed, with either the incongruity being solved by comparing the contextual meaning of a lexical unit with its basic meaning, available to the language user, or by comparing two lexical units that are explicitly used and compared in the discourse context. In other words, while MIP operationalised the notion of similarity at the level of language, verifying if one lexical unit is used indirectly, MIPVU moves it to the conceptual structure, asking if the concepts are being used indirectly. As already mentioned, another difference is the inclusion of MFlags, lexical signals of the presence of a form of contrast or comparison. These encompass a variety of grammatical categories, with members ranging from *like, as, more, less, more/less ... than* to more substantial markers such as *compare, similar, analogy, conceive of or imagine* (Steen et al., 2010, p. 41). In addition to direct metaphors, implicit metaphors are also marked in MIPVU: these are words used for “lexico-grammatical substitution” (as in third person or personal pronouns use) or when ellipsis occurs (Steen et al., 2010, p. 26). For example, in “naturally, to embark on such *a step* is not necessarily to succeed immediately in realising *it*” (British National Corpus, file A9J), the lexical item *step* is related to metaphor, and, since *it* refers to *step*, it is coded as implicit metaphor (Steen et al., 2010, p. 15).

While recognising that “the notion of word itself is not unproblematic” and its relation to concepts and referent is not “completely transparent” (Steen et al., 2010, p. 13), it is still considered to be the most suitable starting point to analyse metaphor in usage, with problematic cases to be discussed and judged. MIPVU takes a similar approach to MIP with regard to the definition of a lexical unit and the contrast between the basic and the contextual meaning, introducing explicitly the principle of sufficient distinctness between the two meanings. This can be judged either on the fact that two separate, numbered sense descriptions appear in the dictionary as possible for the lexical unit under consideration, or the fact that there is one numbered sense description in the dictionary that qualifies a more basic meaning and is different from the contextual meaning of the item under consideration,

which is in some cases not provided in the dictionary entry (Steen et al., 2010, p. 37). MIPVU maintains as a primary reference the corpus-based learners' dictionary also employed by the Pragglejaz Group, *The Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (Rundell, 2002), occasionally resorting to a "second opinion dictionary" (Steen et al., 2010, p. 16), *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, which is also corpus-based.

Contrary to MIP, MIPVU discards the factor of historicity in determining which meaning is the most basic one, considering awareness of which meanings are historically older to be in most cases not accessible to the average contemporary user of English and thus not relevant. While there is a general tendency for more basic meanings to be historically older, this is not a hard-and-fast rule and remains secondary to other considerations with regard to the concreteness, specificity, and closeness to first-hand human experience of basic meanings. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) is consulted in rarer cases, when a need to achieve better understanding of the historical development of the word presents itself (Steen et al., 2010, p. 52). Historicity is considered as a "tiebreaker" (Steen et al., 2010, p. 52) only in cases where the contemporary dictionaries do not provide sufficient information, that is, when more than one of the meanings listed can be considered as basic and it is unclear which of the options should take precedence. For example, for *to disturb*, there was disagreement with regard to whether the concrete sense of making something move, registered as the third sense in Macmillan, was to be considered as more basic than the first two senses ('to interrupt someone and stop them from continuing what they were doing' and 'to upset and worry someone a lot'), which were more human-oriented. Since the Longman offered a similar division of meanings, the OED was consulted, to conclude that all senses appeared roughly at the same time, leading the researchers to conclude that they could all be considered as similarly basic, and thus the unit was not metaphorical (Steen et al., 2010, p. 53).

While MIP already recognised how slippery the notion of figurative language remains, in the attempt to delineate a method that is as effective as possible, MIPVU further operationalised such fuzziness by proposing the category of WIDLII, 'When In Doubt, Leave It In' (Steen et al., 2010, p. 19), for cases where no agreement was reached. This applied to cases such as specialist terminology, where insufficient contextual knowledge may hinder the determination of the precise intended meaning for the general language user that this research approach assumes as the judge of metaphoricity (Steen et al., 2010). One restriction that MIPVU adds to the MIP approach relates to the notion of crossing word boundaries. While MIP allowed for such crossings on the basis that a semantic connection between different parts of speech is generally available to speakers, MIPVU instead limits the notion of lexical unit to specific word classes rather than lemmas. Therefore, considerations on the meaning of the verb *to dog*, qualifying a type of action normally attributed to humans, would not be related to the meaning of the noun *dog*, referring to the animal (Steen et al., 2010, p. 16).

The primary objective of these procedures is to move beyond the individual judgement and intuition of the researcher, which present the limitations and issues of replicability previously discussed. Instead, they aim to adopt the perspective of an ideal contemporary

speaker of English, interpreting language usage on the basis of their linguistic competence. It is generally accepted that the most empirically reliable and attainable method for reconstructing the competence of such a speaker is to consult a contemporary corpus-based dictionary. While such a resource is necessarily constrained by the decisions of its editors, it represents a systematic attempt to reflect that competence as faithfully as possible. Furthermore, since interviewing a sufficient number of speakers to obtain judgments on sufficient distinctness between basic and contextual usage is rarely a feasible option, dictionaries provide the most viable alternative. Table 2.1 below summarises similarities and differences between MIP and MIPVU.

Table 2.1

Similarities and Differences Between MIP and MIPVU

Category	Definition	Examples	MIP	MIPVU
<i>Polywords</i>	Fixed expressions with no internal variability	<i>of course, all right</i>	Single lexical unit	Single lexical unit
<i>Phrasal verbs</i>	Verb + particle(s) with non-decomposable meaning	<i>take off, get on with</i>	Single lexical unit	Single lexical unit
<i>Classical idioms</i>	Semantically opaque expressions; psycholinguistic evidence shows metaphoricality can exist at word level	<i>have a bee in one's bonnet, pop the question</i>	Each component is a single lexical unit (decomposable)	Each component is a single lexical unit (decomposable)
<i>Fixed collocations</i>	Fixed expressions at the border of idioms but without semantic opacity	<i>staking a claim, suffering many blows</i>	Each component is a single lexical unit	Each component is a single lexical unit
<i>Word class</i>	Metaphorical relationship across grammatical categories	<i>cement</i> (noun) vs <i>to cement</i> (verb); <i>squirrel</i> (noun) vs <i>to squirrel</i> (verb)	Treated as one lemma; crosses word-class boundaries	Lexical units are word classes, not lemmas; noun <i>dog</i> distinct from verb <i>to dog</i>
<i>Compounds</i>	Two distinct parts with distinct meanings	<i>underpass, pitter-patter</i>	Not addressed	Single lexical unit (if it is in the dictionary and the primary stress is on the first word)
<i>Proper names</i>	Names of people, places, organisations	<i>Roy Wood, New York, United Kingdom</i>	Single lexical unit	Two lexical units (unless it is in the dictionary and the primary stress is on the first word)

<i>Dead (historical) metaphors</i>	Metaphorical origins no longer retained in contemporary use	<i>pedigree, comprehend</i>	Not metaphorical; metaphorical basis must be active	Not metaphorical; metaphorical basis must be active
<i>Simile</i>	Metaphorical comparison with explicit marker	<i>he's like a ferret</i>	Not addressed	Direct metaphors: identified through metaphor flags (<i>like, as, similar</i>)
<i>Implicit metaphors</i>	Pronouns or ellipsis referring to metaphorical expressions	<i>it</i> referring to metaphorical <i>step</i>	Not addressed	Included: coded as implicit metaphors
<i>Criteria of historicity</i>	Considering historically older meanings as more basic	/	Applied as one of four criteria for basic meaning	Discarded; only used as tiebreaker when contemporary dictionaries are insufficient
<i>WIDLII category</i>	"When In Doubt, Leave It In"	Cases of uncertainty or specialist terminology	Not addressed	Introduced: allows including doubtful cases to maximise coverage

2.4.4.1 Adapting MIPVU across Languages

Both MIP and MIPVU² were conceived, developed and applied to cater to the features and workings of a specific language, English. While one of the basic tenets of metaphor research is that conceptual mappings are to some extent shared across languages – though research has shown that concessions have to be made for cultural variations working as a filter on the universally-shared embodied experience (see Section 2.1.1) – , MIP(VU) offers a series of practical rules at the linguistic level that operationalise metaphoricity in verbal data in the case of English, facing the specific issue that this language poses to the researcher. Acknowledging this, Nacey et al. (2019) aimed to apply and adapt the Procedure to a variety of typologically diverse languages, highlighting research in French, Dutch, German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Lithuanian, Polish, Serbian, Uzbek, Chinese, Sesotho, and English as a lingua franca.

The issues posed by different languages were mostly related to two aspects: on the one hand, language-specific features rendering the demarcation of lexical units more difficult, with regard to processes such as word formation (inflection, derivation, prefixation, suffixation, and compounding; for example considering the fact that in some languages metaphors can be

² Henceforth written as MIP(VU) to refer to both simultaneously

found at the level of morphemes). On the other hand, the use of dictionaries as external reference sources, intended to minimise reliance on analyst intuition, proved methodologically challenging. In some languages, dictionaries are not corpus-based, do not consistently distinguish between parts of speech, and may combine multiple senses which can, in fact, provide the contrasts and comparisons necessary for identifying cross-domain mappings. These limitations required looking for other external sources such as corpora, and, where appropriate, overriding dictionary definitions, as long as such decisions were thoroughly and exhaustively justified.

The German case provides a particularly clear example of how operational constraints intersect with language-specific practices. German dictionaries rely much more heavily on cross-referencing than the English ones, meaning that establishing the meaning of a word frequently necessitates crossing word-class boundaries (e.g., noun *Flöten* ‘flutes’ → verb *flöten* ‘to play the flute’). While such cross-category reference is treated as an exception in English MIPVU, it constitutes a systematic feature of German lexicography (Herrmann et al., 2019). German MIPVU therefore diverges most clearly from English MIPVU in its approach to the structure of dictionary lemmas, systematically identifying independent senses under sub-headings (1a, 1b, 1c) and under descriptive labels that indicate figurative meanings. By contrast, Serbian highlights how grammatical morphology itself may carry metaphorical meaning, leading researchers to discuss “inflectional metaphoricity” – a phenomenon beyond the scope of English MIPVU, in which metaphor is typically conceptualised at the lexical rather than the inflectional level. Nacey et al. (2019), detailing this process of application and implementation of MIPVU in other languages, offered concrete proof of how this method can be adapted across languages, presenting a stable baseline that provides solid ground for comparisons of metaphors across languages.

2.4.4.2 Applying MIP(VU) to Italian

Vernillo (2023) provided, to the best of the author’s knowledge, the first attempt to apply the protocol to the Italian language. Subsequently, Loporini et al. (2024) also applied MIP(VU) to Italian, rendering the present study the third systematic effort to apply a version of MIP(VU) to the Italian language and the second one to yield results in terms of discourse analysis. This is due to the fact that Vernillo (2023) focusses solely on methodological aspects, discussing how language-specific features of Italian could be dealt with when applying MIP(VU), taking an approach similar to the one suggested by Nacey et al. (2019) for other languages. The following paragraphs discuss the issues Vernillo (2023) highlights, with the aim of providing the appropriate background for the implementation of MIP(VU) with Italian data in the current study.

Firstly, Vernillo (2023) restricts the analysis to indirect metaphors, in accordance with MIP’s original approach, excluding direct and implicit metaphors. She discusses polywords (*polirematiche*, e.g., *avanti e indietro*, “back and forth”), multiword expressions (*composti*, e.g.,

pesce spada, “swordfish”), syntagmatic verbs (*verbi sintagmatici*, e.g., *mettere in moto*, “start the engine”), and pronominal verbs (*verbi pronominali*, e.g., *pentirsi*, “regret”), a category present in Italian but not in English. In an attempt to follow the directives set by MIP(VU) and adapt them to Italian, she reaches the following conclusions: all four categories are considered as a single lexical unit when registered in the dictionary chosen (*GRADIT Grande Dizionario Italiano De Mauro – Vocabolario online della lingua italiana*, 1999; as an additional source when necessary, *Vocabolario Treccani* is also considered). For syntagmatic and pronominal verbs there is the additional consideration that the semantic meaning is not merely the sum of the meaning of the single part, but has a *sovrappiù semantico* (‘semantic surplus’) (Vernillo, 2023, p. 364), that is, it carries a semantic meaning that cannot be determined merely by combining the single elements. Furthermore, in the case of pronominal verbs, the pronominal form should not be equivalent to the base form. The approach thus closely follows two of the main guiding principles of, respectively, MIP and MIPVU: the criteria of decomposability, and that of being dictionary-codified. The criteria of decomposability is however limited to the two categories of verbs, noting how difficult it can be to apply it to categories of semantic constructs that exhibit a notable variation in terms of degree of semantic transparency, such as multiword expressions. Inasmuch as it still focusses on the methodological aspects that remain limited to the linguistic level, this approach retains the same issues that MIP(VU) presents when it is utilised as a first step to subsequently implement a discourse analytical approach. The second study applying MIP(VU) to the Italian language is Luporini et al. (2024). The authors adopt MIP(VU) as the primary reference point for identifying verbal metaphors in British and Italian newspaper front pages about Covid-19. However, while they recognise the “inherent challenges and subjectivity involved in metaphor identification” (Luporini et al., 2024, p. 58), specifically with regard to the issue of the basic meaning of a lexical unit, they do not discuss extensively the modality of application of MIP(VU) in their analysis.

2.4.5 Limitations of Linguistic-Level Approaches: The Conceptual Dimension and Lexical Constraints

Two recurring criticisms have been raised with respect to the methodologies discussed so far. First, they do not make claims about the underlying conceptual mappings between domains signalled by metaphor use, instead restricting the analysis to determining whether particular lexical items are used metaphorically (Cameron, 2003; Krennmayr, 2013a; Nacey et al., 2019; Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen, 2016; Steen et al., 2010). The MIP(VU) procedure is not meant to deliver cross-domain mappings, and it cannot be considered as “a procedure for the identification of conceptual metaphors’ linguistic manifestations” (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023, p. 46). On the one hand, in the case of MIP(VU), this is a deliberate choice, meant to maximise the reliability of such a method. The establishment of conceptual structure linked to the linguistic manifestation of metaphors can often be fertile ground for disagreement (Steen et al., 2010), thus further complicating the already contentious issue of

establishing what is metaphorical in language. On the other hand, the MIV procedure actually includes an additional step that goes beyond the linguistic level, based on “systematic metaphor use” (Cameron, 2003, p. 76), that is termed “vehicle grouping” (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 75). Relying on linguistic data to reconstruct conceptual content and process has been criticised as methodologically unreliable and as raising unresolved issues concerning the appropriate level of generality at which conceptual labels should be formulated (Cameron, 2003, p. 240). Thus, while stronger claims about the mental processes of individuals are refuted in the absence of empirical psycholinguistic work (Gibbs, 1994) and no *a priori* assumption is made with regard to the conceptual metaphors that might be at play in the speaker/writer and listener/reader’s mind, the semantic content of the vehicle groupings that have been identified is taken into account and used as a basis to find patterns and systematicity across the results obtained. Linguistic metaphors are sorted into groups on the basis of lexical connections among them, through an “interpretive process” (Cameron, 2007, p. 205): while the literature on specific mappings is taken into consideration and used when deemed appropriate, the main guiding principle is that of the specific interaction under consideration. The groupings are meant to capture the “essential semantic meaning” (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 75) of the vehicle terms, and they are kept “tentative, loose and temporary” (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 75). Within the discourse dynamics framework, linguistic metaphors are expected to evolve and adapt as the discourse proceeds, leaving room for changes in the patterns identified. Thus, the only claims that are made regard semantic traces of systematicity, which “may reflect patterns of metaphorical thinking-and-talking for discourse participants” (Cameron, 2010, p. 92), leaving the cognitive side not addressed directly.

The second criticism is aimed specifically at MIP and MIPVU rather than MIV, and is strongly related to the first criticism. It regards the focus on lexical units, which can be considered to be limiting to metaphor research, while a focus on the phrase-level is perceived to be a “more natural way of looking at metaphor” (Fuoli, Turner, et al., 2021, p. 1). This orientation aligns more closely with MIV than with MIP(VU) and proves particularly well suited to the type of data Fuoli et al. (2021) examine. They analyse film reviews, which often feature direct metaphors marked by explicit signalling devices, creative expression which may involve the extension or elaboration of conventional metaphors or the juxtaposition of different metaphors, and evaluative stance toward the subject matter. The limits of a lexical-level approach are equally evident in the study of metaphorical language in descriptions of highly emotional experiences, such as grief (Turner & Littlemore, 2023). Such experiences may often elicit the production of extended metaphorical scenes that require “an approach that operates beyond the level of the lexical unit” (p. 39) in order to make sense of what is being communicated as a whole and fully comprehend why metaphors are so apt at conveying personal emotional experiences to listeners (Gibbs, 2023). These examples reinforce the view that the procedures applied for metaphor identification must be adapted to the specific characteristics of the data under investigation. A guiding principle across such works remains methodological accountability, which ensures that every decision is clearly justified and reported in a way that supports replicability.

2.4.6 Bridging the Linguistic and the Conceptual Level

The following sections address approaches that engage with the conceptual dimension of metaphor analysis. While various proposals have been advanced, no method in this regard has been as widely adopted as the MIP(VU) approach (Julich-Warpakowski & Pérez Sobrino, 2023). This reflects the inherent complexity of the conceptual level, where issues of appropriate domain granularity, analyst intuition, and replicability remain areas of ongoing methodological debate. First, two attempts to operationalise the transition from linguistic to conceptual analysis are examined, including work that preceded and influenced MIP(VU) (Steen, 1999; 2002a) as well as a recent methodological extension of MIPVU designed to systematically code source domains (MSDIP, Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023). Second, the chapter turns to Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA, Charteris-Black, 2004, see 2.2.2), which prioritises the conceptual and ideological functions of metaphor while adopting less formalised procedures for linguistic identification. Finally, alternative frameworks that critique MIP(VU)'s focus on lexical units and propose different units of analysis better suited to capturing metaphorical meaning in discourse are discussed (PIMS, Johansson Falck & Okonski, 2022, 2023; De Backer et al., 2023).

2.4.6.1 Steen's Five-Step Procedure: From Linguistic Focus to Conceptual Mapping

Steen (1999; 2002a) proposed a procedure meant to cover both the linguistic and the conceptual aspect, finding "a solution" to the usage of language not directly related to the topic of discussion and preserving the "referential coherence of the stretch of discourse" (2002a, p. 394). This solution is derived by means of five distinct steps, presented below and illustrated through the expression "a watchdog organisation" (1999, p. 64):

1. "Metaphor focus identification" (p. 60): determining which expression refers to a concept that cannot be literally applied to the other referents in the surrounding text, defined as the "frame" (p. 61). In the example chosen, this would be *watchdog*.
2. "Metaphorical idea identification" (p. 62): the literal referent to which the focus refers, which in this case is *organisation*, is established. In this expression both "the literal and the nonliteral concept of the underlying proposition" (p. 64) are mentioned explicitly, but, as is noted, that is not often the case, with the literal concept having to be explicitly determined in this step of the procedure
3. "Nonliteral comparison identification" (p. 66): once the literal and the nonliteral concept have been determined, the comparison between the two is delineated in more detail: what are the properties of the focus that are applied to the literal

- concept? In other words, the comparative structure implicitly set up by the mapping needs to be made explicit, in the following manner: “some property of a committee is like some property of a watchdog” (p. 74)
4. “Nonliteral analogy identification” (p. 68): this step involves considering the properties of the focus, and deciding which specific ones can be relevant to the literal element; in this case, this can be formulated in general terms as “guarding property or people” (p. 74).
 5. “Nonliteral mapping identification” (p. 71): this refers to the process of ‘fleshing out’ the comparison, filling in the conceptual structure of both sides of the analogy and establishing in clear terms what are the parallels that are being implicitly drawn by using the focus term in the expression. In the case of “a watchdog organisation”, these would be: “The committee corresponds to the watchdog; The organizational domain corresponds to the yard; The interest or activity at risk corresponds to the property; Malpractice corresponds to trespassing; Monitoring corresponds to watching; Warning the public corresponds to barking” (p. 74)

This first attempt to operationalise metaphor identification is explicitly acknowledged by Cameron (2003) as the basis for her own approach, with regard to the part that only concerns itself with the linguistic expression. Similarly, MIPVU mirrors the first step of Steen’s five-step method, as Steen himself acknowledges. He thus proposes that the remaining four steps of his earlier procedure can serve as a wider theoretical framework which can be used to advance the research beyond the limits of a strictly linguistic perspective (Nacey et al., 2019, p. 11). Nonetheless, as soon as the process progresses, it becomes subject to the risk of the analyst’s intuition, especially in step 4, when the specific properties that are relevant in the mapping are selected; this could easily lead analysts to choose concepts that correspond to preconceived conceptual metaphors. Additionally, the more the process veers towards reliance on intuition, in step 4 and consequently step 5, the less it maintains the principle of replicability, rendering the process of reconstructing the specific choices made to arrive at the mappings established challenging for other researchers. Different interpretations might be acceptable when filling in the properties selected in the analogy established in the text, leading different analysts to arrive at quite different outcomes. Furthermore, the level of generality at which the mapping should be formulated is also dependent on the researcher’s intuition, making it difficult to agree upon suitable domain labels. It should also be noted that the examples selected by Steen (1999; 2002a) are relatively straightforward when compared to the majority of linguistic expressions which tend to be more conventional and difficult to flesh out. Semino et al. (2004) encountered difficulties applying it to conventional expressions found frequently in their corpus about cancer patients, thus going beyond the examples carefully selected by Steen and engaging with the intricacies of actual language usage. Even without considering issues with the boundary between literal and metaphorical language and delimiting precisely tenor and vehicle for each linguistic metaphors, it is noted that step 4, nonliteral analogy identification, is “highly interpretative” (Semino et al., 2004, p. 1276) inasmuch as in order to arrive at a complete nonliteral analogy it has to rely on “prototypical or default knowledge about the source domain” (Steen, 1999, p. 71). This does not take into account the fact that there might be a variety of different possible associations

for the same concepts, thus leading to different mappings depending on the analyst's own judgement. To address this problem, Semino et al. (2004) consulted both the COBUILD dictionary and concordances for the lexical items in questions from various corpora, to constrain the role of intuition and avoid subjective associations; additionally, they propose as an additional possible measure "informant testing" (p. 1288), to gather external evidence of speakers' knowledge and consequent associations of concepts. This approach acknowledges that the steps applied do not invariably lead to a single definitive association for the concept under examination, and that multiple plausible interpretations may coexist. Furthermore, they point out how Steen (1999) himself defined the last step of nonliteral mapping identification as "the weakest of all" (p. 73) and question what constitutes "adequate linguistic evidence" (Semino et al., 2004, p. 1286) justifying the proposal of conceptual metaphors. They propose a more nuanced approach, resulting in mappings that correspond more closely to the actual linguistic manifestations, without extrapolating "fully blown sets of ontological correspondences" (p. 1291) at too high a level. This approach attempts to strike a balance between actually providing useful and concrete data on how an idea is conceptualised in a specific discourse, while avoiding overly speculative leaps or the selection of conceptual domains that "are often too general as units of analysis for conceptual metaphors" (Grady et al., 1999, p. 122). The intent in this approach is not to make inferences about the cognitive mechanisms underlying the production or interpretation of the texts analysed, but the results should nonetheless address the overarching research questions and provide insights into how the topic discussed is conceptualised in this specific cultural context.

2.4.6.2 MSDIP: The Metaphorical Source Domain Identification Procedure

The MSDIP, Metaphorical Source Domain Identification Procedure (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023), is a methodological extension of the MIPVU procedure, adding to the steps for the identification of linguistic metaphor a series of instructions to code for the source domain evoked in the expression. MSDIP is not explicitly designed to identify conceptual metaphors, but aims to propose "source-domain candidates" (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023, p. 307), thus providing a starting point for research adopting a conceptual perspective on metaphor analysis. Nevertheless, this procedure is included in the present overview because it constitutes an intermediate step beyond the identification of linguistic metaphors and begins to engage, albeit tentatively, with the conceptual level through the notion of metaphor candidates. This notion is rooted in the methodological concern regarding the assignment of one definitive source domain when many linguistic metaphors could plausibly instantiate more than one conceptual metaphor or be grounded in multiple related source domains. In such cases, assigning them to one source domain risks overreliance on the analysts' intuition or awareness of predefined conceptual metaphors, thereby undermining the reliability and reproducibility of the analysis.

To overcome these issues, all available meanings in a dictionary for the lexical unit under examination are taken into consideration and compared to the contextual meaning, and the basic ones are marked as possible candidates. Then, a label is assigned to each meaning, fundamentally summarising the dictionary sense description; this step should rely on predefined labels from literature, aiding replicability and avoiding the “proliferation of very similar, but slightly differently formulated, conceptual metaphors” (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023, p. 307), while also allowing for the introduction of new labels when a need is felt to prioritise accuracy in adhering to the actual meaning. At this point, the co-text and the broader context are factored into the last step, meant to establish which label is most likely the one intended or relevant in that instance. However, a small study conducted to test the procedure shows that the cases where multiple source-domain candidates are established, and there seems to be no obvious answer to the question of which one is more appropriate, are the overwhelming majority, “78.24% (338 cases) of the metaphorically used nouns” (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023, p. 306). In these cases, the analyst must acknowledge this ambiguity and justify why multiple candidates remain plausible.

In principle, this method seeks to minimise the influence of individual intuition and promote replicability in metaphor analysis. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the reluctance to prioritise a choice among competing source-domain candidates, even when reasonable arguments could be made for one, undermines the goal of producing interpretable and conceptually meaningful findings. The often arrived-at conclusion of not deciding on a specific label may obscure patterns that are necessary for making broader generalisations. This is linked to MSDIP’s use of co-textual cues; oftentimes, metaphors are not extended in the immediate textual environment, and thus using this as one of the main factors in reaching a decision significantly impacts on how many cases remain unsolved. In once again highlighting the tension between having systematic and replicable criteria and offering insights into the discourse examined, adopting MSDIP as a method may lead to the risk of renouncing making meaningful contributions by placing various linguistic metaphors “under the same conceptual umbrella” (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023, p. 295). Overall, MSDIP represents a significant advance in linguistic-level metaphor coding, but an overly cautious approach that leaves excessive ambiguity may risk stalling the interpretive process at a merely descriptive stage.

2.4.7 Critical Metaphor Analysis: Ideology, Evaluation, and Discourse-Driven Identification

Whereas the approaches proposed by Steen (2002a; 1999) and MSDIP (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023) attempted to develop detailed procedures across all analytical levels, this section focuses on approaches that instead primarily address the conceptual dimension of metaphor identification, without providing a detailed account of the linguistic level. They belong to the research paradigm of CMA, aiming to use metaphors to gain insight into the language of

different kinds of discourse, from politics, to media, and religion (Charteris-Black, 2004). The central concern is with ideology and social relations, and how they are reflected in language through the conceptual metaphors inferred from corpus data. Such an approach is fundamentally different from the already discussed metaphor-led discourse analysis (MLDA), which does not engage with conceptual metaphor theory but rather with a discourse dynamics framework focussing more specifically on “people’s ideas, attitudes, values and language use” (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 69). The theoretical foundations and motivations of CMA were extensively discussed in Section 2.2.2. Building upon that framework, the following sections provide examples of how CMA-based approaches deal with the practical challenges of identifying metaphorical language in use and categorising it at a conceptual level.

2.4.7.1 Charteris Black: Identification, Interpretation, and Explanation

Charteris-Black (2004) proposes three stages of analysis: identification, interpretation, and explanation. This study is the first to explicitly position metaphor studies in the CDA tradition, adhering to its aim of demonstrating “how particular discursive practices reflect socio-political power structures and, by implication, to modify practices to the benefit of those whom they currently disadvantage” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 29). Therefore, metaphors are treated as potentially conveying specific ideological stances and social processes and they are studied as such. Such an approach has the objective of revealing “the covert (and possibly unconscious) intentions of language users” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 34). It draws on Cameron and Low’s (1999) stages for metaphor analysis, starting with the collection of linguistic examples of metaphors used to address a given topic, then proceeding to the generalisation of the conceptual metaphors they instantiate, and finally examining how these metaphors reflect underlying understandings or patterns of thought that exert considerable influence on people’s beliefs and actions. This process can be mapped onto the three functions of language in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985), ideational, interpersonal and textual, and the subsequently developed stages of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) of identification, interpretation and explanation, which Charteris-Black applies to metaphor analysis. It becomes evident that such an approach necessarily entails going beyond the linguistic level, inasmuch as the linguistic level that is central in previously discussed approaches such as MIP merely constitutes the identification stage.

With regard to the first stage of identification, the signal of metaphor use in language is defined as “semantic tension” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 15) between what is the original context of the vehicle and the novel context of the topic, a notion that can be compared with that of incongruity (Cameron, 2003). This is due to a “shift in domain use” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 35), which can be more or less conventionalised depending on when said shift has occurred in the language and how conventionalised it has become. This semantic tension, stemming from the linguistic metaphor, can be detected by reading the context surrounding metaphor keywords. It is operationalised by establishing a “primary meaning” and an

“extended or metaphorical meaning” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 36), with the aid of the *Longman Dictionary*. Steen et al. (2010, p. 6) note that this rationale mirrors the contrast between basic and contextual established in MIP, though Charteris-Black has applied it “without formalizing or testing his approach” (Steen et al., 2010, p. 6). Importantly, quantitative analysis within the corpus under examination plays a crucial role at this stage, as it enables researchers to establish what counts as conventional or novel language use. Without such data, it would be difficult to assess whether a given metaphor represents a creative departure from typical patterns or simply reflects established norms.

The subsequent stage of interpretation transitions to the level of conceptualisation by establishing “conceptual metaphors, and where feasible, conceptual keys” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 38). These two notions are distinguished in terms of levels of abstraction: a conceptual key is “inferred from a number of conceptual metaphors” and it “explains how several conceptual metaphors are related” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 16). They resolve the semantic tension instantiated by the linguistic metaphor and explain the cognitive and pragmatic factors determining a variety of linguistic forms that are motivated by the same underlying mapping. Finally, the stage of explanation aims to pinpoint the ideological, rhetorical and persuasive functions of the metaphor, recognising how it reinforces or challenges existing power structures and social norms. This stage operationalises the framing and evaluative functions of metaphor discussed in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, translating them into an analytical procedure grounded in specific textual evidence. The explanation should highlight how a certain metaphor may utilise the underlying evaluations conveyed by specific words and phrases, due to their connotations, to create “a predisposition towards one interpretation [of events] over another” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 41). It should articulate how the metaphor is designed to evoke certain emotional responses and shape the audience’s perception of the subject, grounding the perspective in the specific historical, cultural, and social context in which the metaphor appears, also analysing the surrounding discourse and taking into consideration the intentions of the speaker or writer.

This approach differs starkly from the others already discussed in terms of the accuracy and soundness of the steps required for the identification of metaphors, leading to the criticism that this procedure “lacks sufficient detail to be applied in a reliable and replicable way by different researchers” (Nacey et al., 2019, p. 7).

2.4.7.2 Koller: Tension in Metaphor, Lexical Fields, and Corpus Evidence

Another contribution to CMA is provided by Koller (2004). With regard to methods used to concretely detect metaphors in context, she notes that, on the one hand, the occurrence of semi-fixed collocational phrases, such as “launch a campaign” (Koller, 2004, p. 52), renders them easy to classify as metaphorical. However, the extent to which such fixed expressions still retain a metaphoric effect within the synchronic system, and thus in language use, requires verification. This problem relates directly to the gradable nature of metaphoricity

discussed in Section 2.3.1: the more an expression has become conventional, the more it can be argued whether it can be considered as “dead”, with the original connection and contrast between literal and metaphoric senses being no longer “transparent to text producers and recipients within the discourse community” (Koller, 2004, p. 50). In studies such as this one, where field research in metaphor processing is not included, checking the core meanings registered in “small dictionaries” is considered to be a useful “indicator of how encroached a metaphoric meaning really is” (Koller, 2004, p. 50).

On the other hand, when not dealing with phrases that are so conventionally used that they have achieved the status of semi-fixed, attention should be paid to words coming from a lexical field markedly different from the topic of the text under examination, for example, lexicon related to dancing in a text on corporate restructuring. In that case, the further the distance between the two input spaces involved in the mapping, the higher the “tension in metaphor” (Koller, 2004, p. 40) that the discourse will exhibit. The metaphors considered are not only at the level of the lexical unit, but also phrasal and higher, through “recontextualization at the paragraph level” (Koller, 2004, p. 54). When metaphors are identified at the linguistic level, their lexical fields of provenance, and thus the source domains in the mappings, are established with the aid of thesauri and glossaries. It is noted that throughout this process “informed intuition” (Deignan, 1999a, p. 180) will inevitably play a role. This introduces a risk of subjectivism and “random inference of underlying conceptual metaphors”, including ones that are in fact not manifestation of deep-seated conceptual mappings but rather merely “idiosyncratic metaphor usage” that does not contribute to the wider “conceptual map” (Koller, 2004, p. 53) actually shaping the discourse. To mitigate this risk, the following parameters proposed by Low (1999, p. 64) are adopted by Koller (2004), considering whether:

1. already established, conventional metaphors are extended creatively
2. the conceptualisation of a certain topic in terms of a metaphor is made explicit by the text producer
3. the semantic features transferred in the mapping are explicitly discussed
4. alternative representations used by others, with different semantic or metaphoric overtones, are challenged by text producers

Additionally, quantitative corpus analysis is considered as providing a sound empirical basis for subsequent claims about the metaphoric structures underpinning cognition and discourse in a given domain. Measurable patterns such as metaphor frequency, distribution across lexical categories, and metaphor density serve as a means to survey the entire corpus and gain an initial sense of the metaphorical tendencies within the data. Nonetheless, this is seen as a starting point, and, similarly to Charteris-Black (2004), great emphasis is given to the conceptual step of metaphor analysis, and the intricacies of metaphor identification at the lexical level are not expanded upon as they would be in MIP and subsequent developments.

2.4.7.3 Musolff: From Linguistic Tokens to Conceptual Groupings

Musolff (2004) takes a similar approach to Charteris Black (2004) and Koller (2004) in highlighting how the linguistic and the conceptual sides of metaphors cannot be separated, and attempting to provide a “semantic account of metaphor” (p. 73) that can bridge the gap between empirically observable linguistic data and conceptual categories. In his view, underlying conceptual structures determine metaphors in language, interacting with semantic knowledge and context to create metaphorical meaning. Metaphor is not a mere semantic anomaly, substituting one lexical item with another, but instead it emerges as new meaning from the interaction between the metaphorical word (“focus”) and the literal part of the statement (“frame” or “primary subject”) (Black, 1979, pp. 25–28), leading to new understanding, through a dynamic process. This functions due to the “communicative co-operation principle” prompting the hearer/reader to look for the most plausible interpretation of the lexical item that appears to be out of place and integrate “folk-theoretical scenarios as well as their normally associated evaluative presuppositions” (Musolff, 2004, p. 80) to draw the correct assumptions and interpret the meaning that is meant to be conveyed. The “linguistic surface text features” are a fundamental empirical grounding of any claim with regard to the “underlying metaphorical concepts” (Musolff, 2004, p. 8). While adopting an integrated approach to the linguistic and the conceptual level and arguing that external features cannot be used to identify metaphors inasmuch as they belong to the “conceptual side of the linguistic sign” (Musolff, 2004, p. 8), he recognises that in some instances, signals such as rhetorical “hedges” or “tuning devices”, for example *so to speak* (Cameron & Deignan, 2003) can be used to explicitly signal that the lexical items require a “special interpretative effort” (Musolff, 2004, p. 64). Nonetheless, in the majority of cases, there are no such overt signs of linguistic metaphor, and thus context becomes especially relevant, making it essential to look for metaphors at the level of key-word-in-context concordances. Through concordances, large enough text passages can be considered in order to discard what is not metaphor, or, in cases where a specific topic has been selected, to exclude metaphors that co-occur with relevant terms but do not actually concern the topic under investigation (Musolff, 2004).

The individual metaphors are seen as “tokens” of the “types” that are conceptual mappings; therefore, these individual tokens are seen as single instances to arrive at groupings, firstly at the level of “conceptual clusters” and then of “larger conceptual units” (Musolff, 2004, p. 9) that constitute the domains. The “authentic linguistic data” and their “distributional patterns” (p. 10), when a sufficient amount is collected, confer plausibility to any claim about the typicality of certain conceptual mappings. This analysis can then be used to better understand the language use of a discourse community and the specific sociopolitical attitudes, beliefs, and value systems held by that community. The groupings are established on the basis of both corpus-external and corpus-internal sources, namely lexical fields “as exemplified in standard thesaurus categories” (Musolff, 2004, p. 11) and collocational patterns extracted from the data. Together with the researcher’s assumed semantic competence, these sources assist in identifying specific linguistic structures as metaphorical and as representative of

underlying conceptual mappings. For example, the co-occurrence of some tokens in the corpora, such as those relating to “various types of JOURNEY concepts (e.g. TRAIN, CAR, SHIP, CONVOY, AEROPLANE, BICYCLE, TRANSPORT)” was used as a demonstration of their “close ‘ontological’ links” (Musolff, 2004, p. 11). Importantly, Musolff notes how the resulting conceptual spaces or source domains are inherently flawed inasmuch as they have a “radial structure”, where the central elements provide prototypical elements, “the most characteristic and easily comprehensible examples” (p. 9), while less prototypical ones reside at the “ontological ‘edges’”(Musolff, 2004, p. 11), close to the ‘fuzzy’ boundaries and thus possibly belonging to more than one domain.

2.4.7.4 Goatly: Metaphor as Bricolage and the Metalude Database

Goatly (2007) maintains that metaphors can expand “the meaning potential of the system”, flouting the norms, by using a lexical item that has “an unusual referent” (2007, p. 304). He defines linguistic metaphors as “a form of *bricolage*” (p. 4, italics in original), where something that was not originally meant to perform one function, that is, talking about a specific topic, is selected to perform such a function due to its availability. Exploiting this metaphor, he suggests how this activity of bricolage might, though in the immediate term useful inasmuch as it facilitates communication, offer a distorted representation of the topic, not having been originally designed to portray it. He notes that the process of disambiguation through which metaphor is understood can be more or less laborious, and thus more or less consciously detectable, depending on how conventional the metaphorical meaning is. For example, when interpreting “financial cuts”, it is not very difficult to disambiguate and select the dictionary meaning of “cut” that is the most relevant in that context, and the grounds (i.e. the analogical links to be drawn between source and target, see Section 2.1) are “more or less ignored” (Goatly, 2007, p. 22).

From a methodological point of view, Goatly reiterates the widespread criticism of CMT noting how previous research in metaphor – e.g., the Master Metaphors List (Lakoff et al., 1991) – often did not specify clear criteria to identify the conceptual metaphors established. Thus, the Metalude database (Goatly, 2007, p. 21), compiled by him and his team to systematically collect the most relevant metaphorical patterns in English, represents an attempt to obviate this problem and systematically provide the lexical details of all the important metaphor themes for English. In order to ground the identification of conceptual metaphors in more rigorous empirical criteria than those employed in earlier work, it was determined that the identification of a conceptual metaphor would require at least six distinct lexical items, drawn from a dictionary of contemporary English, realising the metaphor in language. In addition, each of these items should occur at least 200 times as metaphorical tokens in the *COBUILD Bank of English* corpus. The thresholds established for the Metalude database thus represent an attempt to impose methodological rigour on the identification of conceptual metaphors.

The corpus-informed approaches discussed in this section (Charteris-Black, 2004; Koller, 2004; Musolff, 2004; Goatly, 2007) ground conceptual claims in empirical linguistic evidence and attend to the discourse contexts in which metaphors are produced and received. Collectively, they demonstrate that the linguistic and conceptual dimensions of metaphor analysis cannot be pursued in isolation from one another. Nevertheless, the step from individual linguistic expressions to conceptual groupings, whether framed as domains, themes, or clusters, continues to depend substantially on the interpretive judgement of the analyst, although various approaches relying on dictionaries, corpora and previously established mappings are proposed to deal with the issue. The alternative approaches examined in the following section seek to address these challenges from a different angle, focussing on questioning the adequacy of the lexical unit as the basis for metaphor identification and proposing more detailed frameworks that can capture metaphorical meaning operating above the word level.

2.4.8 Beyond the Lexical Unit: Alternative Frameworks for Metaphor Identification and Analysis

The approaches to metaphor analysis examined in the preceding sections have revealed a persistent methodological tension. Limiting analysis to the linguistic level constrains the ability to determine which conceptual mappings might underpin a given discourse, yet approaches that prioritise the conceptual level have been criticised for lacking rigour in how they handle linguistic identification in practice. The two recent proposals discussed below engage with MIP(VU) to different extents, but share the aim of accounting more explicitly for the nuances of discourse and for the role that metaphor plays in shaping it. Both acknowledge the tensions outlined above and offer alternative analytical frameworks as a means of addressing them.

2.4.8.1 PIMS – The Procedure for Identifying Metaphorical Scenes

The first one, PIMS, was proposed by Johansson Falck and Okonski (2022, 2023). Similarly to the MIV approach, PIMS also does not posit conceptual metaphors; it merely identifies them as “always available as an optional processing strategy” (Kemmerer, 2005) as long as the metaphorical expressions are still transparent (Gibbs et al., 1989). It acknowledges similarities with the Discourse Dynamics Approach to Metaphor, but, while that approach suggests that metaphors represent to some extent a deviation from “normal, non-metaphorical language” (Johansson Falck & Okonski, 2022, p. 317), PIMS is based on the assumption that metaphors do not constitute a departure from more usual expressions, but rather constitute a central part of the cognitive system. The fundamental objection to MIP(VU) is that focusing on the level of the “metaphorically used words” implies a theoretical

stance that is to some extent at odds with the Cognitive Linguistics view that words are prompts for complex conceptualisations allowing us to access related notions (Tyler & Evans, 2003). Linguistic meaning cannot be defined as merely lexical; it is encyclopaedic, embodied and context-dependent, a matter of complex and dynamic conceptualisations (Langacker, 1987, 2002). PIMS adopts a simulation view of language, assuming that when language is processed, mental scenes are created, and, in the case of metaphorical language, the source domain of an embodied metaphor is available for potential simulation. Johansson Falck and Okonski (2022) argue that this approach is more faithful to how language is actually comprehended, and allows them to capture metaphors that go beyond the unit of analysis of MIP(VU), including metaphors that extend over phrases or longer stretches of texts. Fundamentally, PIMS differs from other approaches going beyond the division in lexical units since it posits as the focal point of analysis the scenes, or concepts, that are evoked by language, preferring an understanding of meaning as jointly construed by various elements within a sentence or discourse. The focus is moved from the linguistic constructions themselves to the scenes evoked by the linguistic constructions and the experiences they represent. This refutes the notion of semantic decomposability as a criterion for metaphor identification; even if units can be decomposed and understood separately, as long as they function together in constructing a scene, they are considered together.

Apart from the fundamental difference at the level of the unit of analysis, which in PIMS requires establishing the scenes and elements that will be included, instead of relying on the pre-established notion of lexical units, the subsequent steps retrace those of MIP and Metaphor-Led Discourse Analysis.

1. Determine what type of scene and of elements are relevant to the purpose of the study
2. Establish an understanding of the content, whether through concordance lines, extended context, or complete source texts
3. Determine if the scenes rely on direct understanding (equivalent to basic meaning coinciding with the contextual meaning) or if they can be understood by means of another experience (equivalent to basic meaning diverging from contextual meaning, indicating metaphoricity)
4. Identify and mark ambiguous cases where both metaphorical and non-metaphorical interpretations remain possible

This procedure can be applied to concordance lines, eventually including extended context and even the source text. Thus, such an approach might work together with MIP(VU): the researcher might decide to apply the MIP(VU) procedure in most cases, but resort to PIMS when dealing with units of analysis that are problematic in MIP(VU) and would tend to be excluded, such as idioms or more generally speaking longer stretches of language. As in MIPVU, similes are treated as comparing two units, the one before the signalling word (in MIPVU's terminology, the metaphor flag) and the one afterwards. Similarly, idioms are considered to be non-decomposable, a single unit that evokes a specific scene; as for all other scenes, what constitutes the focus of the evaluation is whether the scene can be understood

directly, or through another more basic type of experience. One of the fundamental tenets of PIMS is that “contextual information should be allowed to override dictionary data” (Johansson Falck & Okonski, 2022, p. 313), and the interpretation of linguistic constructions should be guided primarily by the meanings they evoke within the specific discourse under analysis, rather than by standardised dictionary entries.

Johansson Falck and Okonski acknowledge the fact that identifying scenes might appear to be more problematic than identifying lexical units, based on external sources such as dictionaries, and that adhering to MIP(VU) guidelines can assure the replicability of the results more easily. However, they posit that the segmentation into single words units does not effectively represent the meaning intended by the speaker or writer, and PIMS offers a tool that is “malleable enough to reflect the complex ways in which meaning is construed” (2022, p. 314) and account for metaphorical meaning at various levels of the analysis. Therefore, as long as researchers are clear with regard to the definition of the kind of scenes that are the focus of the analysis, these issues can be overcome and different studies applying the PIMS approach can be meaningfully compared. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to observe that this approach may fall into the opposite pitfall of that identified for MSDIP: while it gains in flexibility and applicability, allowing for more room for the inclusion of linguistic manifestations of metaphors, it does so at the cost of reliability and replicability, inasmuch as the task of establishing a metaphorical scene immediately exposes the researcher to criticism on the subjective nature of their judgments. Evidently, this is precisely the kind of vulnerability that MIP(VU) was designed to avoid by ‘outsourcing’ much of the decision-making process to external sources such as dictionaries. In essence, the trade-off remains. To employ an idiom, one cannot have their cake and eat it too: more rigid and inflexible criteria can confer more apparent solidity on a study from a methodological point of view, and could in theory contribute to adding nuances to the identification of metaphors across a wide range of languages, contexts and discourses. At the same time, the aforementioned criteria might be limiting and even produce outcomes that might appear counterintuitive or overly reductive, rather than faithfully interpreting the data. As ever, a compromise has to be reached, in order to produce meaningful results in a metaphor study. Therefore, as Johansson Falck and Okonski suggest, the first point to take into consideration is that the methodological approach is entirely dependent on the research questions established and should be chosen and refined with the aim of investigating them in the better way possible. It might be useful to maintain MIP(VU) as a baseline for most cases, focussing on the notion of some kind of contrast between two possible meanings. When deemed appropriate, the researcher, familiar with the discourse context and aware of the nuances that are being conveyed in context, can choose to ‘override’ the directions provided by MIP(VU), and focus instead on the PIMS approach, capturing more accurately the meaning that is created in context.

While the proposal of PIMS is relatively recent and has therefore not yet been applied in many studies, Turner & Littlemore (2023) note that, in their analysis of highly emotional experiences such as grief, they draw on both the Discourse Dynamics approach taken by Cameron and colleagues (Cameron, 2003; Cameron et al., 2009; Cameron & Maslen, 2010)

and the notion of metaphorical ‘scenes’ in PIMS to analyse metaphorical experiences operating “beyond the level of the word” (Turner & Littlemore, 2023, p. 40).

2.4.8.2 Strategies for Capturing Metaphorical Strings beyond MIP(VU)

An alternative addressing the limitations of MIP(VU) is proposed by De Backer et al. (2023), who introduce some adjustments while analysing the coverage of Spanish-language US-based newspapers of the migration program known as DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). They highlight how the fact that MIP(VU) is not equipped to deal with metaphorical strings going beyond the established lexical units creates challenges for quantitative semantic analysis. Since this could prove to be particularly problematic for discourse analysis studies, the method should be adapted to the specific research questions in order to obtain meaningful results while still allowing for systematic and transparent application.

Similarly to Johansson Falck and Okonski (2022, 2023), MLDA (Metaphor-led Discourse Analysis) is discussed as a possible alternative for metaphor analysis, but the notion of the vehicle term is defined as problematic inasmuch as, being more flexible than the MIP(VU) lexical unit, it is necessarily less easily delimited. Defining the boundaries by relying on the idea of metaphorical coherence of the image evoked by the vehicle term risks conflating once again the process of linguistic metaphor identification with that of semantic analysis, the very methodological issue that MIP(VU) strives to avoid (Steen, 2016). MIPVU, on the other hand, in an attempt to eliminate subjective judgements from the process as much as possible, does not sufficiently acknowledge non-compositionality, that is, meaning emerging from the complete expression as more than the sum of the individual words (Fillmore et al., 1988; Sullivan, 2007), and separates most expressions except for certain highly conventionalised units such as polywords or compound nouns that meet specific criteria. However, many lexical strings fall on “a continuum ranging from non-compositional [...] to compositional” (De Backer et al., 2023, p. 4) and the metaphorical image is often evoked by a lexical string rather than a single word.

The issues that this might cause can be divided into three categories:

1. The constituent items in a string of lexemes are different metaphors according to MIP(VU); for example, *punto intermedio*, ‘middle ground’ (“In search of a middle ground], the Democrats included a “Light” immigration version”).
2. The constituent items are not metaphorical in isolation, but rather they derive their “metaphorical force from their meaning as a whole” (Deignan, 1999b, p. 33), and are usually grounded in bodily experience; for example, *(esperado) con los brazos cruzados*, ‘(waited) with his arms crossed’ (“Osmán is a “dreamer” who has waited patiently for the opening of the road that will take him from his state of uncertainty to the certainty of immigration legalization. But he has not [(waited) with his arms crossed]: He obtained with much effort and sacrifice a bachelor’s

degree, and is currently working professionally at a major communications company for the Hispanic community”).

3. The string as a whole, which MIPVU would consider as being composed of different direct metaphors, each expressed by one of the constituent items, actually works as a whole to evoke one scenario; for example, *Como ir pintando rayas en la pared cada día que pasa*, ‘Like painting stripes on the wall with each passing day’ (“Some activists believe that it is a small breakthrough, i.e., getting work permits and protection from deportation for 5 years, is better than nothing. But for many of these hundreds of thousands of young people who have waited patiently, the in-between option is no consolation. “For me it’s not. It’s a resolution that has an expiration date. [Like painting stripes on the wall with each passing day],” Osmán tells us”).

Given that MIP(VU) would exclude them, the question of how to reliably and systematically capture metaphorical strings that go beyond the level of individual lexemes arises. One of the main issues is that many discourse studies are interested in specific referential categories or “key discourse topics” (Cameron, 2010a, p. 250), that is, entities deemed to be relevant to a specific discourse, such as, in this case “actors, entities, actions, attributes and relationships within the DACA-debate” (De Backer et al., 2023, p. 6). In light of this, De Backer et al. (2023) propose three different possible solutions:

1. A “semasiological, form-first” (p. 9), approach, meant to establish external objective criteria for what to consider. In order to justify counting collocations such as *punto intermedio*, their validity should be established using an objective external criterion such as their collocation strength in a larger corpus (Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2003). However, this method does not take into account the specific referential categories that might be central to a given study, and may consequently exclude lexical strings relevant to those categories if their collocational strength falls below the established threshold. Once again, the more methodologically sound and externally validated a method is, the more likely it is that it might not be optimally tailored to the specific needs of the research at hand.
2. An “onomasiological, concept-first” (p. 9) approach, which addresses the issue with the first approach by establishing the referential categories, and defining boundaries for lexical units on the basis of whether or not all constituent items are collectively used to refer to one of the pre-established referents. This shifts the focus more squarely on whether and how specific topics are discussed and framed metaphorically. However, both the first and the second approach rely on pre-established categories, and might not afford the level of flexibility required to take into account variables that emerge only once the coding procedure has started being implemented.
3. A bottom-up approach, dealing with the issues with the previous two approaches by proposing instead to actually start with the MIP(VU) criteria for lexemes, and accounting for the possibility of diverging from this standard procedure when it is deemed necessary to capture more accurately what is being conveyed in the

data. If a lexical string longer than the lexemes, or the multiword units considered in MIP(VU), is taken to uniformly constitute a unit of analysis, this needs to be justified and documented. This method involves “post-hoc aggregation of units” (p. 9) as deemed relevant by the analyst, combined with the inclusion of a descriptive parameter to document the formal composition and grouping decisions made.

Similarly to PIMS, this last approach attempts to allow more room for refinement than MIP(VU), recognising the need to diverge from strict criteria when confronted with data that does not fit neatly into it, while at the same time acknowledging that diverging from said criteria exposes to the risk of subjectivity. In including lexical strings that might not be registered in the dictionary, this approach also allows for subjectivity in establishing basic and contextual meaning without the guidance of a dictionary. Noting that there cannot be a “one-size-fits-all answer” (p. 12) applicable to all metaphor studies, the compromise presented here is integrating one of the three approaches delineated here into the MIP(VU) procedure.

2.4.9 Concluding Remarks: Balancing Rigour and Interpretive Depth

As this section has extensively illustrated, metaphoricity can and indeed often is “a matter of degree” (Semino et al., 2004, p. 1277); it is a phenomenon about which researchers may often have intuitions, but providing justifications and ensuring consistency while solely relying on intuitions has proven to be “far trickier than many would imagine” (Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 36). Despite substantial efforts toward standardisation, a balance between systematicity and interpretive nuance remains difficult to strike and a degree of fuzziness remains inherent in the process. The difficulty lies not only in identifying individual metaphorical expressions, but in establishing a shared understanding of what constitutes metaphoricity in the first place. Metaphor is necessarily relational, and perceptions of metaphoricity necessarily vary from one individual to another (Kövecses, 2005; Steen, 2007). Even methodologies that attempt to standardise this notion and adopt the perspective of an idealised native speaker of the language, relying on dictionaries as “culturally sanctioned representation of the knowledge about the English lexicon” (Steen et al., 2010, p. 7), still rest on particular assumptions about linguistic norms. While dictionaries might appear to be a solid and authoritative answer to the enduring question of arbitrariness, it should be noted that a dictionary is the product of the editorial choices of its authors, whose attempts to capture the current status of language and freeze-frame a faithful picture of it perpetually wrestles with its fluid and ever-changing nature. Some scholars object to approaches that yield binary categorisations, regarding them as reductive with respect to the inherently graded nature of metaphor. Yet, as Steen et al. (2010) argue, broad categorisations retain analytical value, provided they are consistently applied, as tools with which a greater comprehension of cognitive and linguistic processes and their effects can be built. Fine-grained approaches that capture gradations of metaphor become less and less reproducible with the same amount of

precision as they become more refined, underscoring the value of broader but more consistently replicable categorisations (Steen et al., 2010).

The attempt to balance on the one hand replicability and falsifiability, and on the other hand interpretive flexibility has underpinned many of the methodological developments surveyed here. The former element leads to delegating as many parts of the process as possible to external sources such as dictionaries or lexical databases, while the latter requires careful consideration of the fluidity and context-dependence of real-world discourse. Here, knowledge of the data becomes crucial, particularly when the goal is not merely to identify metaphors, but to observe how they shape meaning and structure discourse. Accordingly, the preceding overview has served not only to survey a range of influential approaches, but also to examine how each grapples with the negotiation between procedural consistency and interpretive nuance. These questions remain central to the present study, which aims to situate itself within the tradition of metaphor research while adapting established procedures where necessary in order to more accurately capture the characteristics of its object of analysis.

Chapter 3 turns to a discussion of the notion of sustainability, examining its institutional development, definitional ambiguity, and discursive construction across corporate and media contexts. Chapter 4 then builds on the methodological approaches discussed in Section 2.4 and on the characterisation of sustainability developed in Chapter 3 to illustrate how they informed the methodological choices adopted in this study.

Chapter 3

Sustainability as a Contested Concept

This chapter presents sustainability as a contested concept whose meaning is constructed through discourse rather than determined by objective definition. After briefly reviewing its institutional development (Section 3.1), I examine the conceptual frameworks that have emerged in its representation, particularly the three-pillar model, and the terminological ambiguity that enables conflicting interpretations (Section 3.2). Section 3.3 analyses how corporations have appropriated sustainability discourse to advance weak sustainability approaches, while Section 3.4 traces the development of sustainability discourse across the British and Italian contexts. Section 3.5 then presents the role of newspapers in shaping public discourse and the discussion of sustainability, while Section 3.6 discusses critiques of economic framings and greenwashing. Finally, Section 3.7 deals with the function of metaphor in making abstract sustainability concepts concrete and accessible.

3.1 Institutional Development: The Brundtland Report, the SDGs, and European Policy

The notion of sustainability, or sustainable development, occupies a distinctive position in contemporary discourse: it is simultaneously ubiquitous and underspecified, invoked across institutional, corporate, and media contexts, while retaining a conceptual indeterminacy that allows for a wide range of interpretations. Since its inception, it has demonstrated remarkable durability by remaining a focus of public attention (Krieg & Toivanen, 2021). Although it is most commonly linked to the publication of the Brundtland Report of the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, conceptual precursors that significantly contributed to shaping the Brundtland definition can be traced back to much earlier (Mebratu, 1998). A turning point in its institutional history occurred in 1972, when three key events formalised the concept. Firstly, the Club of Rome, a non-profit organisation of scientists, economists, and business leaders, published *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972). This report warned that the economic models of the 1960s and 1970s would cause industrial society to exceed ecological boundaries within decades and advocated for a radical shift towards a “world system [...] that is sustainable without sudden and uncontrollable collapse” (Meadows et al., 1972, p. 158). Secondly, building on these findings, the editors of *The Ecologist*, an environmental journal, published *A Blueprint for Survival*, presenting their proposals for the creation of a sustainable society (The Ecologist 1972). Lastly, the 1972 Stockholm UN Conference on Human Environment acknowledged the vital role of environmental management and the implementation of assessment tools (DuBose et al.,

1995), representing a major step forward in the institutional formalisation of the sustainability paradigm (Mebratu, 1998).

Building on these foundations, the World Commission on Environment and Development published the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), which marked the “political coming of age” (Mebratu, 1998, p. 501) of the concept and provided the definition of sustainable development that is the most globally recognised and forms the bedrock of modern sustainability discourse:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987, p. 37)

The crux of this conceptualisation lies in the search for a balance between current needs and environmental limitations. In doing so, it explicitly correlates sustainability to “futurity” (Basiago, 1995, p. 109). The WCED argues that current development paths fundamentally ignore this temporal element. By engaging in practices that cause lasting ecological damage, society effectively “borrows environmental capital” (WCED, 1987, p. 14) from future generations with no prospect of repayment. This damage creates ripple effects throughout the global economy, as the environment and the economy are interwoven into a “seamless net of causes and effects” (1987, p. 13). While recognising these systemic issues, the Report does not fundamentally question the growth model itself. Instead, it advocates for a rethinking of development paths by promoting poverty alleviation, environmental improvement, and social equitability through sustainable economic growth. This institutional approach culminated in the multifaceted framework of *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015), adopted by 193 United Nations member states in September 2015. This agenda established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets to be achieved by 2030, aiming to balance inclusive economic growth, social development, and environmental protection. The SDGs differ from previous conceptualisations in terms of the depth and granularity of issues identified, addressing “an astonishing range of very different environmental and socioeconomic challenges, some of which are global in nature and some of which are more context-specific” (Barkemeyer et al., 2017, p. 3). The manifold blueprint established in the UN’s 2030 Agenda thus represents the most comprehensive institutional framework for sustainability to date, illustrating the breadth of interconnected areas and challenges that this understanding of sustainable development encompasses.

Given the focus of this study on British and Italian media, the European regulatory context is especially pertinent. The European Union has been a significant parallel actor in this institutional development (European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, 2000). Sustainability entered EU environmental policy in the 1982-1986 Environment Action Programme, and the framework progressively expanded in subsequent policy frameworks. The EU played an instrumental role in shaping the 2030 Agenda, and all EU member states are committed to its implementation within EU policies (European Commission, n.d.). Contemporary EU policy centres on the European Green Deal and the 8th Environment Action

Programme (EAP), establishing legally binding commitments toward climate neutrality by 2050 (European Commission, 2019). The 8th EAP, which entered into force on 2 May 2022, currently serves as the EU's legally agreed common agenda for environment policy until 2030. The European regulatory context has proven particularly influential in shaping corporate sustainability practices and reporting requirements both within the EU and internationally, through what scholars have termed the "Brussels Effect", that is, "the European Union's ability to set global standards for industrial and financial rules and regulations" (Redondo Alamillos & De Mariz, 2022, p. 2).

3.2 Conceptual Architecture: The Three-Pillars or Circles Model

After decades of institutional and academic debate, the precise definition of sustainability remains contested, as does the question of whether a meaningful distinction can be drawn between sustainability and sustainable development. The concept, as the literature frequently acknowledges, is intrinsically resistant to precise delineation. The most widely accepted framework conceptualises sustainability through three interconnected dimensions, often referred to as pillars: environmental, social and economic. This model has gained widespread traction in public discourse and typically focuses on balancing trade-offs between equally desirable objectives within these three categories (Millar et al., 2019; Purvis et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this conceptualisation lacks a theoretically rigorous foundation, seemingly "just appearing in the literature" (Purvis et al., 2019, p. 685) with no clear origin, and being taken at face value as a common view of sustainability as early as 2001 (Giddings et al., 2002).

Within the literature, two distinct approaches to this model can be identified, reflected in different visual representations carrying distinct conceptual implications. The first approach presents the three elements as discrete dimensions (Goodland, 1995; Goodland & Daly, 1996), distinguishing the three types to better organise the practical actions required for "global sustainability" (Goodland, 1995, p. 2). The "three-pillar" or "three-legged stool" model (Millar et al., 2019, p. 12) thus visually presents the dimensions as separate. While the stool metaphor foregrounds the notion that all three dimensions must remain equally balanced for long-term sustainability to be achievable (Young, 1997), this model has been criticised for implying compartmentalisation (Dawe & Ryan, 2003) and for making sustainability sound static whereas it should be viewed as a dynamic process (Elkington, 1997). The second approach instead conceptualises the dimensions as necessarily interacting systems that strengthen and enhance one another (Basiago, 1995). The three overlapping circles or Venn diagram representation (Barbier, 1987) emphasises this interconnectedness (Flint, 2013; Millar et al., 2019). It foregrounds how the three aspects cannot be completely separated, and how any challenge or potential solution in one area is inevitably shaped by externalities arising from the other two (Bergman et al., 2018).

Hence, the alternative figurative representations add different nuances to interpretation. The circles convey efficiently high interdependence, while the pillars present the dimensions as equally important components of a larger structure. It might be argued that the endurance of the three-pillar model is connected to its reference to the conceptual domain of building, which carries entailments of a process that, though long and arduous, will lead to the final result of a solid structure able to sustain itself. As previously noted in Section 2.2.1, these figurative framings necessarily offer partial representation of vast and complex issues, each presenting advantages and disadvantages with regard to the aspects that are brought to the foreground and those that are kept in the background. Such considerations suggest that more than one metaphor is needed to provide a suitable, though necessarily incomplete, representation of sustainability.

3.2.1 Definitional Ambiguity: Sustainability, Sustainable Development, and the Weak vs. Strong Divide

Any discussion of sustainability discourse must address a fundamental terminological question: what, if any, is the distinction between ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’? The “competing language” (Purvis et al., 2019, p. 691) of these terms remains difficult to disentangle, and they are frequently used almost interchangeably, along with related formulations such as ‘corporate social responsibility’ and ‘corporate sustainability’ (Dovers & Handmer, 1992; Janoušková et al., 2019; Sartori et al., 2014; Sheehy & Farneti, 2021). It should be noted that, at its most fundamental level, ‘sustainability’ qualifies more generally the ability of sustaining a specific state or situation, that is, ensuring that it continues to exist or happen. This broader semantic scope means that the term ‘sustainability’ can be applied in contexts far removed from environmental and social concerns. Janoušková et al. (2019) note, for instance, that “sustainability of pension systems” or “sustainability of fiscal policy” (p.3) denote specifically the ability of governments to secure the long-term functioning of these systems.

Not all scholars treat the two concepts as synonymous. A substantive distinction drawn in the literature positions sustainability as the ultimate long-term goal, whereas sustainable development serves as the process or pathway to achieve it (Bergman et al., 2018; Sartori et al., 2014; Yacoumis, 2017). From this perspective, sustainable development functions as “an organising principle” (Fergus & Rowney, 2005, p. 21) that human society should follow for life on a finite planet, and sustainability constitutes “the long-term and difficult goal of reaching an ecologically sustainable state” (Dovers & Handmer, 1993, p. 217). This distinction, which foregrounds the notion of development in the process to actually achieve sustainability, carries significant implications for how the relationship between the three pillars is conceptualised. The prevailing approach to sustainable development, as exemplified by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ki-Moon (2013), promises to simultaneously “generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and

strengthen governance". This paradigm, often termed "green growth" (Yacoumis, 2017, p. 2) or "ecological modernisation" (Christoff, 1996, p. 476), rests on the core tenet that economic growth and ecological protection are mutually compatible. Despite these conceptual distinctions, empirical trends suggest that 'sustainability' has become the more prevalent term in public discourse. Analysing articles from 115 national newspapers across 39 countries between 1990 and 2008, Barkemeyer et al. (2009) observed that while 'sustainable development' dominated the first half of this period, it was surpassed by 'sustainability' in the following decade.

These terminological shifts reflect the deeper conceptual problem of opacity that continues to characterise sustainability discourse. Despite its ubiquity, or perhaps because of it, the concept of sustainability has been repeatedly defined as, fundamentally, undefinable. It has been described, alternatively, as elusive (Goldin and Winters, 1995), opaque (Goodland, 1995), a murky concept (Aguirre, 2002) and dangerously vague (Daly, 1996), and it resists precise definition. This highlights a central paradox: while general consensus can be easily achieved around the desirable goals of living within planetary means, avoiding climate catastrophe, and ensuring that nobody suffers from destitution, the difficult and still unresolved question of how to achieve these goals in practice remains contested. What could initially be considered a "good political strategy" for building consensus quickly on an deliberately broad definition became "a breeding ground for disagreement" (Daly, 1996, p. 7). It has been argued that it is precisely this vagueness that explains the success of the definition presented in the Brundtland Report; the endurance of the definition stems directly from and has persisted because of its opacity, and the variety of interpretations it can be attributed (Goodland, 1995; Mebratu, 1998). As Mebratu critically noted already in 1998, sustainable development had thus become "something to which everyone can agree, like motherhood and apple pie" (p. 502). Its vagueness, combined with its positioning of sustainability within a growth context, encouraged widespread adoption (Goodland, 1995). As demonstrated above, this opacity extends to the nomenclature itself, rendering the distinction between sustainability and sustainable development unclear and contributing to their interchangeable use in much public discourse.

This conceptual and terminological ambiguity has had far-reaching consequences for how sustainability functions in contemporary discourse. The opacity surrounding both the concept and its nomenclature has solidified the status of sustainability as a "typical floating or empty signifier" (Catenaccio, 2019, p. 208) capable of taking on multiple, often mutually contradictory, meanings. It remains a "contested and elusive concept with which to engage" (Milne et al., 2006, p. 802), ontologically open and subject to countless context-specific understandings. Consequently, it carries different meanings for different actors and organisations (McKenzie, 2004; Zec, 2024). Although it has been argued that variation in conceptualisations necessarily reflects the abstract, complex, and inherently flexible nature of the concept (Carew & Mitchell, 2006), this leaves room for various interpretations, which make it difficult to have clarity of purpose (Sunderlin, 1995) and may hinder the process of creating a unified actionable framework for its implementation (Labuschagne et al., 2005; Purvis et al., 2019). This capacity to accommodate multiple interpretations has not simply

created confusion; it has enabled fundamentally divergent approaches to emerge under the same conceptual umbrella. Strong sustainability emphasises living within the means of nature and acknowledges finite planetary limits (Milne et al., 2006). It advocates for radical transformation, reforming the configuration of industrial production to align with ecological boundaries and human rights (Sheehy & Farneti, 2021). Weak sustainability, by contrast, interprets development primarily as economic growth and adopts a functionalist approach that treats sustainability as something that can be added incrementally to existing business practice, an approach that has come to be known as a 'business case' for sustainability (Milne et al., 2006).

3.3 Corporate Discourse: Weak Sustainability and the Triple Bottom Line

The semantic latitude inherent in the definition of sustainability has been readily embraced by the business community. This ambiguity creates ample opportunity for considerations linked to profit and growth rather than ecological interests, allowing corporations to claim ethicality by adopting sustainability discourse while not implementing any substantive change to core activities (Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023). A 'triple bottom line' (TBL) accounting method, drawing heavily on the three-pillars conceptualisation of economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Lamberton, 2005), rose to prominence following the publication of the book *Cannibals With Forks* (Elkington, 1997). This approach ensures that the traditional financial bottom line of a corporation is complemented by bottom lines for social and environmental performance. Often summarised with the alliterative shorthand 'People, Planet, Profit', this framework encourages firms to consider longer-term perspectives in their decision making. However, critics argue that TBL often perpetuates business-as-usual approaches rather than driving genuine transformation (Milne & Gray, 2013). Thus, this prevailing corporate framing has been criticised for, once again, placing excessive emphasis on 'development', and not enough on 'sustainable', fostering an approach which some argue is incompatible with an actual implementation of sustainability (e.g., Koteyko, 2012).

Banerjee (2003) identifies a discursive shift in corporate discourse from sustainable development to "the more positive sounding sustainability", subsequently narrowing towards "corporate sustainability" (p. 163). This represents a move "from global planetary sustainability to sustaining the corporation through growth opportunities" (Banerjee, 2003, p. 163), with businesses actively engaged in defining sustainability-related concepts "in a way which at best gives a weak definition of sustainable development" (Welford, 1998, p. 5). This terminological evolution reflects a broader reorientation in which businesses and organisations have come to be seen as central actors in sustainability, and sustainability itself as progressive improvements, reflecting a weak sustainability approach (Milne et al., 2006). The definition of the Brundtland Report, with its emphasis on meeting present needs, though with the caveat of not compromising future generations, provides a discursive framework

that can accommodate corporate interests and reinforce the assumption that the economic growth pursued by corporations can be reconciled with ecological imperatives and social concerns (Milne et al., 2006).

The current attention of businesses to sustainability has also been driven by regulatory developments, since the regulatory landscape surrounding corporate sustainability disclosure has evolved considerably in recent years. This shift was largely prompted by a growing interest among stakeholders in non-financial information, alongside international dissatisfaction with corporate scandals and the subsequent erosion of public trust (Jámbor & Zanócz, 2023). Consequently, the European Union introduced the Non-Financial Reporting Directive (2014/95/EU), obliging major corporations to disclose information on environmental, social, and governance matters (Sheehy & Farneti, 2021).

The EU mandatory approach has been demonstrated to be more efficient than voluntary disclosure systems, and other countries have adopted EU policies into their legislation, reflecting the 'Brussels effect' discussed in Section 3.1 (Redondo Alamillos & De Mariz, 2022). Within this context, non-financial reporting has emerged as a primary mechanism for businesses to demonstrate commitment to the environmental, social, and governance actions outlined in the 2030 Agenda (Raman et al., 2023). Sustainability has thus become "an obvious buzzword in today's business environment", where "claiming to be 'sustainable' is to all effects and purposes akin to claiming to be ethical" (Catenaccio, 2009, p. 208).

3.4 Italy and UK: The Development of Sustainability Discourse across Two Countries

Given the comparative focus of this study, the features of sustainability discourse pertaining specifically to the UK and Italy are discussed in this section.

Russel (2007) noted that the UK, whose commitment to coordinated environmental policy dated back to the early 1990s, was a frontrunner among European Union states in adopting sustainable development strategies. However, he argued that, at the time of writing, sustainable development had yet to make a significant impact on UK policy making, attributing this limited influence to inconsistencies in governmental definitions of sustainable development, intermittent political support, and insufficient integration between different administrative mechanisms, tools and processes. This evaluation is echoed by Kambites (2014), who, drawing on a critical discourse analysis of five strategy documents produced by UK national governments between 1990 and 2010, shows how the concept of sustainable development was progressively assimilated to the dominant political ideologies of neo-liberalism, Thatcherism and New Labour, with the asserted compatibility of continued economic growth and environmental protection established discursively through devices such as the listing of economic, social and environmental aims as equivalent and mutually reinforcing. The well-established flexibility of the term, she argues, allowed its contradictions

to be glossed over, so that successive governments invoked sustainable development to justify inaction while prioritising economic concerns and “paying lip service” to the social and ecological dimensions (Kambites, 2014, p. 347). This pattern has been detected in various sectors. For instance, in the field of food policy, sustainability rose to prominence in the mid-2000s and subsequently declined, displaced by the narrower goal of food security and by an emphasis on competitiveness (Sharpe & Barling, 2019). Throughout this period the social dimension functioned as a “pliable pillar” (Sharpe & Barling, 2019, p. 228), reshaped to fit the agenda of successive governments and progressively condensed into an individualistic notion of wellbeing which did not include the relational concern with fairness and equity widely held to be central to social sustainability. Examining trade publications, policy documents and interviews, Ehgartner (2020) similarly finds food sustainability discourse to be organised around three interpretative frames, namely consumer sovereignty, economic rationality and stewardship, which together marginalise the environmental dimension and constitute a shared discursive common ground among retailers, public bodies and other authoritative actors. Comparative work on food-system transitions reaches a related conclusion: contrasting the British and French trajectories, Lamine and Marsden (2023) find that an intensifying competition between rival sustainability narratives has driven a growing fragmentation of the field since the 1990s, shaped by the particular configuration of relations among the state, economic actors and civil society in each country.

The political and policy trajectory of sustainability discourse in Italy has been traced over time. For the 1980s, Zampieri (2025) shows how sustainable development was taken up only slowly and unevenly by the three main political cultures of the period, the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, and the Communists. Extending the account to 1992-2020, Pizzimenti and Di Giulio (2023) portray the institutionalisation of sustainable development as a story of failure, in which cognitive, institutional and political factors, compounded by instability and two economic crises, left its policy outputs largely ceremonial, until the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) of 2021 reasserted a commitment to ecological transition. More recently, Coronato et al. (2025) describe the governance architecture built around the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of 2017, a multilevel and multisectoral framework assigning a central role to regions and territories in localising the Sustainable Development Goals. The reach of such governance has been proven to be uneven at the local level: examining Italian local governments between 2000 and 2009, Sangiorgi et al. (2017) found that European recommendations produced largely declarative commitments, and conclude that voluntary facilitation alone is insufficient to embed sustainability policies sub-nationally. Saviano et al. (2019) analyse instead sustainability communication in listed companies, finding that ESG disclosures are shaped by a strategic orientation to secure the consensus of external stakeholders. Comparable dynamics appear in the public and hybrid sector, where SDG reporting in a municipally owned enterprise served to manage competing institutional demands (Gaspari et al., 2026), and in higher education, where consistency between strategic plans and sustainability reports is rarely achieved and institutionalisation is shaped by normative pressures (Di Tullio & Rea, 2025). A specific strand concerns the energy transition; bridging the political and energy fields, Brondi et al. (2014) analyse parliamentary debates and the national press, characterising

Italian discourse as techno-centric and inconsistently combining centralised (“hard”) and decentralised (“soft”) representations in a way that tends to preserve centralised control while neglecting citizen participation. Sarrica et al. (2018) compare instead national, regional and local political and press discourses, finding that the argumentative short circuits characterising national and regional discourse, which confine citizens to accepting or refusing top-down decisions, are disrupted at the local level, where network governance and active energy citizenship emerge as alternative framings.

In an explicitly comparative study, Albareda et al. (2006) characterise the promotion of corporate responsibility as more systemic, government-centred and top-down in the UK, and more multilevel and multi-stakeholder in Italy. Although this picture predates later developments such as the Non-Financial Reporting Directive and the PNRR, the structural contrast it draws remains relevant, and it is consistent with the broader emphasis placed on stakeholders under the Italian civil-law tradition, as opposed to the shareholder orientation of UK common law (Minciullo, 2019).

3.5 Media Discourse: The Mediating Role of the Press in Shaping Collective Understanding

Across both national contexts, the press is one of the principal arenas in which sustainability discourse reaches the public, and it is to this mediating role that the discussion now turns. As established in the previous sections, sustainability emerges as an inherently multifaceted issue that cannot be regarded as purely scientific or environmental, defying simple measurement or objective definition. Its widespread representation through the three pillars framework demonstrates that sustainability functions as a social and political problem, inextricably linked to human behaviour and with consequences and ramifications affecting innumerable fields. Given that implementing sustainability encompasses managing shared resources (i.e., the environment, in all of its components) and addressing the effects of climate change both from the perspective of long-term environmental damage and that of its repercussions on society, sustainable development can be understood as a “social problem that is defined and constructed socially” (Bonfadelli, 2010, p. 259). This process of communal construction unfolds in public spaces that are shared by diverse stakeholders ranging from policymakers to corporate actors, researchers, individuals and news media. Given, on the one hand, the relevance of sustainability for critical decision-making processes affecting present and future society, and on the other hand its inherent complexity and uncertainty, communication plays a crucial role in shaping how these challenges are addressed (Newig et al., 2013). Generally speaking, a significant link between the focus of media attention and public perceptions on the relevance of an issue has long been identified (Atwater et al., 1985), which leads to the adoption of the volume of media coverage as an adequate proxy for the level of public attention (Carvalho, 2005).

Mass media serve as crucial mediators in this communication process, functioning not merely as a conduit for reporting events but rather providing interpretive portrayals that reflect underlying ideological perspectives (Baker et al., 2013a, p. 3). Despite experiencing gradual circulation decline, print news media continue to exert significant influence over knowledge formation and social attitudes. Research has shown that legacy news media amplify public attention to current issues (Langer & Gruber, 2021). Comparative evidence from nine European countries, including the UK and Italy, suggests that print outlets play a comparatively moderating role: readers relying on newspapers tend to hold more positive views of immigration than those relying on television or social media, where coverage is more polarised and affect-driven (Terren, 2024). Additionally, in Italy local newspapers have been shown to increase voter turnout and enhance accountability by acting as an “external governance power” (De Giovanni et al., 2023, p. 6339). When individual papers are considered, political orientation has been shown to have a significant effect on readers’ attitudes. Lynott et al. (2019) found that in the UK, readers of the *Daily Mail* display stronger implicit anti-immigration biases than *Guardian* readers, suggesting that repeated exposure to biased language reinforces attitudes. Similarly, Foos & Bischof (2022) showed how the long-term boycott of *The Sun* in the UK county of Merseyside reduced Euroscepticism, illustrating how the effects of removing a powerful tabloid voice impacted public opinion. Media discourse thus remains a privileged vehicle for introducing dominant views into society (van Dijk, 2005). This influence stems from the reach and credibility of the media, their impact on policymakers (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005), and their role as agenda-setters both “intermedia” (McCombs, 2014, p. 211), shaping the content of other media, and at a broader level, influencing decision-making by the general public and policy actors (Koteyko, 2012; Painter & Gavin, 2015). Beyond guiding public attention toward specific issues, media shape interpretive frameworks (McCombs, 2014). Multiple factors influence how mass media present information: the political agendas of newspapers, journalists’ capacity to synthesise and communicate specialised notions, and their assumptions about who constitutes the target audience, which shape both content selection and presentation style (Richardson, 2007). This audience-focused approach connects directly to media tendencies to foreground content that can maximise reader engagement (Garzone, 2014) and amplify public response (Nikitina, 2020), potentially resulting in either intentional or inadvertent manipulation of how information is interpreted.

News outlets thus exert a “cumulative” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 54) effect: through the repetition of images and concepts compounding over time, the media contribute to shaping how the general public comes to understand and forms opinions about a specific topic (Dietrich et al., 2006; Lido et al., 2006; van Dijk, 1991). As Stubbs (2001) argues, “[r]epeated patterns show that evaluative meanings are not merely personal and idiosyncratic, but widely shared in a discourse community” (p. 215). These meanings are partly shaped by the linguistic choices that newspapers consistently make, contributing to the establishment of entrenched ways of thinking about a topic (Baker et al., 2013). Therefore, the analysis of a substantial amount of news articles proves especially effective for shedding light on repetitive patterns influencing the readership (Baker et al., 2013).

3.5.1 Representations of Sustainability in the News

Public opinion on contentious matters relies primarily on the information received through mass media, rather than on the actual underlying science (Nikitina, 2020). Thus, media play a fundamental role specifically in cementing the concept of sustainability in the collective consciousness, by both reflecting societal dynamics and providing a place to structure and develop a shared discourse. Media constitute one of the main channels through which the public can familiarise themselves to sustainability and with large-scale approaches to achieving it (Ziemann, 2011). Being unable to access and process the multitude of sustainability-related information available autonomously, the public relies instead on “infomediaries” (Deephouse & Heugens, 2009, p. 541), third-party mediators fulfilling the function of selecting and synthesising pertinent information, often paired with social evaluations guiding the public (George et al., 2016). Consequently, newspapers shape societal discourse about sustainability by influencing how sustainability issues and related research enter public conversation (Fischer et al., 2017; Ryghaug, 2011). Sustainability represents a “cross-sectional media topic” (Bonfadelli, 2010, p. 259), due to its threefold nature, with scientific, economic, and societal drivers and outcomes. This complexity poses challenges regarding the competencies needed to discuss sustainability accurately and thoroughly, making the manner in which it is communicated in the public sphere critically important. It should be simultaneously on the one hand impactful and effective, and on the other hand meaningful and accessible to the public at large, aiming to create common knowledge about specific areas of interest (Roulet & Clemente, 2018).

Despite the increasing complexity of the mass media landscape in the recent years, with numerous new communication channels emerging, broadsheet newspapers continue to hold a significant role in exposing the wider public to sustainability-related issues (Zec, 2024). Nonetheless, two factors emerge: on the one hand, owing to its complexity and ambivalence, the concept of sustainable development has been less readily taken up by the mass media; although over time there has been an increase in the media interest about the topic, this increase has not been consistent (Zec, 2024). On the other hand, even when coverage of sustainability challenges other than climate change has increased in the past, its framing in the press has received less attention (Barkemeyer et al., 2017; Bonfadelli, 2010; Diprose et al., 2018). Moreover, media coverage of sustainability tends to be mostly reactive rather than proactive: environmental and social issues typically enter the news cycle only in response to external triggers, events, or official public relations events, rather than through a sustained, investigative journalistic agenda (Bonfadelli, 2010). Because sustainability is a long-term, lingering, and complex issue, it often lacks the immediate ‘surprise’ factor required for daily news (Atanasova, 2019b; Bonfadelli, 2010). These issues can be partly attributed to its status as a floating signifier and to the methodological challenges of definition (Barkemeyer et al., 2009), arising from the widespread use of this term and the vast array of meanings it can

take on as a social construct with “multiple and contested meanings” (Diprose et al., 2018, p. 2).

Furthermore, even when discussing sustainability challenges, news media discourse reflects traditional news reporting trends: firstly, the balance-as-bias problem. While the media may try to present multiple perspectives on issues to avoid accusations of bias, in cases such as those mentioned above, this practice can have the effect of giving space to sceptical voices and thus contributing to the notion that no scientific consensus has yet been reached on matters such as climate change (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004). Additionally, coverage may focus on crises and natural disaster due to the ease with which they can be represented through personalisation and dramatization (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; Doulton & Brown, 2009). Most importantly, due to its overall authority orientation across various types of coverage (Hansen, 1991), the media tend to rely on a limited pool of sources in government and mainstream business (Bonfadelli, 2010; Diprose et al., 2018; Yacoumis, 2017), presenting a section of the debate that “takes place inside a box” (Lewis, 2000, p. 268). Lewis’s (2000) analysis of source selection in sustainability news coverage illustrates this pattern: national government sources were the most commonly cited, followed by NGOs and industry representatives, with academics and international government less frequently heard; notably, indigenous voices were almost entirely absent. As established in Section 3.3, sustainability has unquestionably come to be connected to ethicality, signalling an awareness of social and environmental issues and a preoccupation with the future of our planet and its inhabitants (Catenaccio, 2019; Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023). This prompted business to assert claims of being sustainable as a sign of embracing their social responsibility and being ethical, in an effort to retain legitimacy. This stance is communicated directly by business, for example through sustainability reports or dedicated webpages on their website, but crucially, it is frequently conveyed to the general public by newspapers. Businesses are presented as a credible voice, and the framing of sustainability as being inextricably linked to economic growth is never really challenged (Atanasova, 2019b; Diprose et al., 2018; Lewis, 2000).

In mainstream news media, sustainability is thus predominantly represented through neoliberal and technocratic frames (Atanasova, 2019b; Diprose et al., 2018; Yacoumis, 2017). Sustainable development is often framed “almost exclusively within an economic growth paradigm that assumes that economic growth, technology, and northern expertise are the most effective way to achieve development” (Lewis, 2000, p. 244). This results in a notable imbalance between the three pillars: the economic pillar is frequently prioritised, with coverage often defining sustainability through market mechanisms and green growth (Diprose et al., 2018; Zec, 2024). Conversely, there are few positive or solutions-focused news stories about the social pillar of sustainability, perhaps reflective of the fact that this remains “relatively unexplored territory” (Murphy, 2012, p. 25) compared to the dominant frame of neoliberal environmentalism. This is especially true in the British press, where sustainability action is chiefly related to the actions of business leaders and private consumers, rather than political intervention (Hellsten et al., 2014; Koteyko, 2012). Technology is presented as the solution to most problems, with industrialised countries being the ones most successful in using scientific innovations and financial mechanisms to reconcile environmental and

economic issues (Diprose et al., 2018; Doulton & Brown, 2009; Koteyko, 2012). Thus, a form of “green” (Atanasova, 2019b, p. 2) or “sustainable consumerism” (Diprose et al., 2018, p. 8) is encouraged, as a kind of environmentalism that does not problematise the notion of a growth economy and its repercussions on the ecology of the planet (Diprose et al., 2018). The representation of sustainability remains superficial, not exposing readers to the relevance of international commitments or the need for behavioural change, especially in terms of measures aimed at the reduction of general consumption (Diprose et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the public is aware of the issues typical of news reporting trends and may therefore regard the media as a problematic source of information, attributing varying levels of credibility to different outlets (Whitmarsh, 2009).

3.6 Critical Perspectives: Growth Paradigms and Legitimation Discourse

Despite its near-universal institutional endorsement, the concept of sustainability and sustainable development has attracted sustained and significant criticism from multiple scholarly perspectives. These have emerged and evolved alongside the paradigm itself and have accordingly been introduced in the preceding sections. The following section, however, provides a more systematic overview of these areas of contention. While these objections operate at theoretical, discursive, and practical levels, they converge on a central concern: whether the dominant sustainability paradigm, as it is currently constituted, can deliver meaningful ecological transformation.

Perhaps the most persistent line of criticism concerns the economic framing that underpins institutional sustainability discourse, with an approach that typically conforms to ‘ecological modernisation’ paradigms (Atanasova, 2019b; Yacoumis, 2017). Analysing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Stibbe (2021) observes that, although many aspects, including gender equality, the elimination of poverty, and environmental stewardship, are consistent with the principles of ecosophy, the primary focus is economic. He points to the linguistic habit of placing the economic dimension first in the sustainability triad, before the environmental and the social one, as evidence of this bias. The primary goal in the Agenda is expressed as sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth for all countries and increases in productive capacity. This approach is exemplified in the logo for Goal 8 of the SDGs, “Decent Work and Economic Growth”, which features a vector that depicts economic growth visually with a line that goes up and down before shooting upwards at a steep angle, conveying a narrative of unlimited growth. Therefore, the SDGs can be considered to be “actively dangerous”, structuring the global development agenda around “a failing economic model that requires urgent and deep structural changes” (Hickel, 2015, para. 2). Opponents of ecological modernisation contend that persistent economic expansion, fuelled by ever-increasing resource consumption, is fundamentally incompatible with the preservation of the ecological foundations on which humanity depends (Daly & Farley, 2011; Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2013). Numerous scholars dispute the claim that technological breakthroughs, increased

efficiency, and incremental political reform can effectively offset the environmental toll of a growing global population and economy (Kemp & Van Lente, 2011; Moriarty & Honnery, 2008; Yacoumis, 2017). This scepticism towards technological solutions and market-based mechanisms represents a fundamental challenge to the premises underlying much institutional sustainability discourse. In response to these perceived inadequacies, some scholars have proposed alternative framings that challenge the development paradigm more fundamentally. For instance, Selby (2007) articulates a framework of sustainable contraction, wherein wealthy nations scale down their economies, either willingly to prevent ecological collapse, or by necessity in response to it.

A related critique concerns the “erasure” of nature within sustainability discourse. The natural world is often obscured within institutional sustainability texts, appearing only as “the vaguest of traces” (Stibbe, 2021, p. 154). The documentation of the SDGs, for instance, mentions humans significantly more than animals or plants, and frequently frames ecological entities as natural resources intended for human use rather than as living beings with intrinsic value (Stibbe, 2021). This anthropocentric orientation, critics argue, undermines the capacity of sustainability discourse to foster genuine ecological thinking, reducing the non-human world to its instrumental value and thereby reproducing the very logic that has driven environmental degradation. A further strand of criticism concerns the strategic deployment of sustainability discourse for purposes of legitimation rather than transformation. The conceptual ambiguity discussed above creates opportunities for greenwashing, where corporations and institutions use the language of sustainability to mask business-as-usual practices that do not challenge existing power structures (Janoušková et al., 2019; Niceforo, 2023). Invoking sustainability can serve to greenwash activities that simply relocate resource extraction or postpone the inevitable degradation of commodities into waste (Krieg & Toivanen, 2021). These concerns are further reflected in international climate negotiations, with NGOs reporting that COP events are treated by governments and corporations as “a greenwashing PR opportunity” (Augé, 2023b, p. 66) promoting misleading Net Zero targets as victories. Beyond these institutional critiques, sustainability frameworks face challenges in public perception as well. A survey investigating the associations, knowledge, and attitudes of Norwegian citizens regarding the SDGs found that they were sometimes perceived as “unattainable” (Fløttum et al., 2022, p. 8), while a “vocal minority” regarded them as “nonsense” (Fløttum et al., 2022, p. 9) with no real impact anymore.

3.7 Metaphor in Sustainability Discourse: Cognitive Functions and Ideological Implications

As the preceding sections have demonstrated, sustainability is characterised by abstractness, complexity, and a notable resistance to precise definitions. This conceptual opacity poses significant challenges for communication, particularly when sustainability is discussed in public discourse and translated into actionable frameworks. As argued in Chapter 2,

metaphors offer a cognitive and communicative resource for navigating abstractness, facilitating the understanding of abstract concepts by mapping familiar, concrete source domains onto unfamiliar or intangible target domains. Developing a complete mental model of sustainability, that is, a coherent representation of how the domain and all its interacting variables function, proves extremely difficult, given the complexity of the ecological, economic, and social systems it comprises. Hence, metaphor and analogy provide essential structure for ideas that would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible, to conceptualise (Augé, 2020; Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023; Malt & Majid, 2023). This function proves especially useful when the target domain involves intangible concepts that cannot be physically sensed, such as our emotional connection to nature or the complexities of the global climate. Metaphors allow stakeholders to navigate scientific uncertainty and structure their reasoning about ecological systems, functioning as a bridge that translates the complex, abstract, and often elusive nature of environmental challenges into more familiar, concrete concepts (Atanasova, 2019b; Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023). Thus, understanding conceptualisations of economic and social sustainability is fundamental (Malt & Majid, 2023). From ‘mother nature’ and ‘carbon footprints’ to ‘the race against global warming’ and ‘the war on coal’, popular discourse on sustainability and environmental issues is saturated with metaphor (Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023; Princen, 2010; Thibodeau et al., 2017).

3.7.1 Metaphorical Patterns in Previous Research

A review of the existing literature reveals a diverse range of metaphorical themes employed to conceptualise sustainability and related environmental challenges. The three pillars and other metaphors used to represent the three elements of sustainability, discussed in Section 3.2, represent a foundational set of figurative framings in sustainability discourse. The three-pronged fork (Elkington, 1997), the three-legged stool (Millar et al., 2019), and the Venn diagram of overlapping circles (Barbier, 1987) each offer distinct conceptualisations of the relationship between economic, social, and environmental dimensions, with different implications for how sustainability is understood and pursued. As noted earlier, these alternative figurative representations add different nuances to the interpretation and the way in which the relation between the three elements is understood.

One of the most pervasive framings is the JOURNEY metaphor, which presents sustainability as a “path”, “road map”, or “journey” (Atanasova, 2019a; Berry, 2019; Milne et al., 2006). Critics argue that this framing often allows organisations to celebrate incremental progress while masking or deferring the ultimate destination and avoiding radical structural change (Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023; Milne et al., 2006), reinforcing the weak sustainability view of gradual reforms to the status quo (Section 3.3). ORGANISM and PERSONIFICATION metaphors constitute another significant category. The Earth is frequently personified as “Mother Nature” or “Gaia,” invoking feelings of nurturance, but also of potential “wrath” or “punishment” if humans violate the planet; similarly, the planet is often described through a medical frame as a patient” on “life support” suffering from “ailments” (Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023; Augé,

2023). Conflict metaphors, including both WAR and RACE framings, are among the most frequently documented in environmental discourse, highlighting urgency and thus the importance of timely intervention (Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023).

Explanatory metaphors serve a different function, helping make complex scientific processes accessible to non-specialist audiences. The “bathtub” metaphor illustrates that carbon builds up in the atmosphere faster than the planet can absorb it, similar to an overflowing tub when the drain is clogged, while the “heat-trapping blanket” metaphor explains the greenhouse effect in tangible terms (Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023). At a more systemic level, the circular economy paradigm is built on the conceptual metaphor of a “circle” or “loop,” representing a move away from “linear” waste towards perpetual resource reutilisation (Gutentag & Russell, 2025). The “carbon footprint” metaphor is another pervasive framing within environmental discourse. By conceptualising carbon emissions through the image of a personal footprint, this metaphor tends to foreground individual impact while obscuring the broader responsibilities of corporate and political entities (Flusberg & Thibodeau, 2023; Malt & Majid, 2023). In contrast, sceptical discourses frequently employ religion metaphors (e.g., “prophets of doom” or “cult”) to paint environmental science as a fabricated system of faith rather than empirically proven facts (Augé, 2023b; Stibbe, 2021).

The role of metaphor in sustainability communication remains a subject of debate. While some critics contend that the use of metaphors in climate and sustainability discourse has been largely ineffective (Forgács & Pléh, 2022), other researchers argue that they are vital for improving public engagement with environmental issues, though the efficacy of different metaphors depends on context and audience (Larson, 2011; Thibodeau et al., 2017). These considerations underscore the importance of a systematic empirical investigation into how metaphorical framings operate in specific discursive contexts. The metaphorical framings outlined here are examined more fully in Chapters 5 and 6, where each domain identified in the corpus is discussed in relation to the relevant theoretical literature and empirical findings. First, however, building on the overview of methodological approaches in Section 2.4 and on the discussion of sustainability in the present chapter, Chapter 4 articulates the methodological framework developed to examine metaphorical patterns in the data, describing the corpus design and compilation, the adapted MIP(VU) procedure for metaphor identification, and the analytical schema to account for source domains, scenarios, and sub-targets within sustainability discourse.

Chapter 4

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and the analytical framework developed to investigate metaphorical framings of sustainability in British and Italian newspaper discourse. It begins with the criteria for the construction of the comparable bilingual corpus, including newspaper selection and data collection (Section 4.1), before situating the approach within the methodological debate between corpus-based and corpus-driven orientations (Section 4.2). Section 4.3 then describes how concordances were generated and organised for the analysis in the Excel software. Section 4.4 establishes the procedure for metaphor identification, discussing vehicle terms, idioms, and word-class boundaries, as well as the dictionaries consulted, direct metaphors and metaphor flags. Section 4.5 details the annotation process, discussing the categories applied and the criteria for topic-triggered metaphors, the conventionality-creativity scale, and the principles guiding the assignment of vehicle terms to source domains and scenarios. Section 4.6 presents the sub-target framework developed to account for the fragmented nature of sustainability as a target domain in media discourse, drawing on both the SDG framework and categories that emerged inductively from the data.

4.1 Corpus Design: Constructing a Comparable Bilingual Dataset

To address the research questions, I constructed a comparable bilingual corpus comprising an English and an Italian subcorpus, both drawn from newspaper discourse on sustainability. To ensure comparability, the datasets were aligned according to text genre, by focussing on newspaper articles, which typically share the communicative goal of providing information to the reader on a particular topic (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023), and semantic field, by comprising all articles mentioning *sustainability/sostenibilità* or *sustainable development/sviluppo sostenibile*³. The four British newspapers and four Italian ones selected are the following: *Financial Times*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Giornale*.

The corpus comprises all articles published in the months from May to July 2022, starting from the 2nd of May, when the 8th EAP, Environment Action Programme to 2030 (European Commission, 2022), entered into force. This programme represents the “EU’s legally agreed

³ Henceforth, unless otherwise specified, references to the English version of the keywords are understood to also include their Italian counterparts when discussing the corpus as a whole.

upon common agenda for environment policy until the end of 2030” (European Commission, 2022), building on the objectives established in the European Green Deal and providing the foundation for the achievement by the EU of the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (see Section 3.1). Environmental Action Programmes establish broad directions and structures for EU environmental policy through legally binding frameworks; they form part of the European Green Deal strategy, which encompasses intervention areas from biodiversity to circular economy and chemicals. This starting date was selected after reviewing the legislative action within the framework of the European Green Deal and identifying measures that were explicitly linked to the notion of sustainability and sustainable development. While the Green Deal is primarily presented as the EU’s communal effort toward becoming the first climate-neutral continent, pointing to a focus on environmental sustainability foregrounded in the title itself through “Green”, its stated goals comprise “economic growth decoupled from resource use” and “no person and no place left behind” (European Commission, 2019). Therefore, economic and social aspects are intrinsically linked to the main goal, in keeping with the traditional three-pillars representation of sustainability (see Section 3.2). The endpoint of July 2022 was chosen to balance the need for a meaningful dataset with the need to ensure accuracy both in corpus construction and analysis. As the corpus was built *ad hoc*, the collection process required careful selection of relevant articles and data cleaning, followed by manual annotation, and detailed qualitative examination. The May–July timeframe was therefore established as the most feasible scope, providing a substantial amount of data while allowing for thorough verification of each stage of construction and analysis. The selection of British and Italian newspapers was motivated by both countries sharing a number of structural, cultural, and historical similarities due to their being European, yet differing significantly in key aspects. Most notably, at the time of data collection, the UK was no longer a member of the European Union, having formally withdrawn on 31 January 2020, following the 2016 referendum in which British citizens voted in favour of Brexit, the UK’s exit from the EU. This comparative approach is consistent with the understanding that how knowledge is portrayed in the media typically mirrors cultural assumptions and aligns with local audience expectations (Nikitina, 2020). Moreover, the relation between the media systems in the two countries is marked by specific features. First, a documented tendency on the part of Italian newspapers to borrow terminology directly from English (Fiasco, 2020; Fusari, 2012), and second, longstanding perceptions among Italian journalists and readers that the British press represents a model of journalism that is more balanced, reliable, and rigorously fact-checked (Caimotto, 2016). At the same time, both the UK and Italy form part of a wider European media landscape characterised by high levels of pluralism and internet access, as confirmed by cross-national data (Media Pluralism Monitor, 2020; Statista, 2020), supporting a comparative approach (Terren, 2024) while still allowing for divergences in media effects on public perceptions.

To contextualise the general tendencies in both countries, data from Eurobarometer surveys are provided. These constitute the official polling instrument used by the European Parliament, the European Commission and other EU institutions and agencies to gauge European citizens’ opinions on a variety of topics relating to the role of the European Union as well as attitudes on subjects of political or social nature (*Eurobarometer*, 2025). Thus, they

offer relevant insights regarding attitudes toward environmental and climate issues in both countries, enabling UK-Italy comparisons. Data from the Summer 2022 Standard Eurobarometer, collected within my corpus timeframe, reveal that Italian respondents ranked “The environment and climate change” as a relatively more pressing national issue than UK respondents (14% versus 12%), although both countries fall below the 15% European mean. For both countries, this percentage remained far below the most pressing issue of “Rising prices/inflation/cost of living”, at 46% for Italy and 55% for the UK (respectively, below and slightly above the 54% EU mean). These figures mark a notable reversal compared with the preceding Winter 2021-2022 Eurobarometer, when environmental and climate change concerns registered at 7% in Italy and 21% in the UK, against a 16% EU average.

4.1.1 Newspaper Selection: Political Spectrum, Readership, and Comparability

The corpus was designed to capture a reasonably broad spectrum of opinions in the political landscape of both countries, by selecting mainstream daily newspapers with relatively high circulation figures offering different perspectives on issues and targeting diverse readerships spanning various socio-demographic groups. Although direct correspondence between press systems of different countries remains unattainable due to inevitable specificities and differences, the aim was constructing a comparable corpus through shared criteria. Accordingly, I firstly decided to focus on newspapers at the national level, as they are more accessible to entire populations and potentially exert greater influence than local publications.

A distinctive feature of the UK newspaper market is the conventional division between broadsheets or “quality” newspapers and tabloids, based on both stylistic and formal characteristics. Graphically, broadsheets are typically larger in format and contain a greater volume of text, while content-wise, they employ a more formal writing style and tend to prioritise international news and political analysis, offering more in-depth coverage. Tabloids instead feature smaller formats and contain shorter articles, being more “image led” (BBC, 2016). They adopt a more informal writing style and focus predominantly on national stories on topics such as celebrities, sport and entertainment (Baker et al., 2013; Loporini et al., 2024). The distinction can become blurry in some cases, with some newspapers generally considered to be tabloids having a more formal writing style and covering more politics on the one hand, while on the other hand some broadsheets may publish supplements referred to as “tabloid section”, or have adopted a smaller size (Baker et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the dichotomy remains a useful and recognised characterisation of the market and is maintained in the current study to ensure the comparability of the two sub-corpora. Prototypical British tabloids are highly specific to the UK media context, and have no direct equivalent in the Italian one (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Mancini et al., 2016; Semino, 2002; Taylor, 2014). For this reason, only British broadsheet newspapers were included in the analysis.

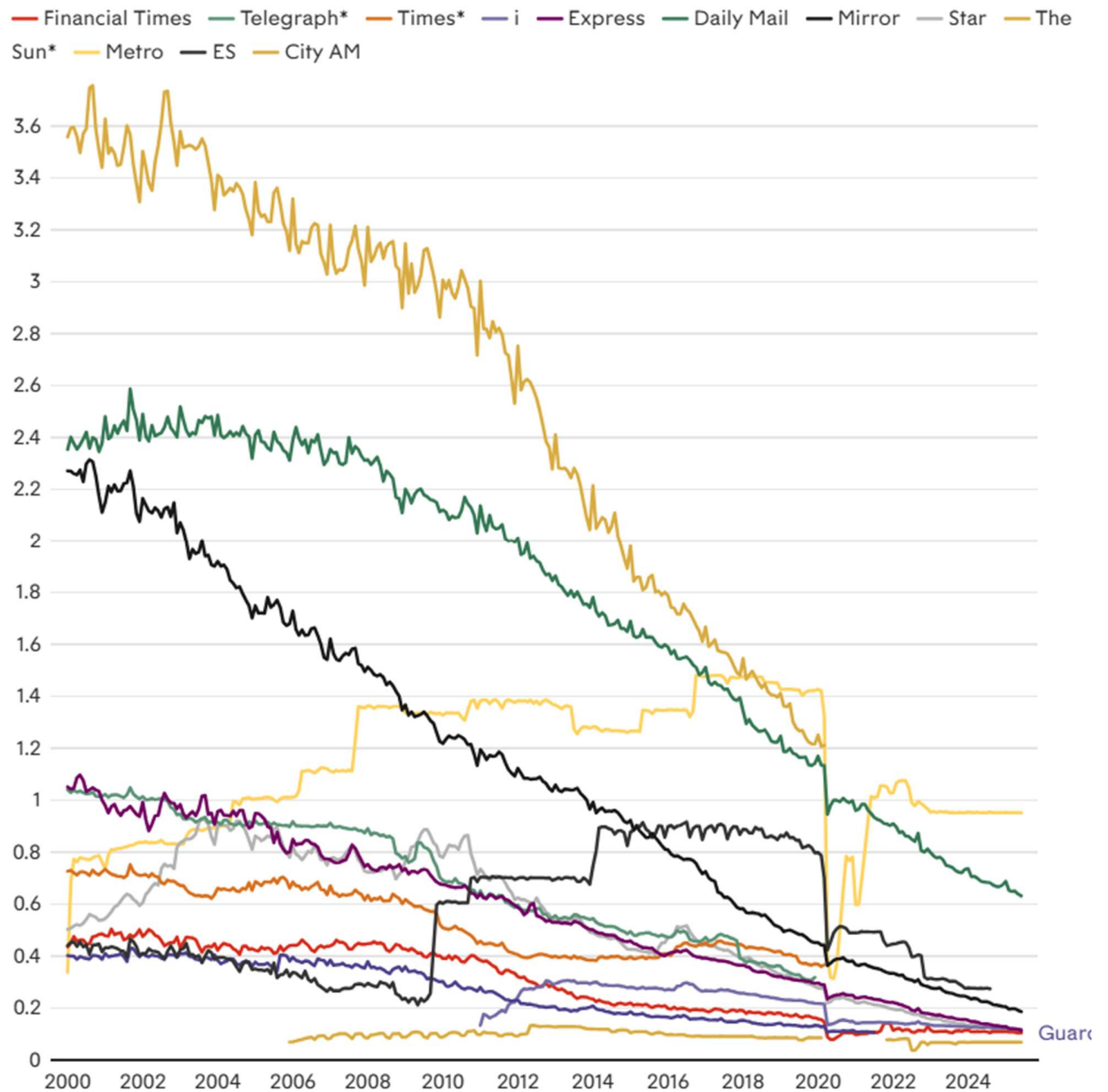
Another important criterion was the overall political stance of the newspapers, since the objective was selecting publications representing similar political positioning in both countries. Consequently, the sample for each country included a newspaper generally regarded as right-leaning (*The Telegraph* and *Il Giornale*), one considered to be left-leaning (*The Guardian* and *La Repubblica*), as well as a more centrist one (*The Independent* and *Il Corriere della Sera*), and one focusing more specifically on business and economic current affairs (*Financial Times* and *Il Sole 24 Ore*). This partly reflects choices made in previous discourse-analytical studies addressing the Italian and/or British press (Koller, 2024; Luporini et al., 2024; Mancini et al., 2016; Semino, 2002). Additionally, it draws on two surveys conducted by YouGov, which explored citizens' perceptions of the predominant political orientations of newspapers respectively in Italy (Massara, 2019) and the UK (Smith, 2017). However, this political categorisation is not without its limitations, inasmuch as the terms 'left' and 'right' are relative and multifaceted. Thus, the preferred terminology in the present study is 'right-leaning' and 'left-leaning', which implies a less rigid classification while still serving to indicate a general political orientation (Baker et al., 2013).

4.1.1.1 Circulation and Readership Trends

The role of newspapers must be understood within the broader context of a changing media landscape. Over the first quarter of the twenty-first century, a clear trend of declining print circulation has defined the industry (see Figure 4.1). According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), a non-profit industry organisation that delivers industry-agreed standards for media brand measurement across print publications, digital channels and events, UK press sales have noticeably decreased since 2000 (Tobitt, 2025). Major publications, including *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, and *The Times*, among others, have all experienced declining circulation, with *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian* ceasing public circulation reporting in 2020 and 2021 respectively (Tobitt, 2025). In contrast to circulation, which counts distributed copies, readership offers a more comprehensive measure of a publication's influence as it estimates total audience, including online consumers (Baker et al. 2013). Data from YouGov (YouGov, n.d.) indicates that in the fourth quarter of 2022, several of the newspapers considered here maintained significant readership percentages. *The Guardian*, for instance, had a 36% reach, closely following the tabloid *Metro* (39%). *The Independent*, the *Financial Times*, and *The Daily Telegraph* also demonstrated substantial reach at 32%, 28%, and 27% of the surveyed population respectively. The publications selected for this study were thus chosen for their continued relevance and influence on public discourse, as evidenced by their readership numbers, despite the overall decline in print sales (see Figure 4.1). This approach allows for a comparative analysis of publications that, while facing similar industry pressures, represent distinct voices within the UK's media ecosystem.

Figure 4.1

Paid Print Circulation of Selected UK National Daily Newspapers, 2000–2024



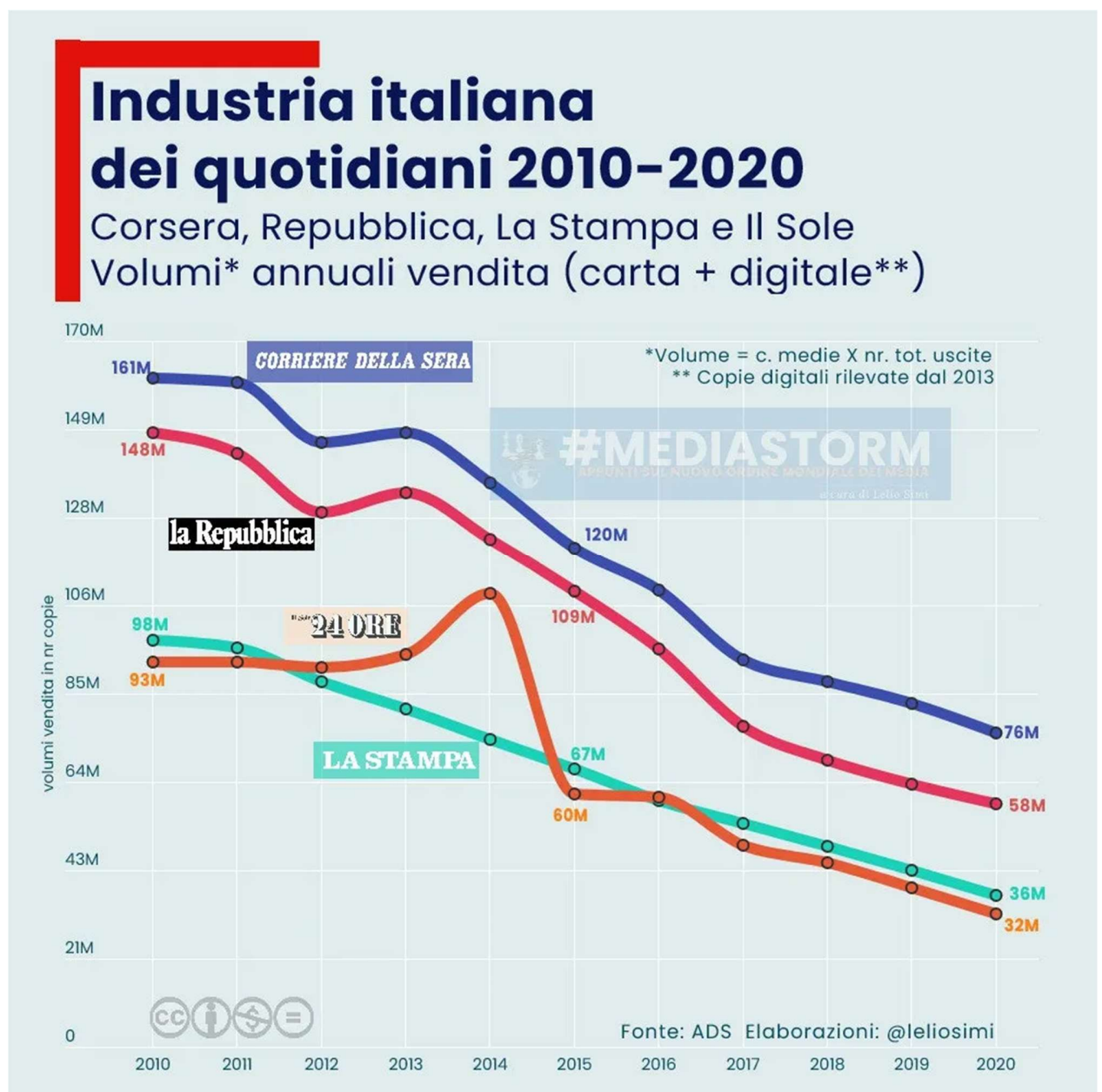
Note. Adapted from “Latest ABC UK Newspaper Circulations: Updated Monthly,” by D. Tobitt, 2025, Press Gazette

Mirroring the trends observed in the UK, the Italian newspaper market has also been characterised by a structural crisis over the first quarter of the 21st century (Simi, 2021) (see Figure 4.2 and 4.3). A general trend of declining sales has been observed, with daily newspaper circulation falling in 2023 and 2024, reflecting a broader crisis in both sales and

advertising revenue (Agcom, 2025). The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ADS, *Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa*) provides data spanning from 2010 to 2020 which clearly illustrates this downward trajectory across all publications in this corpus, including both print and digital copies (Simi, 2021). Similarly, readership figures tracked by Audipress also show a parallel decline across both print and digital versions over the same period. Consequently, while the selected newspapers remain significant within Italian media contexts, they operate within a contracting print market characterised by evolving consumption patterns.

Figure 4.2

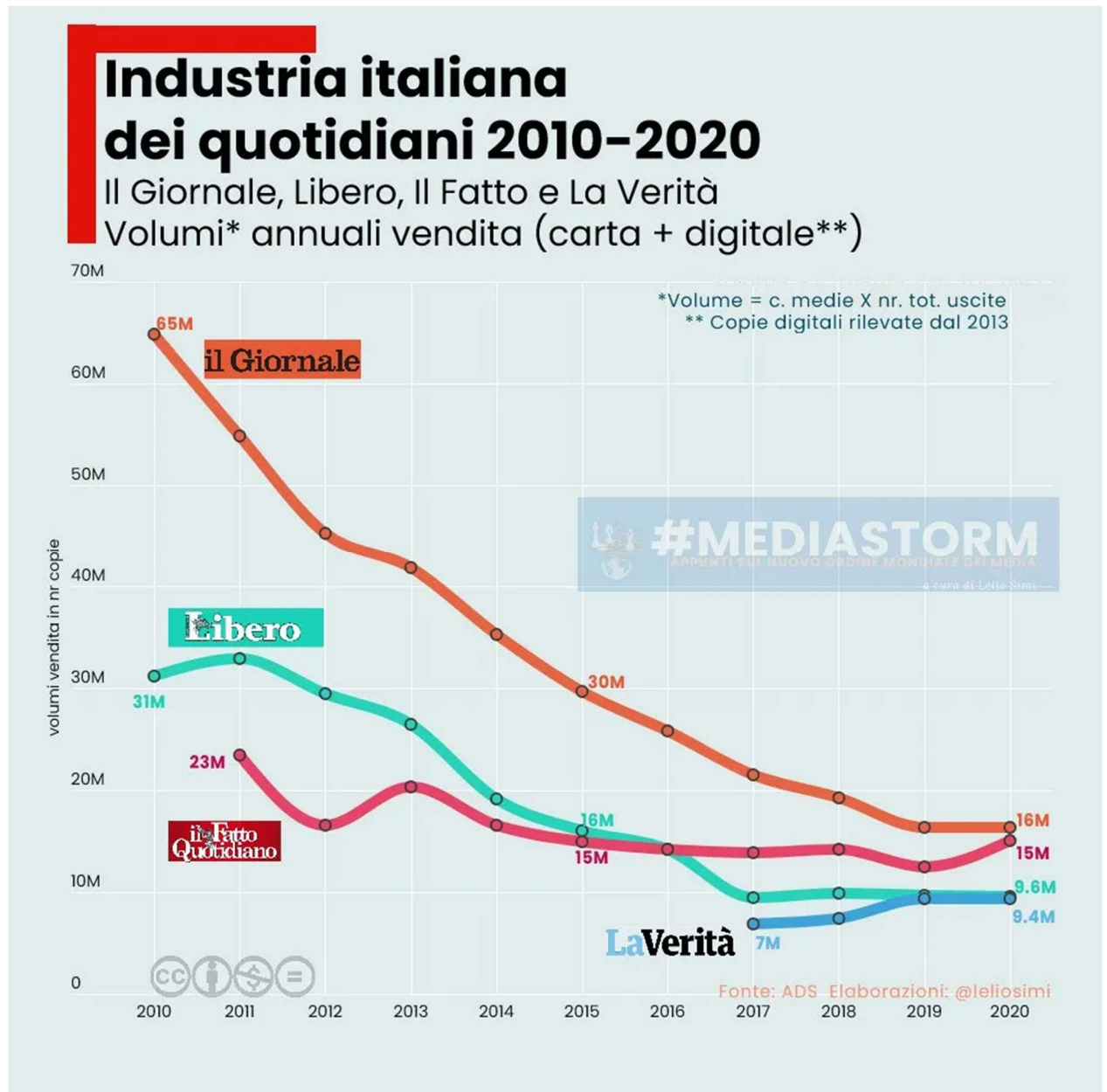
Print and Digital Circulation of Selected Italian Daily Newspapers, 2010–2020, part 1



Note. ADS data showing total circulation including print and digital copies. From “#Mediastorm 02 – Industria italiana dei quotidiani (parte II),” by L. Simi, 2021, Medium

Figure 4.3

Print and Digital Circulation of Selected Italian Daily Newspapers, 2010–2020, part 2



Note. ADS data showing total circulation including print and digital copies. From “#Mediastorm 02 – Industria italiana dei quotidiani (parte II),” by L. Simi, 2021, Medium

4.1.1.2 Newspaper Profiles

To contextualise the corpus composition and facilitate interpretation of subsequent findings, a brief profile for each newspaper is presented below, covering political positioning, circulation patterns, and public trust ratings.

The Guardian, together with its Sunday sister paper *The Observer*, is generally characterised as centre-left or left-leaning (Baker et al., 2013; Brookes & Baker, 2021; Brownlie, 2010; Haddock-Fraser, 2012). YouGov data indicate that 71% of respondents placed it as left of centre/fairly/very left-wing, with only 11% as centrist (Smith, 2017). Mancini et al. (2016) describe it as a “quality liberal” newspaper, with a readership extending well beyond national borders. According to the NRS Digital Print and Digital Data survey, it had the largest readership among the UK’s “quality” newspapers, defined as including *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Independent* and the *Financial Times* (Collins & Nerlich, 2015). In the Reuters brand trust survey, it ranked second among the British newspapers in the corpus, with a score of 48%.

The Independent is generally considered centrist or centre-left (Haddock-Fraser, 2012; Painter & Gavin, 2015). In the YouGov survey, it was classified as “centre” by 37% of the sample, by far the highest proportion recorded of all newspapers (Smith, 2017), with *The Times* being the second highest at 17% and remaining clearly more right of centre/fairly/very right-wing (70%). Having published its last print edition on March 26, 2016, the newspaper transitioned to an exclusively online outlet. It ranks third among the British broadsheets in the corpus in terms of brand trust, with a score of 42% (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022b).

The Daily Telegraph, together with its Sunday edition *The Sunday Telegraph*, is generally considered a right-leaning newspaper with a predominantly conservative stance (Baker et al., 2013; Brownlie, 2010; Haddock-Fraser, 2012). This orientation is also reflected in its choice of foreign source newspapers, such as *Le Figaro*, the French right-wing daily (Brownlie, 2010). YouGov survey data indicate that 73% of respondents classified it as “right of centre/fairly/very right-wing,” the highest proportion among broadsheets, surpassed only by the tabloids *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail* (Smith, 2017). It is widely referred to as one of Britain’s “big three” quality newspapers alongside *The Times* and *The Guardian* (AllSides, 2016). Among the four British newspapers considered in the corpus, it records the lowest brand trust score, at 36% (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022b).

The *Financial Times* is generally regarded as centre-right and liberal (Brownlie, 2010) functioning as a leading business newspaper, influential among global business elites with international interests (Mancini et al., 2016). Thus, it provides specialised financial perspectives that might be underrepresented in mainstream broadsheet coverage, paralleling *Il Sole 24 Ore*’s role in the Italian context. Among the British newspapers considered in the corpus, it achieved the highest brand trust score, at 52% (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022b).

La Repubblica is a centre-left newspaper (Mancini et al., 2016). Survey data show that 79% of respondents place it on the left of the political spectrum (Massara, 2019). It is considered the third most trustworthy Italian newspaper by 27% of respondents (Massara, 2019) and it holds the third-highest brand trust score among the Italian newspapers in the corpus, at 54% (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022a).

Il Corriere della Sera is Italy's most widely distributed newspaper (Mancini et al., 2016). It does not display a clear political affiliation, with 32% of respondents in the YouGov survey positioning it at the political centre (Massara, 2019). Survey data identify it as the second most trustworthy Italian newspaper among 30% of respondents (Massara, 2019) and it achieves the second highest brand trust score among the Italian newspapers in the corpus, at 60% (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022a).

Il Giornale is a centre-right newspaper (Mancini et al., 2016), with YouGov data showing 83% of respondents identify it as far-right, right, or centre-right (Massara, 2019). In the Reuters brand trust ranking, it places fourth among the Italian newspapers considered in the corpus, with a score of 42% (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022a).

Il Sole 24 Ore is a business-oriented newspaper (Mancini et al., 2016), regarded as the newspaper of record for Italian economic and financial news, paralleling the role of the *Financial Times* in the British context. It is regarded as having no political leaning by 26% of the YouGov sample, the highest result. This feature probably correlates with the fact that it is consistently ranked as the most trusted Italian newspaper, both survey data identifying it as the most trustworthy outlet at 31% (Massara, 2019), and in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2022a), where it achieved the highest brand trust score among the Italian titles in the corpus, at 65%.

To ensure a thorough and comparable analysis, the corpus compiled for this study includes Sunday editions where available. All four Italian newspapers (*Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *La Repubblica*) regularly publish Sunday editions. Among the British newspapers, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* have associated Sunday publications, *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Observer* respectively, both of which were included in the corpus. *The Independent*, which ceased print publication in 2016 and now operates exclusively online, uploads a digital edition daily, including on Sundays; these Sunday editions were treated as equivalent to those of the other newspapers. The sole exception is the *Financial Times*, which publishes its *FT Weekend Magazine* on Saturday (included in the dataset), but lacks a Sunday edition.

4.1.2 Data Collection and Corpus Composition

Since access to the selected newspapers varied, article collection relied on three retrieval procedures: (a) text retrieval through institutional *MyDesk24* access (search and export); (b)

text retrieval through *Nexis Uni* (search and export); and (c) web-based text collection using the *BootCaT* toolkit, which generates targeted search queries and compiles a specialised corpus from the resulting webpages, for newspapers not covered by the subscription services. Specifically, *MyDesk24* provided access to *Il Sole 24 Ore*, while *Nexis Uni* enabled retrieval of articles from *Corriere della Sera*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian/The Observer*, *The Independent* and *The Daily/Sunday Telegraph*. Both databases were searched using the English and the Italian versions of the keywords, *sustainability/sostenibilità* or *sustainable development/sviluppo sostenibile*. In the case of *Nexis Uni*, search results were sorted alphabetically, and duplicate articles (that is, the same article appearing in both national and regional editions of a newspaper, for example in the National edition of *Corriere della Sera* and its local editions) were removed. Lastly, *Bootcat* (Baroni & Bernardini, 2004) was employed to retrieve articles from *Il Giornale* and *La Repubblica*, which were not available in a downloadable format through any accessible database. This web scraping tool enabled article extraction from newspaper websites using search words as “seed terms”. Search queries were generated using the selected tuples (limited to *sostenibilità* and *sviluppo sostenibile*) and executed via Google. The results were filtered to the relevant time period using *Date Range*, checked for tuple matches, and cleaned to remove incomplete, paywalled, or irrelevant entries.

Although searches for *sustainability/sostenibilità* produced a significant volume of results, some proved irrelevant to the discourse under investigation, as a result of multiple meanings being possible (cf. Baker et al., 2013). Many of these instances reflected non-specific mono-dimensional meaning uses of the term in everyday language (Di Giulio, 2004; Fischer et al., 2017) referring to durability or permanence as a generic quality that can be applied, for example, to a variety of topics ranging from the financial performance of a company to weight loss programmes and pension systems, qualifying the overall ability to secure long-term functioning of these systems (see Section 3.3). Such occurrences were thus excluded from the corpus following a contextual evaluation, leaving only those where the meaning corresponded to the SDG-related conception of sustainable development, defined as the consideration of ecological (concerning natural resource conservation), socio-cultural (addressing distributional justice and human needs fulfilment), economic (concerning economic viability) and integrated (comprising all three aspects) dimensions in an interconnected framework (Fischer et al., 2017). By way of illustration, the following extract from an article published in *The Independent*, titled “London’s 2012 legacy investment has failed some primary school teachers” (2022) demonstrates the type of occurrence that was excluded from the corpus. Here, *sustainability* and *sustainable* are used in a generic sense referring to long-term financial viability, without any connection to the integrated, multi-dimensional conception of sustainable development outlined above:

Investigations attached to our 2018 research revealed that there were significant challenges with accountability, quality assurance and sustainability. And the testimony from head teachers overwhelmingly revealed there was little or no concern for long- or even medium-term strategy in PE delivery. Perhaps an even bigger problem is that this funding was supposed to be sustainable and of long-term benefit to primary education. The word “sustainability” was attached to the Premium from the start. In short, what schools invest in

now should have a long-lasting impact in the future. Within the field of conservation, sustainability is often associated with renewal or regrowth; what is lost is then replaced. [...] Our earlier research findings revealed that the use of external sports coaches, who do not hold primary teaching qualifications, has been growing for the best part of two decades, raising questions about how such an approach could be sustainable without continued levels of investment. [...] Whatever the right direction, if we are not to squander the legacy of London 2012, we should ensure that the physical education of young people is fully integrated into the school curriculum with funding that is both sustainable and accountable (The Independent)

The discussion concerns Physical Education in primary schools, and its implementation in ways that fail to ensure long-term viability. The sustainability problem is referred to as a mismanagement of a £2.2 billion investment which, rather than being utilised to train and upskill existing teachers (which would create lasting capacity), has been primarily spent to outsource PE teaching to external sports coaches. The authors argue that this approach is fundamentally unsustainable because if the Premium funding were removed, schools would struggle to deliver quality PE through their existing staff, having lost rather than gained internal expertise over the past decade. Hence, the notion of sustainability discussed here concerns building lasting educational capacity and professional development within schools. This is compared to a *conservation* model of sustainability, where *what is lost is then replaced*, maintaining natural systems through renewal cycles on the basis of the key principle of replacement and regeneration. But, the authors argue, in the context of primary PE education the opposite has happened: instead of building sustainable capacity within schools, the funding has created dependency on external providers. Therefore, while the notion of sustainable development typically refers to ensuring the long-term effectiveness balancing economic, social, and environmental considerations on a global scale, the concept of sustainability invoked in this article is considerably narrower and more technical, pertaining specifically to educational policy design and to whether a specific funding programme generates lasting institutional capacity or merely temporary dependency. This kind of financial sustainability concerns whether a specific sector such as the education system can continue to be financially viable, maintaining balanced budgets, operating profitably rather than at a loss. This process was concluded during the annotation phase, when remaining everyday-language uses of *sustainable* and *sustainability* that were not excluded in the preliminary filtering stage were systematically removed, ensuring that only instances consistent with integrated, SDG-related sustainable development conceptions were retained.

Given this inherent semantic ambiguity, a second, more targeted search was conducted using the terms *sustainable development/sviluppo sostenibile*, which are consistently employed with the relevant, more specialised meaning. This strategy avoided the inclusion of a considerable number of irrelevant ‘everyday language’ uses that would have inevitably arisen from searches limited to the adjective *sustainable*. Duplicates resulting from articles containing both *sustainability* and *sustainable development* were subsequently removed. Nexis Uni’s classification data (percentage values in the “Subject” and “Industry” fields, e.g., “Corporate Sustainability”, “Sustainability”, “Sustainable Development”) provided additional support for filtering decisions. Short news briefs (e.g., front page snippets in *MyDesk24*) were excluded, maintaining the corresponding full articles. Following Baker et al. (2013) and

Barkemeyer et al. (2009), all articles mentioning *sustainability/sustainable development* were included, even if the keyword was mentioned only once or “in passing” (Baker et al., 2013, p. 29), and was not the central focus. This methodological choice reflects the aim of the present study to capture all instances of the keywords in order to identify related metaphors within their discursive context, rather than restricting the focus to articles explicitly devoted to sustainability.

The resulting corpus consists of 1,664,644 tokens, of which 953,133 form the Italian subcorpus and 711,511 the English subcorpus. Detailed counts for articles and tokens by newspaper and month are provided in Table 4.1 below. The token imbalance between subcorpora reflects the methodological decision to establish temporal boundaries and comparable selections of newspapers, rather than targeting equivalent subcorpora sizes.

Table 4.1

Number of Articles and Tokens by Newspaper and Month (May–July 2022)

2022	<i>Il Sole 24 ore</i>	<i>Financi al Times</i>	<i>Corrier e della Sera</i>	<i>The Independe nt</i>	<i>Il Giornal e</i>	<i>The Telegrap h</i>	<i>La Repubbli ca</i>	<i>The Guardia n</i>	TOTAL
<i>May articles</i>	149	52	150	99	35	32	148	64	729
<i>tokens</i>	85,202	45,435	70,977	85,345	28,179	29,321	111,373	64,602	520,434
<i>June articles</i>	186	46	209	95	31	28	148	91	834
<i>tokens</i>	105,852	46,732	121,116	89,649	24,472	21,622	112,645	88,279	610,367
<i>July articles</i>	144	40	174	87	24	23	145	58	695
<i>tokens</i>	83,499	29,538	85,745	73,502	17,332	24,975	106,741	112,511	533,843
<i>Total articles</i>	479	138	533	281	90	83	441	213	2.258
<i>Total tokens</i>	274,553	121,705	277,838	248,496	69,983	75,918	330,759	265,392	1.664,644
								<i>Total tokens ITA</i>	953,133
								<i>Total tokens ENG</i>	711,511

Note. Token counts were generated using AntConc. ITA = Italian subcorpus; ENG = English subcorpus.

4.2 Methodological Orientation: Between Corpus-Based and Corpus-Driven Approaches

The approach that was adopted in the current study cannot be defined as unequivocally either corpus-based or corpus-driven. The methodological debate between these two approaches has been extensively discussed in the literature, though the distinction proves less straightforward in practice.

Tognini-Bonelli (2001) defines corpus-based research as taking existing linguistic theories or categories as a starting point, using corpora primarily to test, exemplify, or add probabilistic weight to pre-existing assumptions. According to Tognini-Bonelli (2001), the corpus functions as supporting evidence to validate and refine prior theoretical claims. In her view, corpus-based approaches have a fundamental limitation since the assumption that previously established paradigms and models of language are “fundamentally adequate” (p. 66) restricts what could emerge from the analysis of the data. Conversely, corpus-driven research is defined as being characterised by a commitment to the integrity of the corpus itself: in this theory-agnostic approach descriptions are expected to arise from recurrent patterns in the data without imposing prior categories. Starting with a “clean slate” (Deignan, 2005, p. 89), the theoretical statements generated are seen as emerging directly from corpus evidence, based on recurrent patterns and frequency distributions, rather than preceding it. Although this binary distinction may at first appear to be deceptively straightforward, it has been subsequently criticised for being more porous than initially apparent (Deignan, 2005; McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Meyer, 2014) and “ultimately misleading” (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p. 151). In practice, studies that claim to be corpus-driven often rely on pre-existing theories at certain stages, while corpus-based studies may adapt or even abandon categories once confronted with contradictory corpus evidence. As such, the distinction can be seen less as a categorical divide than as a cline of methodological commitments, with most empirical research situated somewhere in between, starting from a pre-established scheme but refining and modifying it as a consequence of applying it to the data (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Already in 1998, Partington described corpus research as generally a hybrid of the two approaches: intuitions about language initially guide the research, while the process of interrogating the corpus data serves as a means to either confirm or challenge these intuitions and frequently open up “other avenues of research” (1998, p. 1). The terminology has also been a source of confusion, as some authors reject the corpus-based/corpus-driven divide altogether and use corpus-based to cover both orientations (e.g. McEnery et al., 2006). A distinction grounded solely in respect for the empirical evidence of the corpus on the one hand and lack thereof on the other hand ultimately appears artificial, since a reliance on empirical data can be considered as the fundamental building block of all corpus studies.

Metaphor research in corpora often exemplifies such a methodological compromise, presenting features of both: it is corpus-based, inasmuch as previous theories about CMT, metaphoricity and how to locate metaphors are necessary, and corpus-driven, due to its willingness to forego existing categories and develop new descriptive models if the

previously available ones are found to be in conflict with evidence from the data, allowing new “categories of meaning to emerge” (Deignan, 2005, p. 174). Thus, the present study, like many before it, occupies this middle ground in the “sliding scale” (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p. 151) between these two “opposite ends” (Deignan, 2008, p. 156). It is corpus-based insofar as it relies on a broad theoretical foundation rooted in metaphor theory, while additionally pre-determining the target domain of sustainability and thus the keywords guiding the analysis as entry points. However, the analysis does not proceed by simply locating pre-established conceptual mappings taken from the literature in the corpus. Instead, concordance lines are examined inductively, and categories of metaphor are established in response to recurring patterns in the data. In this sense, the approach is also corpus-driven: emergent categories are not forced into alignment with existing inventories, and novel or hybrid patterns are allowed to reshape the analytical scheme. My method therefore represents a compromise: theory provides a starting point, but the data are granted priority in determining the eventual categorisation.

4.3 Concordancing and Excel Data Management

Traditionally, metaphor identification has involved an initial close reading of the entire text. However, corpus analysis derives much of its value from the ability to examine large datasets and identify patterns that close reading alone cannot reveal. Accordingly, different strategies for retrieving metaphors have been developed, including sampling, clustering, *ad hoc* tools such as the Metaphor Candidate Identifier (Berber Sardinha, 2007), semantic annotation, or concordancing. In sampling, a subset of texts in the corpus are selected and read in full in order to gain a clearer idea of which metaphor candidates may be present. The metaphor candidates found serve as the basis to establish keywords for a concordance search across the whole corpus (Charteris-Black, 2004). The step of sampling can be avoided by adopting a different approach and establishing an area of investigation a priori; this is treated as a potential source or target domain, and lexicon related to it is considered as keywords for further investigation in concordance lines. The current analysis follows this latter approach. Specifically, sustainability was defined as the target domain of interest, with attention directed toward metaphors related to it; all concordances for the keywords selected were thus analysed, applying an adapted version of the MIP(VU) procedure. Previous studies have shown that applying MIP(VU) to concordances is viable, since the amount of text in the concordance line, or an expanded window, generally suffices to distinguish literal from figurative uses (Deignan, 2005, 2017; Deignan et al., 2019).

Articles for each month of each newspaper were therefore searched in AntConc (Anthony, 2023) using the regular expressions *sustainab?* and *sostenib?*, thus retrieving both the noun *sustainability/sostenibilità* and the adjective *sustainable/sostenibile*. This concordance search was conducted within the already filtered focus corpus, from which the majority ‘everyday language’ uses of *sustainable* and *sustainability* had been removed at the corpus construction

stage (see Section 4.1.2). This motivated the choice of including all instances of *sustainable* in the concordances, since mentions in the remaining articles could more reasonably be assumed to concern the integrated sense. This allowed for a more comprehensive perspective on sustainability discourse and enabled a focused analysis of the collocational behaviour of *sustainable*, which evidently included both the fixed expression *sustainable development*, and collocations of *sustainable* with other nouns. As Gillings and Mautner (2024) note, a recurrent methodological difficulty in concordancing lies in defining the precise unit of analysis, and deciding how much co-text is necessary. In this study, due to the relatively small size of the corpus, the issue was addressed by setting the AntConc window to its maximum of 25 tokens, in order to capture as much surrounding context as possible. Additionally, in a minority of cases where this span was insufficient, the original article was consulted to obtain more contextual information.

The concordances were then transferred to an Excel spreadsheet, where metadata identifying the source newspaper and the month was retained. This format was selected because it facilitated the implementation of an *ad hoc* annotation framework which was progressively modified and adapted during the annotation process to best achieve the research aims and accommodate the trends and tendencies that emerged as the analysis was carried out. Each concordance line was entered as a separate row in Excel and coded with the categories established, which are explained in more detail in Section 4.5. If more than one metaphor was found within one concordance line, the concordance was duplicated in order to assess each metaphor separately and ensure manageability of the dataset; a dedicated column to record this enabled the exact number of duplicates to be retrieved through filtering. Metaphors appearing both in a title and repeated in the body of the text were counted twice, reflecting the fact that the reader encounters them twice. Entries in Excel were ordered by article title to preserve a clearer sense of the wider context, and track whether, for instance, a metaphor was extended, repeated, or elaborated. To ensure greater comparability across the dataset, adjustments were made to standardise file naming and metadata. Articles downloaded from *MyDesk24* and *NexisUni* were automatically saved under filenames corresponding to the original titles recorded in the databases, which were preserved throughout the AntConc and Excel transfer process. This allowed headlines, often particularly salient sites for metaphor usage (see Section 2.3.2), to be included in the analysis. By contrast, *BootCat* generated files with numerical identifiers rather than article titles. To resolve this, titles for *Il Giornale* and *La Repubblica* were extracted and subsequently integrated into the Excel file, thereby ensuring consistent availability of title information for all articles across the eight newspapers.

4.4 Metaphor Identification: Criteria and Procedures

As established in Section 2.4, the criticism directed at the MIP(VU) procedure primarily concerns its approach focussing on metaphor identification at the linguistic level. This differs

starkly from most other approaches to metaphor studies, which emphasise instead that conceptual considerations inevitably underlie linguistic analysis itself. The importance of MIP(VU) cannot be underestimated, inasmuch as it provided a standard framework for metaphor studies that subsequent research had to necessarily measure itself against, by establishing explicit and replicable steps for metaphor identification. However, as has been shown, all studies that also account for how figurative language contributes to constructing meaning in discourse have faced the necessity of adapting MIP(VU) to their specific research aims. As noted by Semino (2019), research on metaphor is often shaped by particular aims and constraints, rather than being geared towards identifying all instances of metaphorical language within a dataset, as in the project that led to the development of MIPVU. An analyst might instead have the goal of identifying exclusively metaphors relating to particular topics, and “decide that some aspects or distinctions within MIPVU are not relevant or appropriate” (2019, p. 320). The present study reflects this approach, being primarily focussed on how a target domain is constructed through language. Therefore, rather than adopting MIP(VU) to identify the metaphoricity of all linguistic expressions within a text, this research takes as its starting point which aspects of experience are linguistically invoked and what they reveal about the target domain through the source domain activated. Consequently, the MIP(VU) rules have been adapted and integrated with discourse-oriented approaches, with the aim of addressing the research questions as comprehensively as possible.

4.4.1 Vehicle Terms as the Unit of Analysis

The first step consists in identifying the vehicle term, noting its relation to the target domain: whether it refers directly to sustainability, to other entities that are qualified as being *sustainable*, or to one of the sub-targets established within the broader target domain (see Section 4.6 below). The terminology of ‘vehicle term’ adopted from Cameron (2003) is preferred in order to foreground the more flexible nature of this unit of analysis compared with the ‘lexical unit’ identified in MIP(VU). Whereas, as already explained, in MIP(VU) every lexical unit is considered separately, except for phrasal verbs, polywords, compounds, and multiword expressions (see Section 2.4.4), the present approach is less restrictive. Although in practical terms the vehicle terms identified coincide in the majority of cases with what MIP(VU) would classify as lexical units, there are instances in which this is not the case, as will be discussed below. The aim of this approach is to integrate the step of identification at the linguistic level with the analysis at the semantic–conceptual level, considering what the vehicle term refers to both in terms of elements in the target domain and in terms of the source domain it evokes. Moreover, since metaphor does not operate only at word level, the focus is on stretches of language (cf. Cameron & Maslen, 2010) rather than on individual words. The notion of incongruity (Cameron, 2003) or semantic tension (Charteris-Black, 2004) is adopted: a close reading of the concordance establishes whether the basic meaning of the vehicle term is incongruous with respect to its surrounding context, and thus points to a contextual meaning that contrasts sufficiently with the basic one to constitute a figurative

use. Accordingly, MIP(VU)'s segmentation of lexical units prior to meaning consideration is partly rejected, allowing for a broader focus on referents in discourse and their semantic value in a wider sense.

Only open-class lexical units are considered, excluding closed-class items and de-lexicalised verbs (make, do, put, take, give, have, get) (cf. Fuoli et al., 2021, p. 13). Prepositions are included exclusively in the instances where they contribute to the broader construction of meaning together with a content word that is used metaphorically. As Johansson Falck and Okonski (2023) argue, word-by-word analyses such as MIP(VU) may encounter problems and be ill-suited for analysing the conceptualisation of relations, which are inevitably interconnected with the entities that they put into relation (Langacker, 1987, p. 215). The fundamental function of prepositions is to encode such relations, and they can enrich the semantic representation of metaphor in a text and offer valuable information. For instance, in the expression *impegno verso la sostenibilità* ('commitment towards sustainability'), a journey metaphor may be inferred, since the meaning of *verso* is "towards", introducing a prepositional phrase of motion towards a place. Nevertheless, while prepositions can enrich metaphorical representation, when no content word is present, they are not included, given the difficulty of clearly delineating metaphorical from non-metaphorical cases, considering the wide range of meanings prepositions have developed historically. They are instead included when they complete the sense of an expression together with a content word, that is, when they occur with a verb or noun and contribute to the creation of a figurative scenario (e.g., *path towards sustainability*, or *moving into quality and sustainability type of tourism*). In such cases, the preposition connects the figurative content word *path* with another referent in the sentence, thereby contributing to the construction of a metaphorical scenario in which the *path* has a specific destination. Additionally, they are also included when part of a fixed expression (e.g., *andare a braccetto*, "to walk arm in arm", or *keep up the pace*).

In the case of verbs, all components are included when auxiliary verbs occur (e.g., *hanno accelerato*, "they have accelerated"), whereas periphrastic forms are treated as integral to the expression when they contribute meaningfully to the broader metaphorical scenario. Although they do not introduce a semantic surplus that cannot be deduced from their component parts, as phrasal verbs do, they nonetheless contribute to the meaning of the verb. For example, in *continuando a puntare su* ("continuing to bet on"), the periphrastic form conveys temporal-aspectual information, signalling continued effort. This decision is grounded in the understanding that such combinations participate in the semantic construction of the metaphor, even if not lexicographically fixed.

The following sub-sections address features that required specific methodological decisions in the present study. For each metaphorical expression identified, the following are systematically considered:

- Whether the metaphorical expression constitutes an idiom (see Section 4.4.1.1)
- Whether it crosses word-class boundaries (Section 4.4.1.2)
- Whether a metaphor flag is present (see Section 4.4.2)
- If the metaphor can be considered to be "topic-triggered" (see Section 4.5.1)

- The sub-target to which it can be assigned (see Section 4.6)

4.4.1.1 Idioms

Although the primary focus of this study is metaphor, idioms are included in the analysis since many are rooted in metaphorical conceptual mappings and can function as instantiations of broader source domains (Gibbs, 1992; Kövecses & Szabó, 1996). This metaphoric basis is not uniform across idioms: Dancygier and Sweetser (2014, p. 35) note that some are fully opaque to contemporary users while others retain aspects of their metaphorical roots, and what are often described as dead metaphors may be better characterised as “sleeping”, since they can be reactivated in creative use. Excluding idioms from the analysis would therefore risk overlooking a significant strand of figurative language through which sustainability is framed in the corpus. The analysis of idioms has been a contested issue in metaphor studies (see Section 2.4.3 and 2.4.4). Idioms can be defined as conventionalised, fixed expressions that resist straightforward literal interpretation and often consist of clauses or sentences; however, they vary in their degree of transparency and fixedness (Steen et al., 2010). Classical examples include expressions such as *have a bee in one’s bonnet*, *be tied to someone’s apron strings*, or *(not) have a leg to stand on*. Although generally considered to be fixed lexical entries with limited syntactic flexibility (Cameron, 2003), idioms can be revitalised in context, with dormant metaphorical roots reactivated in creative use (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023). For example, we can imagine someone elaborating on the conventional idiom “The cat is now out of the bag” by adding “and a big, ugly cat it is too” (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 35). Their flexibility is linked to their degree of semantic decomposability, that is, whether the meaning of the expression can be derived from the sum of its constituent parts or only understood as a holistic unit. As discussed in Section 2.4, the Pragglejaz Group (2007) assumed that “most, if not all, idioms are decomposable to some extent for speakers” (p. 27), a principle also subsequently adopted by MIP(VU) (Steen et al., 2010). However, others argue that while the meaning of an idiomatic expression can have varying degrees of detachment from the literal meaning of its single components (e.g., Cameron, 2003), it can largely be considered to be “non-compositional” (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023, p. 9). Idioms often evoke concise, functionally specific scenes that are construed collectively by their constituent words, rather than being interpretable through the meanings of the individual components (Johansson Falck & Okonski, 2022). For instance, the idiom *on the fence* does not transparently combine the meanings of *on* and *fence* to yield “being undecided”; rather, its figurative sense arises from the scene evoked of someone perched between two sides, unable to choose, which conveys the notion of indecision (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023).

Although they can be seen as formulaic language (Carrol & Conklin, 2020; Wray & Perkins, 2000), many idioms are “rooted in metaphors” (Bolognesi & Werkmann Horvat, 2023, p. 9) and constitute meaningful instantiations of broader conceptual mappings, reflecting conventional knowledge (R. W. Gibbs, 1992; Kövecses & Szabó, 1996; Lakoff & Kövecses,

1987). For instance, idioms relating to the expression of anger such as *blow your stack* derive from the metaphors MIND IS A CONTAINER and ANGER IS HEATED FLUID IN THE BODILY CONTAINER (Gibbs, 1992), and their semantics preserve the topology of the source domain (Lakoff, 1990). These metaphors may also motivate a range of other non-idiomatic expressions in speech. Idioms can also encode explicit stance or implicitly invite evaluative inference, often being tied to culture and encapsulating socially shared experiences (Moon, 1998). According to Sinclair’s “idiom principle” (1991, p. 110), they function as single choices that constrain what could otherwise be freely combined in language. They encode richer meanings than the equivalent literal paraphrases, which fail to capture the same inferences (Gibbs, 2024). Therefore, in the present study, idioms are treated holistically, following Fuoli et al. (2021b), who adopted the same approach when their figurative meaning emerges from the phrase as a whole rather than from its individual parts.

In a few instances, corpora of contemporary usage were consulted as an additional external criterion to measure the collocational strength of some idiomatic expressions in a larger dataset (Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2003). This approach has been adopted in previous research as one possible solution to deal with lexical strings beyond the affordances of MIPVU (Augé, 2023a, 2024a; De Backer et al., 2023). The most recent *enTenTen* and *itTenTen* corpora available in SketchEngine were searched to examine two distinct issues:

- a) Whether a certain lexical string, though not registered as a single unit in dictionaries, appeared frequently enough to justify it being considered as one lexical unit
- b) Whether a certain basic meaning was still present in language usage, thus justifying a contrastive interpretation of contextual and basic meanings, although the contextual meaning could be argued to have become significantly more salient than the original basic one

For instance, the idiomatic expressions *move the dial*, absent from major reference dictionaries but recurrent in the *enTenTen* corpus with the consistent figurative sense of “to make a measurable difference in a situation”, was treated as an idiomatic unit on the basis of its collocational behaviour and semantic stability. The expression occurred with a frequency of 0.03 hits per million tokens, suggesting moderate but stable usage. Its contextual meaning was then compared against corpus evidence of its usage to determine whether literal uses persist in present-day English. Although rare, examples such as the following demonstrate that literal meanings remain attested (in italics in the examples below):

At that time, many manufacturers printed on the dials of their shortwave receivers the names of various cities, with the implication that to hear London, you would *simply move the dial* to the spot where it said “London”. (*enTenTen21*)

Move the dial around or set up a desired speed for certain groups of mechanism; admire the exquisite luxury on your cell phone or tablet PC. (*enTenTen21*)

By contrast, idioms such as *blow the whistle* and *beat the drum (for)* differ in that their figurative senses are already established in reference dictionaries. According to the OED,

blow the whistle means “to bring an activity to a sharp conclusion, as if by the blast of a whistle; now usually by informing on (a person) or exposing (an irregularity or crime)” (OED, *whistle*), while *beat the drum (for)* is defined as “to direct attention to or promote something enthusiastically, often with the intention of attracting support for a particular cause or opinion” (OED, *drum*). In these cases, the enTenTen corpus was consulted solely to address the second criterion, namely, to determine whether literal meanings remain in contemporary usage. The data showed that literal instances persist for both entrenched idioms, albeit marginally, in sporting contexts and musical or ceremonial contexts respectively:

The referee will throw the ball on the water between the players and *blow the whistle* to restart play. Both players must make an attempt for the ball with their hands as soon as it touches the water. (enTenTen21)

Beat the drum in a slow tempo, and have the children pat their thighs or march in place while keeping time to the beat. (enTenTen21)

4.4.1.2 Word-Class Boundaries

Word-class boundaries are relevant to the present analysis inasmuch as metaphorical uses of a given lemma can be unevenly distributed across parts of speech (Deignan, 2005). This raises a key methodological question for metaphor identification: whether metaphors should be analysed as extending across word-class boundaries, or whether grammatical class distinctions should instead constrain the analysis. As discussed in Section 2.4.3, considering the parts of speech related to one lexeme, one might be predominantly used figuratively, while another might be predominantly used literally (e.g. the verb *to cement* and the noun *cement*); in other cases, one might be used exclusively figuratively and the other exclusively literally (e.g. the verb *to squirrel* and the noun *squirrel*) (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). Since in both cases it can be argued that there is a clear connection between the meaning of the two parts of speech, a flexible stance is adopted in MIP by comparing meanings of related forms across parts of speech. This follows Kittay’s (1987) principle that the unit of metaphor should be independent of any grammatical unit, a view also echoed in subsequent studies. Charteris-Black (2004) searched across all morphologically related forms of a keyword (e.g., *build*, *building*, *built*) and classified them as metaphorical if they referred to non-concrete entities. Similarly, Koller (2004, p. 49) observed that metaphorical potential may exist in some word classes but not in others within the same lemma (e.g., *to consummate* vs. *consummate* as an adjective), yet she argued that overall analysis benefits from considering cross-class relations. More recently, Fuoli et al. (2021b) argue for the inclusion of metaphors that cross word-class boundaries, on the grounds that this is “often a central characteristic of metaphor” (p. 13). They cite the case of *staggering*, which is metaphorical as an adjective but literal as a verb, and contend that the meaning of the adjective can be understood by reference to that of the verb, mirroring the Pragglejaz Group’s (2007) reasoning for *(to) squirrel*. By contrast, MIPVU imposes stricter boundaries, which are justified according to the rationale that lexical

units must be analysed in their discourse-specific morphological and syntactic contexts, rather than through derivational links. Thus, MIPVU defines lexical units as referring to one single grammatical category and requires that contextual and basic meanings be compared within those confines (Nacey et al., 2016; Steen et al., 2010).

This research adopts the original MIP approach to word-class boundaries, casting a wider net and crossing word-class boundaries, on the basis of the argument that connections between meanings across word classes are accessible to speakers, and that disregarding them risks overlooking potentially metaphorical uses. Additionally, it should be noted that, although this is a methodologically relevant aspect, touching upon the issue of how we consider meaning to be configured in the speaker's mind, its concrete effect on the result can be characterised as minimal, inasmuch as cases where word-class boundaries need to be crossed to have a literal-metaphorical comparison constitute a notably small minority which has a very limited effect on overall counts. The clearest instance is the verb *to champion* (eight tokens, all in the English sub-corpus), discussed in the WAR domain (see Section 6.5.3.1): contemporary learner's dictionaries record only the figurative sense for the verb, so that the metaphorical reading is recoverable only by reference to the related noun *champion* ('a person who fights on behalf of a cause').

4.4.2 Direct Metaphors and Metaphor Flags

Direct metaphors (see Section 2.4.4), which are explicitly signalled in language, serve as an important linguistic tool, despite the fact that the majority of metaphors in discourse are indirect. The scope of what counts as a metaphor-signalling device is a category that lacks consensus throughout the literature. The MIPVU procedure formalised the notion of signalling under the label of metaphor flags (Steen et al., 2010) and restricted the category to explicit markers of comparison or analogy (e.g., *like*, *as*, *as if*, *compare*, *similar*, *regard as*, *conceive of*) while general vague markers (*sort of*, *kind of*) were excluded in the name of consistency and methodological rigour. Conversely, Goatly (1997) included linguistic cues ranging from explicit markers such as *metaphorically*, to downtoners such as *sort of* (which soften metaphorical commitment), and orthographic devices such as inverted commas, noting that they help reduce interpretive risk, since metaphors are not always immediately transparent. Skorczynska and Ahrens (2015) similarly identified categories such as explicit markers (*metaphor*), intensifiers (*just*, *really*, *literally*), superordinate terms (*sort of*, *kind of*), similes (*like*, *as*, *as if*), and modals (*may*, *could*, *would*). Ahrens et al. (2024) extended the inventory to include "typographic signals such as scare quotes (\" \")" (p. 2), which can simultaneously flag metaphorical usage, indicate irony, or express epistemic doubt. Generally, these "tuning devices" (Cameron & Deignan, 2003, p. 149) are used in interaction to alert the listener to possible figurativity (e.g., *like* signalling comparison) and to modulate the degree of emphasis assigned to a metaphor (e.g., *sort of* mitigating the strength). They overtly indicate cross-domain mappings, thereby serving as formal anchors for identifying direct metaphors within systematic corpus annotation (Steen et al., 2010). Metaphor flags

have been analysed in languages beyond English (see Nacey et al., 2019). More specifically, Mercantini et al. (2022) observed that Italian approximatives such as *quasi* ('almost'), *una sorta di* ('a sort of'), and *praticamente* ('practically') function analogously to English hedges or downtoners in signalling figurativity. In line with the broader approach adopted by most of the studies reviewed above, the present study considers a range of linguistic devices that, to varying degrees of explicitness, signal a departure from literal meaning, thereby inviting a figurative interpretation.

4.4.3 Dictionaries: Establishing the Basic Meaning

Along the lines of previous approaches, in the present study dictionaries were used as the primary source to establish the basic meaning. MIP and MIPVU both relied primarily on the corpus-based *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (Rundell and Fox, 2002). MIP supplemented this with *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (SOEDHP, Little et al., 1973) for etymological insights, while MIPVU also consulted the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* when additional clarification was required, and occasionally resorted to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) when the historical development of a word was deemed necessary to evaluate its basic meaning.

In the present study, the intention was to remain as consistent as possible with these earlier procedures. However, the Macmillan Dictionary is no longer accessible online. While a printed version (2002) was occasionally consulted when a more comprehensive picture was needed, more up-to-date and easily accessible sources were preferred for practical and methodological reasons, as they more accurately reflect current language use. Consequently, in this study, Longman⁴, the 'second choice' in MIPVU, was chosen as the primary reference, with the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)⁵ being often consulted for further lexical or semantic clarification. Historicity was not treated as a decisive criterion in determining the most basic meaning; instead, priority was given to concreteness, relation to bodily action, and precision of meaning. The present analysis adopts as a guiding principle the current status of the language, and the perspective of an ideal contemporary speaker. Such a speaker is not assumed to possess explicit awareness of the etymological development of a lexical unit, but rather to rely on the synchronic meanings that are active in present-day English or Italian. Nonetheless, the OED proved useful for its detailed treatment of semantic nuances and its system of subject and register labels, which often provided support in disputable cases. These labels rely on an extensive range of sources such as digital archives, specialist consultants, and the Oxford English Corpus (OEC), collected from diverse sources, including academic journals, newspapers, blogs, social media, and more. They are used to provide full context for each word, explaining its usage in terms of register (such as archaic, derogatory, figurative, formal, technical, etc.), region (such as Australian, British, etc.), and subject (such

⁴ <https://www.ldoceonline.com/>

⁵ <https://www.oed.com/>

as Art, Ecology, Finance, Medicine, etc.) (Oxford Languages, 2025). For the purposes of the current analysis, the *figurative* register label (or the alternative *Abstract uses*) and the subject labels were particularly valuable. The former directly signalled metaphorical usage, while the latter helped distinguish whether a more basic meaning existed, even when this meaning was less frequent or unlikely to be chosen or even known by a non-specialist speaker. This information was instrumental in judging degrees of conventionality and creativity in metaphorical usages.

For Italian, the methodological landscape is less consolidated, with fewer studies systematically applying MIP(VU) or comparable dictionary-based procedures (see Section 2.4.4.2). Vernillo (2023, p. 360) identifies GRADIT (De Mauro, 1999) as “the preferred lexicographical source [...] chosen”⁶, in its version available online⁷, and, as a supplementary source, the Treccani Vocabulary⁸. Luporini et al. (2024) combined etymological dictionaries with the diachronic corpus DiaCoris to verify how long certain metaphorical uses had been attested. In the current study, GRADIT was adopted as the main source. Similarly to English, other dictionaries were consulted when necessary, namely Sabatini-Coletti. One of the distinguishing features of GRADIT is the use of the *marche d’uso* (“usage markers”), which classify lexemes on the basis on their frequency in a digital corpus. This corpus is composed of a variety of texts drawn from print media, literature, academic texts, spoken language, and even digital communication. This method represents a shift away from reliance on smaller, less diverse text samples toward a comprehensive, empirical approach that captures the true breadth of actual language use (De Mauro, 2016). The core list of 33,000 high-frequency words, which constitutes the *vocabolario di base* (“basic vocabulary”), accurately reflect contemporary Italian usage and distinguishes ‘fundamental’ (*fondamentale*, *FO*), ‘high-use’ (*alto uso*, *AU*), and ‘high-availability’ (*alta disponibilità*, *AD*) words, on the basis of relative frequency and relevance in current use. It also adds other markers for finer-grained distinctions of register and usage domain such as: ‘common’ (*comune*, *CO*), ‘technical-specialist’ (*tecnico-specialista*, *TS*), ‘literary’ (*letterario*, *LE*), ‘regional’ (*regionale*, *RE*), dialectal (*dialettale*, *DI*), exotic (*esotico*, *ES*), low-use (*basso uso*, *BU*), and obsolete (*obsolete*, *OB*) words. GRADIT offers a more comprehensive inventory of polywords than other Italian dictionaries, as well. Like the OED’s system of subject and register labels, GRADIT’s usage markers capture how words function across different domains and registers, facilitating the identification of the most basic meaning, even when they constitute technical lexicon. The more the basic meaning is specialised, the more likely it is that the figurative meaning might be more prominent for speakers and thus more conventionalised; in accordance with MIP(VU), the most concrete sense, even if very specialised, is compared with the contextual one to evaluate metaphoricity.

⁶ “fonte lessicografica che qui abbiamo scelto come preferenziale” (*my translation*)

⁷ <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/>

⁸ <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/>

4.5 Annotation Categories

The general procedure for retrieving and managing concordances was described in Section 4.3. In this section, I outline the annotation schema and the specific features considered in the process. The procedure involves several steps. First, the presence or absence of figurative language is determined: if figurative language is present, the analysis specifies the vehicle term(s) through which it is expressed, along with their basic meanings as recorded in dictionaries, contrasted with their contextual meaning (see Section 4.4). All lexical units referring to the same source-target mapping are treated as constituting a single metaphorical expression (see example (y) below, single metaphorical expression underlined), contributing to creating a unitary and coherent image, while ones referring to different mappings are analysed and counted separately (see example (w) below, different metaphor in italics).

(y) The risk, she says, is that relying on climate reporting without other policy measures would equate to “embracing another fad diet”, while “the world will keep getting fatter - and hotter.” Silvia Pavoni is the editor of Sustainable Views (Financial Times)

(w) È un trend globale che non accenna ad arrestarsi perché in fondo la sicurezza alimentare è una delle *chiavi di volta* per raggiungere gli obiettivi di sostenibilità al 2050

Agrifoodtech, which took off with the pandemic, remains the most popular investment category today. It's a global trend that shows no signs of slowing down because, ultimately, food security is one of the keystones to reaching the 2050 sustainability goals (Il Sole 24 Ore)

On the basis of the basic meaning established, previous literature, and observable trends in the data, the semantic domain to which the vehicle terms belong is established. For instance, in the example above, the domain appearing in (y) is ORGANISM, while the domains in (w) are, respectively, JOURNEY and BUILDING. In cases of more creative expressions, the degree of creativity is assessed with reference to external factors such as the status of the basic meaning (see Section 4.4.2) and the extent to which the metaphor is elaborated and extended in the text.

Additionally, other features are systematically considered:

- Whether the metaphorical expression constitutes an idiom (see Section 4.4.1.1)
- If a metaphor flag is present (see Section 4.4.2)
- If the metaphor can be considered to be “topic-triggered” (see Section 4.5.1 below)
- The sub-target to which it can be assigned (see Section 4.6 below)
- Whether the metaphorical expression appears in the headline or within a direct quotation

4.5.1 Topic-Triggered Metaphors

The phenomenon of topic-triggered metaphors has been widely recognised as a productive mechanism in media and political discourse, yet it remains comparatively underexplored within metaphor studies (Augé, 2024b; Semino, 2009). Topic-triggered metaphors arise when “an aspect of the topic under discussion inspires the choice of the metaphorical source domain” (Semino, 2008, p. 27), often creating linguistic expressions in which both the literal and metaphorical meanings are simultaneously relevant. They can be contrasted with situationally-triggered metaphors, which are motivated not by the topic itself but by contextual features such as place, time, or the identities of addresser and addressee (Kövecses, 2010; Semino, 2009). This mechanism can be explained in terms of cognitive priming. Kövecses (2018, p. 135) argues that contextual factors, including the immediate linguistic environment “prime” speakers or writers to select metaphorical expressions that are coherent with the topic at hand, employing a semantic field that is already more cognitively accessible to guide the selection of the metaphor. For example, in American newspaper headlines reporting football matches, the team names serve as triggers for metaphor choice, resulting in lexical choices such as “*Cougars drown Beavers*” or “*Clemson cooks Rice*” (Aitchison, 1987). Pranoto and Koller (unpublished) similarly observed that in Indonesian sustainability reports for the transport industry, MOVEMENT metaphors such as “accelerating transition” or “driving toward a low-carbon future”, frame change as purposeful, progressive, and inevitable, using the literal topic of mobility to support the figurative conceptualisation of CHANGE AS GOAL-ORIENTED MOTION.

Topic-triggered metaphors serve multiple rhetorical and communicative functions. Since both literal and figurative readings are active, they attract attention and may create humorous or playful effects, particularly in headlines where space is limited and impact is paramount (Krennmayr, 2011; Semino, 2009). Beyond humour and conciseness, however, they can also be “subtly persuasive” and potentially “manipulative” (Krennmayr, 2011, p. 173). Semino (2009) demonstrates this in political discourse, noting how the British National Party framed asylum seekers through metaphors of EXPLOSION and DESTRUCTION (“time-bomb”, “blowing a massive hole”, “ripping apart our countryside”) (p. 230), exploiting topical associations with terrorism to construct a narrative of threat coming from migrants. The rhetorical power of such metaphors lies precisely in this topical coherence. Topic-triggering may also exploit contrast rather than similarity. The Italian politician and civil-right campaigner Emma Bonino, for example, described non-violent protest using WAR metaphors (“weapons,” “battle,” “struggle”) (Semino, 2009, p. 232). Here, the effectiveness derives from a paradoxical inversion: peace is strengthened through the vocabulary of its opposite. This illustrates how topic-triggering can operate through opposition as well as congruence. Within this study, topic-triggeredness was judged on the basis of the relevance of the figurative expression with regard to the topic that was being discussed.

4.5.2 Assessing Conventionality and Creativity: A Gradient Approach

Section 2.3.1 established that conventionality is best understood as a gradient rather than a binary property, shaped by frequency, lexicalisation, and discourse context. The present section outlines the criteria applied to assess conventionality and creativity in this study.

To gauge metaphoric effect in the synchronic system, the degree of transparency of the relation between literal and metaphorical senses needs to be determined (Koller, 2004, p. 50). Conventionality must be evaluated through a combination of corpus evidence, lexicographic criteria, and contextual analysis (Goatly, 1997; Charteris-Black, 2004; Deignan, 2005). Intuitively, we might argue that for different words the figurative meaning is more salient than the basic one, but it becomes more difficult to pinpoint specific characteristics for such an evaluation in a systematic manner. As Goatly argues, “dictionaries are certainly the cemeteries and the mortuaries, definitely the dormitories, and generally the resting place for the populations of metaphors” (1997, p. 29). Absence from the dictionary may serve as a heuristic for novelty of a specific meaning; when it is in fact present, dictionaries might signal its status of a figurative sense with labels such as *fig.*, or *estens.* (“*extension*”, De Mauro), which reflects their entrenchment while still acknowledging their non-literal origin. Considering that there is a frequency threshold a meaning needs to pass in order to be considered sufficiently conventionalised to be registered in a dictionary (Steen, 2007), this is not a comprehensive representation of contemporary language use, but rather of the meanings that are already established. To reprise Goatly’s (1997) terminology, such labelling can be used as a baseline to determine how “tired”, or even “sleepy” a metaphor is in synchronic terms. Nevertheless, this must be balanced against corpus evidence, since lexicographic practices vary across dictionaries and languages. As already mentioned when discussing dictionaries, another parameter to consider is the status of the most basic meaning: if it classified as specialised, this might be seen as an indication that it is less accessible to the average speaker, to whom the figurative one might have become more salient. Deignan (2005) introduces corpus methods as another important tool to identify gradability via collocational patterns and frequency. They can counterbalance the limitations of dictionaries, and the presence of figurative meanings can be counted within corpora, determining “what frequency of occurrences marks the appropriate cut-off point between conventionalized and novel uses for the purposes of a particular research project” (Cameron & Deignan, 2006, p. 678). Taylor (2021) adopted a similar approach with regard to the number of lexicalisations (specific words referring to the underlying conceptual metaphor) within the focus corpus, to determine the phase in the “life-cycle” and thus the level of conventionality of the metaphor.

Conventionality is also relative to discourse communities, register and genre. Expressions highly conventional within specialised registers may appear novel or striking when transferred to different domains (Steen et al., 2010; Fuoli et al., 2021). A metaphor highly conventional in economic reporting may still appear creative in lifestyle journalism, and vice versa. Thus, conventionalisation is not a universal status but a genre-sensitive process (Koller, 2004). Creativity, in such cases, lies not in the expression itself but in its

recontextualization across discourse boundaries. This means that the same expression may vary in its degree of metaphoricity depending on context: a term may be processed as unremarkable in one discourse domain but felt as metaphorical in another (Fuoli et al. 2021), through ‘out of place’ revitalisation. Finally, another indication of conventionality might be found in the comparison with established mappings in metaphor literature, suggesting that the mapping has become entrenched enough to be recognised in lists.

4.5.3 Source Domains and Scenarios

Section 2.2.3 established that source domains provide a crucial entry point for analysing metaphor in discourse, enabling comparison across texts and revealing the experiential realms through which abstract topics are conceptualised. However, domain-level abstraction risks arbitrariness, with no logical stopping point for generalisation. The present section outlines the criteria and procedures adopted in this study for assigning vehicle terms to source domains, balancing systematicity with sensitivity to discursive context.

A systematic attempt to address this challenge is represented by the MSDIP approach (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023), previously discussed in Section 2.4.6.2, highlighting how it can be somewhat limiting when attempting to make meaningful contributions in providing insight into discourse. In the current analysis, the same basic principles are applied in terms of relying on dictionary definitions and of predetermining various source domains that were found to be frequent in previous literature to streamline the coding process. Nonetheless, I did not treat MSDIP as a prescriptive framework, since its application often does not result in the assignment of metaphorical expressions to a definite source domain, due to discourse often being underspecified and metaphorical words possibly being “compatible with multiple source-target domain mappings” (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023, p. 306). Although this is a valid concern, two counter-arguments can be made. First, although some ambiguity might be unavoidable, contextual information, combined with familiarity with the topics (in this case, of sustainability) and with the features of the discourse being examined (in this case, that of newspapers), allows for a reasonably accurate distribution of lexical items into domains, striking a balance between overgeneralising on the one hand, and overfitting the label to specific examples on the other. Second, in a discourse-oriented study, it would be counterproductive to refrain from classifying metaphors altogether. Providing an overview of the experiential realms through which a topic is metaphorically constructed is crucial, both when expressions echo established patterns identified in prior research, and when they introduce novel, unexpected domain transfers. For these reasons, this study assigns all vehicle terms in the dataset to a source domain, doing so as transparently as possible and acknowledging that other researchers might categorise them differently and with varying levels of granularity. The principal aim is not to claim definitive labels, but to provide a comprehensive and coherent picture of the metaphorical resources shaping this discourse. As established in Section 2.2.3, metaphor scenarios provide an intermediate analytical

category between broad domains and individual tokens, capturing the mini-narratives through which discourse participants structure and evaluate social reality (Koller, 2024; Musolff, 2006, 2016b). Accordingly, metaphorical scenarios were delineated throughout the analysis at varying levels of specificity, in order to better account for the contextual deployment of figurative language. As will become apparent in Chapters 5 and 6, this process was adapted to the differing sizes and characteristics of individual domains. In the case of JOURNEY, six overarching scenarios were identified on the basis of the principal feature they foreground, and these serve to organise the presentation of results. At a higher level of specificity, the discussion of individual examples from the data allows in turn for the delineation of more detailed scenarios, in which specific constitutive elements are examined alongside their discursive functions.

In this study, the process of assigning vehicle terms to source domains and delineating specific scenarios was informed by trends and patterns that emerged from the corpus, by previous literature, and by earlier large-scale databases designed to catalogue and systematise metaphor. These repositories, while differing in scope and methodology, provided a crucial frame of reference for establishing and validating mappings in my own analysis. MetaNet (Dodge et al., 2015) offered a formalised framework for conceptual mapping, integrating linguistic theory with computational methods. At its core lies a repository of metaphors and frames, a structured, wiki-based database of formalised metaphors, conceptual frames, metaphor constructions, and relational patterns. This includes both the internal structure of frames, including participant roles, causal and aspectual relations, and lexical units that evoke them, and cross-frame conceptual mappings. By contrast, Goatly's Thesaurus of Metaphors (2024) adopts a more lexically grounded dimension to the analysis. Its classification of metaphorical expressions according to underlying themes (e.g. *Human is Building*, *Opportunity is Opening*) and its inclusion of extensive usage examples made it particularly valuable for exploring how abstract mappings are realised in ordinary language. The Thesaurus also allows lexical items to appear under multiple themes, highlighting polysemy and cross-domain connectivity. Their combined use grounded the analysis in both formal conceptual theory and real-world linguistic practice, ensuring that the mappings proposed in this study were not only internally coherent but also consistent with established patterns in metaphor research.

4.6 The Target Domain: Sustainability and Its Sub-Targets

As extensively discussed in Chapter 3, the conceptual space of sustainability is inherently complex. The framework of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) already reveals its impressively diverse and multidimensional nature, ranging from the eradication of poverty to the safeguarding of ecosystems (United Nations, 2015). This diversity of issues can run the risk of obscuring their relational character. Fuso Nerini et al. (2019), for example, show that climate change (and consequently Climate Action, SDG 12,

undertaken to combat it) directly affects the achievability of goals relating to material and physical well-being such as prosperity and welfare, poverty eradication and employment, food, and energy and water availability and health, demonstrating the inherent interdependencies within the system. Without acknowledging such interconnections, any discussion of sustainability risks presenting it as a collection of disconnected themes rather than as a holistic framework. Yet, the concept of sustainable development or sustainability has not been rendered “broadly appealing” and accessible to the public (Janoušková et al., 2019, p. 1). Media discourse, in particular, frequently reduces the complexity, presenting the different facets of sustainable development, such as climate change or gender inequalities, predominantly as stand-alone issues, missing the opportunity to frame them within the broader, overarching concept of sustainable development, and resulting in fragmented communication (Janoušková et al., 2019). Therefore, one of the aims of the current research was to bring a degree of systematicity to the fragmented representation of sustainability in media discourse, accounting for the different issues that are to varying degrees connected to the central concept.

When dealing with similarly multifaceted concepts, earlier analytical approaches in metaphor and discourse research resorted to dividing these highly complex notions into a set of sub-topics or targets. Cameron et al. (2009) developed a topic-coding system that allocated linguistic metaphors to a limited set of “key discourse topics” (p. 74) (e.g., Terrorism, Responses to terrorism by authorities, Society and social groups, etc.), with further sub-topics streamlining the annotation process. Similarly, De Backer et al. (2023), while studying the discourse around migration policies, created inductively derived “referential categories” (p. 6) to capture recurrent discourse actors, entities, actions, attributes and relationship. Augé (2024a) explicitly identified “sub-topics” (p. 49) within the climate crisis (e.g., environmental activism, green parties, sustainability and sustainable development, nature and the ecosystem), distinguishing metaphors that referred directly to the crisis from those that were only indirectly related. Wackers et al. (forthcoming), in their study of metaphors in quantum science communication, relied on prior literature to select three fundamental target concepts (superposition, entanglement, contextuality), while allowing space for additional secondary targets. Adopting a comparable principle, the present study understands sustainability as a broad, multifaceted construct, that can be organised into sub-targets to facilitate the analysis of metaphorical framings.

This analytical framework enabled the inclusion of two types of expressions relating to the central target. Firstly, expressions that contain sustainability-related terminology may simultaneously engage with specific thematic domains within the broader framework. The Italian example *dando vita a un'azienda innovativa che dell'edilizia sostenibile ha fatto il suo mantra* (“giving life to an innovative company that has made sustainable construction its mantra”) exemplifies this phenomenon: the collocation *edilizia sostenibile*, “sustainable construction”, points specifically to building practices, thereby connecting the metaphor to SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (United Nations, 2015). In these cases, the adjectival modifier *sustainable* derives its semantic specificity from its collocational environment, with the accompanying noun indicating the particular sub-target being

referenced. Conversely, other expressions invoke conceptually related notions without direct lexical markers. These encompass expressions such as “wake up to the climate crisis,” which, while lacking the terms *sustainability* or *sustainable*, nonetheless addresses sustainability-related concerns through its focus on climate change, a domain which aligns with SDG 13, Climate Action (United Nations, 2015), and was found through the concordance procedure used for *sustainab?* (see Section 4.3). These cases underscore the importance of adopting a holistic analytical approach that illuminates which aspect of sustainability is foregrounded in metaphorical expressions, whether it is one of the many challenges it encompasses, proposed solutions, or the stakeholders involved in addressing these issues. Consequently, the identification of sub-targets functions as an interpretive framework for determining the scope and focus of metaphorical reference within sustainability discourse.

4.6.1 A Classification of Sub-Targets: From SDGs to Corpus-Driven Categories

This research organises sustainability-related themes into sub-targets. They are comparable to previous categories (key discourse topics, referential categories, sub-topics), being concepts relating to sustainability to which metaphors are applied. The schema established is based on two elements: the thematic connections among recurring themes emerging in the surrounding context of the concordances, and the SDGs framework. Although this latter element was used to establish sub-targets when suitable, in other cases alternative labels were proposed as more appropriate in representing the attention reserved to what could constitute a more specific topic within one of the SDGs or, conversely, an overarching theme comprising different areas. Thus, when trends emerging from the data required greater or lesser granularity compared to the SDGs structure, this was prioritised to ensure the framework captured patterns as they actually emerged from the corpus. An example of the former is the CO2 Emissions sub-target, which is not a stand-alone issue in the SDGs, but was prominent in the data through the mentions of terms such as *decarbonisation*, *neutrality*, *fossil fuels*, or *footprint*. Lesser granularity is instead exemplified by the Social Issues sub-target, encompassing all rare mentions of topics such as *poverty*, *gender equality* or *slavery*, corresponding to SDGs 1, 5, and 8.

Rather than eliminating taxonomic overlap, this framework provides operational consistency by acknowledging the multidimensional nature of sustainability discourse. The labelling protocol typically assigns single categories based on primary thematic focus, recognising that while overlap remains inevitable, as demonstrated by the considerable interdependence among SDGs themselves, classification decisions prioritise dominant conceptual emphasis. However, instances of expressions integrating multiple elements as fundamental components are reflected in composite labelling, reflecting the cross-referential character inherent to sustainability communication. Below, the list comprising all sub-targets is presented; as previously explained, while the SDGs were used as a blueprint, the categorisation was fitted and adapted to the data. As a result, some labels map directly onto one of the SDGs, while others function as either hypernyms or hyponyms.

- Climate Action (SDG 13)
- CO₂ Emissions
- Sustainable Finance & ESG
- Social Issues
- Industry and infrastructure
- Research and Innovation
- Responsible Consumption & Practices (cf. SDG 12)
- Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11)

4.6.1.1 Climate Action

This sub-target encompasses discourses and metaphors addressing the need for immediate and coordinated responses to climate change, in line with the priority of SDG 13, “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”. The UN framework situates this goal within a network of global efforts to enhance resilience, adaptation, and mitigation, from strengthening early-warning systems to integrating climate measures into national policies and promoting awareness at all levels of society. In the corpus, these objectives converge in a narrative that conceptualises climate change as crisis or emergency, a destabilising force that threatens planetary systems while simultaneously mobilising collective action, technological innovation, and policy reform.

Studies have compared the parallel uses of ‘climate change’ and ‘global warming’: within the scientific community, the former prevails (Boykoff, 2007; Whitmarsh, 2009), being perceived as a broader concept encompassing all forms of climatic and weather variability, involving hotter summers, colder winters, higher rainfall, and increased drought (Schuldt et al., 2011; Whitmarsh, 2009), while ‘global warming’ qualifies more narrowly a constant increase in the average Earth’s temperature (Shi et al., 2020). Media coverage in the past tended to use the two terms almost interchangeably (Henderson-Sellers, 1998), with ‘global warming’ being preferred between the two (Corbett & Durfee, 2004). More recently, however, this trend has reversed, and ‘climate change’ decidedly surpassed the other option in media usage; Schäfer et al. (2023) analysed news coverage across 16 media outlets from the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, and Thailand over a 26-year span (1996–2021) to find that while nearly half also described the phenomenon as ‘global warming’ (45.44%), the overwhelming majority referred to ‘climate change’ (91.29%). Thus, it can be argued that news media seem to prefer the term ‘climate change’; in the literature, this is mostly attributed to its connotational profile, inasmuch as it is seen as representing a more neutral rendering of the concept, pointing to a diverse set of climate impacts that are less directly connected to human actions, while the greater specificity of “global warming” entails a

stronger association with concepts related to temperature and human intervention (Gann & Matlock, 2014). Other “more urgent, even alarming labels” (Schäfer et al., 2023, p. 8), which are ‘crisis’, ‘emergency’, ‘catastrophe’ and ‘disaster’, have been shown to play a considerably smaller role, being used in 4.52% of all articles (Schäfer et al., 2023). Schäfer et al. (2023) detect a shift towards these worrying labels, especially ‘climate crisis’ and ‘climate emergency’, since *The Guardian* and other news outlets in 2019 advocated for a change in the nomenclature. Additionally, although they represent a considerably small percentage of usages when compared to the more established options, the sampling procedure in the study, selecting articles that featured at least twice climate change, global warming, greenhouse effect, undoubtedly affected the frequency results; as the authors note, they did not explicitly include as search term the more “urgent nomenclature” (Schäfer et al., 2023, p. 6). Thus, although results show that the shift toward more urgent terms is underway but not overly pronounced at least for the moment, a possible underestimation of urgent terms due to the sampling criteria is acknowledged in their study.

4.6.1.2 CO2 Emissions

The CO₂ Emissions sub-target encompasses discourse relating to carbon neutrality, decarbonisation and carbon offsetting, capturing the framings of human and corporate efforts to mitigate carbon output. The pursuit of achieving net-zero emissions is identified as a major factor driving demand in Voluntary Carbon Markets (VCMs), with achieving this target identified as an eventual aim for all countries under the Paris Climate Agreement. Corporate narratives on decarbonisation frequently adopt aspirational framings (Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023), with net-zero pledges surging significantly in recent years. However, any discussion of net-zero should be evaluated through the lens of the criticism that has been moved towards it. A “troubling disconnect” (Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023, p. 383) between the discursive constructions and the solutions proposed on the one hand, and the actual magnitude of the climate crisis on the other has been detected. Carbon offsetting, one of the main solutions proposed, is based on the notion that a tonne of carbon emitted in one place is equivalent to a tonne sequestered or reduced elsewhere (Kruse, 2024). Subsidising projects and initiatives to reduce emissions (by, for example, planting trees) or compensate for already emitted carbon allows companies to qualify themselves as carbon-neutral, and have consequently become a central part of the global approach to addressing the climate crisis. VCMs have however been plagued by systemic issues regarding fragmented standards and accounting frameworks, insufficient transparency, and double counting, which refers to the same emission reduction being counted more than once (Fearnough et al., 2020). This system generates “phantom credits” (Meitner, 2024, p. 16), allowing firms to portray themselves as environmentally responsible while continuing emitting carbon, creating a tradable right to pollute (Kruse, 2024). A 2016 report to the EU Commission concluded that 85% of all carbon offsets “had failed to generate a meaningful reduction in emissions” (Buller, 2022, p. 84). This dynamic ultimately makes carbon offsets counterproductive: they channel

investment back into fossil fuel interests, divert political attention from genuine decarbonisation efforts, and harm communities in developing countries whose land and resources are used for offset projects (Buller, 2022). Despite this, offsetting has managed to create a “dominant narrative frame of climate change policy based on offsetting rather than reducing emissions” (Wittman, et al. 2009, p. 712). The fundamental goal of offsetting appears to be maintaining the central position of the fossil industry and the economic status quo, despite promises of cost-effective reductions.

4.6.1.3 Sustainable Finance and ESG

The Sustainable Finance & ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) sub-target refers to discourse that links environmental sustainability to financial and corporate reporting and governance practices. It includes references to elements such as *ESG*, *sustainable investing*, *green finance*, *responsible investment*, and *corporate sustainability*. This category highlights how financial institutions and corporations frame environmental responsibility not only as an ethical imperative but also as a metric of competitiveness and reputational legitimacy. While the ESG framework emerged as a concrete system for measuring corporate impact across environmental, social, and governance dimensions, its discourse frequently blurs with that of *sustainability*, producing considerable semantic overlap. In this context, the terms *ESG* and *sustainability* are often used interchangeably, though ESG tends to be more investor-oriented and quantifiable, whereas sustainability retains a broader, value-based scope. This emerges from discussion of the finance world within the corpus, and can be exemplified by the following quote, explicitly designating ESG as the technical manner of referring to the initiatives of businesses on sustainability: “the 500 most significant stock market companies that are taking concrete action on the sustainability front. In technical terms, the ESG objectives.”⁹ (La Repubblica).

Several examples in the data highlight this conflation, where *sustainability* is reframed in financial terms and *ESG* is presented as its operational manifestation. At the same time, the institutionalisation of sustainability through ESG reporting and rating systems invites critique with regard to its reliability and consistency. The rapid expansion of ESG investing has simultaneously increased the risk of “greenwashing”, as investors are often unsure whether investment labels and underlying methodologies truly reflect sustainable objectives (Chiu, 2025). A core weakness is the “variance” (Chiu, 2025, p. 246) in information about ESG products, that is, a significant divergence of ESG ratings across providers resulting in typically low correlations between different ratings for the same companies. This inconsistency arises because rating agencies lack standardised approaches, resulting in fundamental differences in the specific set of factors deemed material, the indicators used for measurement, and the weightings applied during aggregation (Jámbor & Zanócz, 2023). Moreover, the

⁹ “quello dei 500 titoli più importanti del mercato azionario che fanno qualcosa di concreto sul fronte della sostenibilità. In gergo, gli obiettivi ESG”

methodologies and data sources used by ESG infomediaries are frequently criticised for their opacity and for their reliance on subjective elements (Chiu, 2025; Jámor & Zánócz, 2023). These issues are compounded by the fact that the underlying corporate ESG reports frequently lack standardisation and assurance, thereby undermining credibility and accountability, and often fail to provide complete or comparable information on sustainability performance (Jámor & Zánócz, 2023). Such concerns are echoed in the opinions voiced within the corpus, where the reliability of ESG criteria is repeatedly questioned and sometimes reduced to a series of performative commitments that verge on greenwashing practices. This tension between genuine responsibility and strategic branding underlines the discursive ambivalence of sustainable finance, oscillating between the rhetoric of systemic change and the logic of market adaptation.

4.6.1.4 Social Issues

This sub-target brings together discursive framings related to social dimensions of sustainability, encompassing poverty reduction, health and well-being, gender equality, and fair labour conditions. While these themes correspond to multiple SDGs, SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being, SDG 5 Gender Equality, and SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, they converge around the facet of sustainability as a fundamentally human and ethical project. In this domain, sustainability discourse expands beyond environmental and economic concerns to include notions of justice, dignity, and collective flourishing. The main reason why they have been grouped together is the relatively scarce number of instances mentioned. This corroborates findings on the collocational behaviour of *sustainability*, which occurs notably more frequently with *environmental* than with *social*, suggesting how the former aspect might be immediately more salient to writers and readers. The representation of the social side of sustainability within the corpus, however scarce when compared to the more prominent environmental side, aligns closely with UN objectives of resilience, protection, and empowerment.

4.6.1.5 Industry and Infrastructure

This sub-target encompasses discourses that connect sustainability with industrial development, technological advancement, and infrastructural transformation. According to the United Nations framework, Goal 9 aims to “build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation”. It frames sustainability as inseparable from the capacity to design, build, and maintain systems that are both technologically advanced and socially inclusive. At the same time, this sub-target reveals a conceptual tension between growth and sustainability. The repeated reference to notions such as ‘green industrialisation’, ‘sustainable manufacturing’, and ‘responsible innovation’

attempt to reconcile expansion with ecological constraint, constructing a hybrid narrative where technological optimism coexists with environmental caution. This tension is especially visible in corporate and policy-oriented contexts, which often position innovation as both an economic growth driver and a sustainability strategy, reflecting an ideological convergence between competitiveness and environmental stewardship.

4.6.1.6 Research and Innovation

This sub-target consists of discourses that link technological innovation and scientific research to sustainability goals, particularly SDG 7 (Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all) and one specific aspect of SDG 9 (Foster innovation). Research and technology are framed as key drivers of the energy transition. With the UN framework, they emphasise international cooperation as essential to expanding access to clean energy research and innovation, particularly in developing countries. Innovation is presented as a catalyst for overcoming environmental and economic challenges, representing adaptability, efficiency, and modernity. Concretely, the corpus addresses multiple dimensions of technological sustainability: various clean renewable energy sources (solar, wind, hydrogen, methane) and energy storage solutions; sustainable mobility initiatives, primarily through hybrid and electric private vehicles and electrified public transport; and broader climate tech applications, characterised as a *climate tech boom*, including for example carbon capture and storage or low-impact cruise ships. Yet critical voices problematize the assumption that technological progress automatically ensures ecological improvement, citing greenwashing and the material limits and accessibility issues of 'green' technological developments. This discourse thus articulates sustainability through dual logic: as progress, intended as the forward motion of science and technology, and as a transition, representing a gradual but inevitable system transformation.

4.6.1.7 Responsible Consumption and Practices

This sub-target centres on SDG 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns), which emphasises “doing more and better with less” through resource efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable business practices, and enhanced consumer awareness of environmental and social impacts. In the corpus, two complementary narratives emerge: consumers as active agents making sustainable choices and adopting less impactful habits, and possible responses to these impulses represented by innovations in materials, packaging, and production processes offering systemic solutions. The circular economy concept anchors both dimensions, actualised in initiatives going from waste management, recycling, sustainable tourism, to ethical fashion, eco-design, and the sharing economy. Several examples extend the notion of responsible consumption beyond individual behaviour to

collective or educational initiatives, such as, for instance, a *green escape room* project linking sustainability with interactive learning, or to systemic critiques, including calls for degrowth and local resilience as alternatives to mainstream *sustainable development*. In parallel, consumer-oriented narratives emphasise conscious choices and green lifestyles.

4.6.1.8 Sustainable Cities and Communities

This sub-target brings together discourses concerned with the transformation of urban environments into inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable spaces aligned with SDG 11. Within the UN's framework, sub-goals spanning affordable housing, sustainable transport, participatory urbanisation, cultural heritage protection, and disaster risk reduction position the city as both a site of climate vulnerability and a laboratory for resilience. Urban areas constitute a central focus for the former and latter element, accounting for a disproportionate share of global resource use. They consume roughly 80% of the world's energy, use 70% of its food, generate around 60% of greenhouse gas emissions, and produce about 70% of global waste (Intini, 2024). Such concentrated environmental pressures highlight the urgent need to rethink urban management and planning urban sustainability, which is often linked to the notion of adaptation and regeneration. In the corpus, this is concretely represented by initiatives like Brescia's *Un Filo Naturale* 'A Natural Thread', which distributed eco-postcards to be planted, generating balcony gardens to create an *oasis city*. Rome's Expo 2030 bid instead embodies this through its Metro C extension, demonstrating comprehensive infrastructure modernisation alongside cultural preservation. Other examples include communal laundry systems, microplastic filtration appliances, greywater recycling, and construction exclusively using recycled materials, emphasising citizen proactivity. The implementation of sustainability in cities is thus presented as hinging on finding a balance between growth and preservation, framing urban environments as both mirrors of collective responsibility and testing grounds for shared projects.

4.6.2 The Analytical Function of the Sub-Target Framework

The analysis demonstrates that sustainability rarely receives framing as a unified, monolithic concept. Instead, public and media discourse fragments it into a constellation of sub-topics, each linked to distinct SDGs and employing specific metaphorical framings. Thus, this framework illuminates both the structuring of sustainability as a comprehensive notion and the specific framing of individual issues (e.g., climate change, ESG) within this broader framework. This systematic mapping reveals how sustainability becomes operationalised in communication, either as an abstract aspiration when invoked as a vague signifier, or more directly as a concrete set of thematically specific concerns. This taxonomic framework is intended to combine the metaphor analysis approach with the specific necessities posed by

SDGs categorisation, providing operational tools for addressing sustainability discourse complexity without excessive simplification. Below, a summary table of the sub-targets is presented, with explicatory examples from the data.

Table 4.2

Sub-target categories for the classification of sustainability discourse with illustrative examples from the corpus

Sub-target	Examples from the corpus
Climate action	The <u>climate emergency</u> continues to rear its ugly head We help protect the environment by introducing technologies and services that combat <u>climate change</u>
CO ₂ Emissions	Formula One said it was “racing towards” its <u>target of making the sport net-zero carbon</u> by 2030, which also includes a plan to have a 100 per cent sustainable fuel
Sustainable finance and ESG	Blockchain can help us build a more <u>sustainable finance</u> The <u>ESG net zero zeitgeist</u> is so allpowerful you just <i>can’t stand in its way</i>
Social issues	A pioneer in <u>social sustainability</u>, the operator has worked on several socio-economic issues around tourism here How a new course is helping to combat the <u>modern slavery problem</u>
Industry and infrastructure	The food system could help [...] build a resilient and sustainable <u>agriculture sector</u> Godefroy, head of sustainability, said: “Government took a positive step by requiring that <u>new homes and residential buildings</u> [...] should be designed and built to <u>limit overheating risk</u>”
Research and innovation	The <u>solar tower power plant</u> [...] can be a technological milestone towards the production of <u>sustainable aviation fuels</u>

Responsible consumption and practices	Among the trends that <i>drive</i> <u>food consumption</u>, those linked to product sustainability continue to stand out <i>A good place to start</i> is to look for <u>local producers</u> whose <u>product</u> is certified for sustainability
Sustainable cities and communities	In addition to being a unique opportunity to make <u>our cities</u> more digital, and sustainable, <i>the smart city game is [a] competition [...] that TIM intends to play on the front line</i>

Note. Sub-targets are underlined, metaphors are in italics

The following chapters present the results of the analysis, applying the methodological framework outlined above to the bilingual corpus. Chapter 5 opens with a quantitative overview of the full dataset, reporting the distribution of metaphorical expressions across source domains and newspapers, before turning to a detailed examination of the JOURNEY domain, the most frequent in both sub-corpora. Chapter 6 discusses instead the other source domains in order of decreasing frequency, examining their discursive deployment and the patterns that emerge across the corpus. Throughout both chapters, the analytical categories and criteria established here are discussed in practice, through the examination of specific concordance examples.

Chapter 5

Analysis and Results: Quantitative Results and the JOURNEY domain

This chapter opens with a quantitative overview of the full dataset (Section 5.1), reporting the distribution of the 1,976 identified metaphors across sixteen source domains, and examining variation in metaphor density across the eight individual newspapers. This section serves as an entry point into the data, establishing the relative weight of each domain and highlighting cross-linguistic convergences and divergences in metaphor density and domain distribution, before the qualitative analysis is undertaken. The chapter then turns to the JOURNEY domain (Section 5.2), the most frequent source domain in the corpus; after situating JOURNEY within its theoretical and discursive context, the analysis examines six overarching scenarios identified within the data. The chapter concludes with observations on the patterns, cross-linguistic tendencies and discursive implications that emerge from the JOURNEY domain as a whole (Section 5.2.7).

5.1 Quantitative Results

This section provides an overview of the distribution and density of metaphorical expressions across the corpus, establishing the quantitative foundation for the qualitative analysis presented in subsequent sections. The data discussed here derive from the manual annotation procedure described in Chapter 4, applied to the comparable corpus of 1,664,644 tokens. The annotation procedure yielded a total of 1,976 metaphorical expressions, of which 1,386 (70.14%) were identified in the Italian sub-corpus and 590 (29.86%) in the English sub-corpus. While the raw count indicates a substantially higher number of metaphors in Italian, this disparity is partly attributable to the different sizes of the two sub-corpora, with the Italian sub-corpus comprising 953,133 tokens and the English sub-corpus 711,511 tokens. To allow for a meaningful comparison, normalised frequency measures were therefore calculated. Metaphor density¹⁰ is 11.87 for the corpus as a whole, 14.54 for the Italian sub-corpus, and 8.29 for the English sub-corpus. These figures indicate that, even when corpus size is controlled for, Italian newspaper texts in the present dataset contain a higher proportion of sustainability-related metaphors than their English counterparts.

The 1,976 metaphorical expressions were classified into 16 source domains; Table 5.1 reports the absolute frequency of each domain and its relative frequency expressed as a percentage of all metaphors identified, both for the entire corpus and for the two sub-corpora

¹⁰Expressed as the number of metaphorical expressions per 10,000 tokens

individually. The relative frequencies in Table 5.1 describe the internal composition of the metaphorical landscape, indicating how much conceptual space each domain occupies within the full set of metaphors identified. Figure 5.1 presents the relative frequencies for the two sub-corpora.

Table 5.1

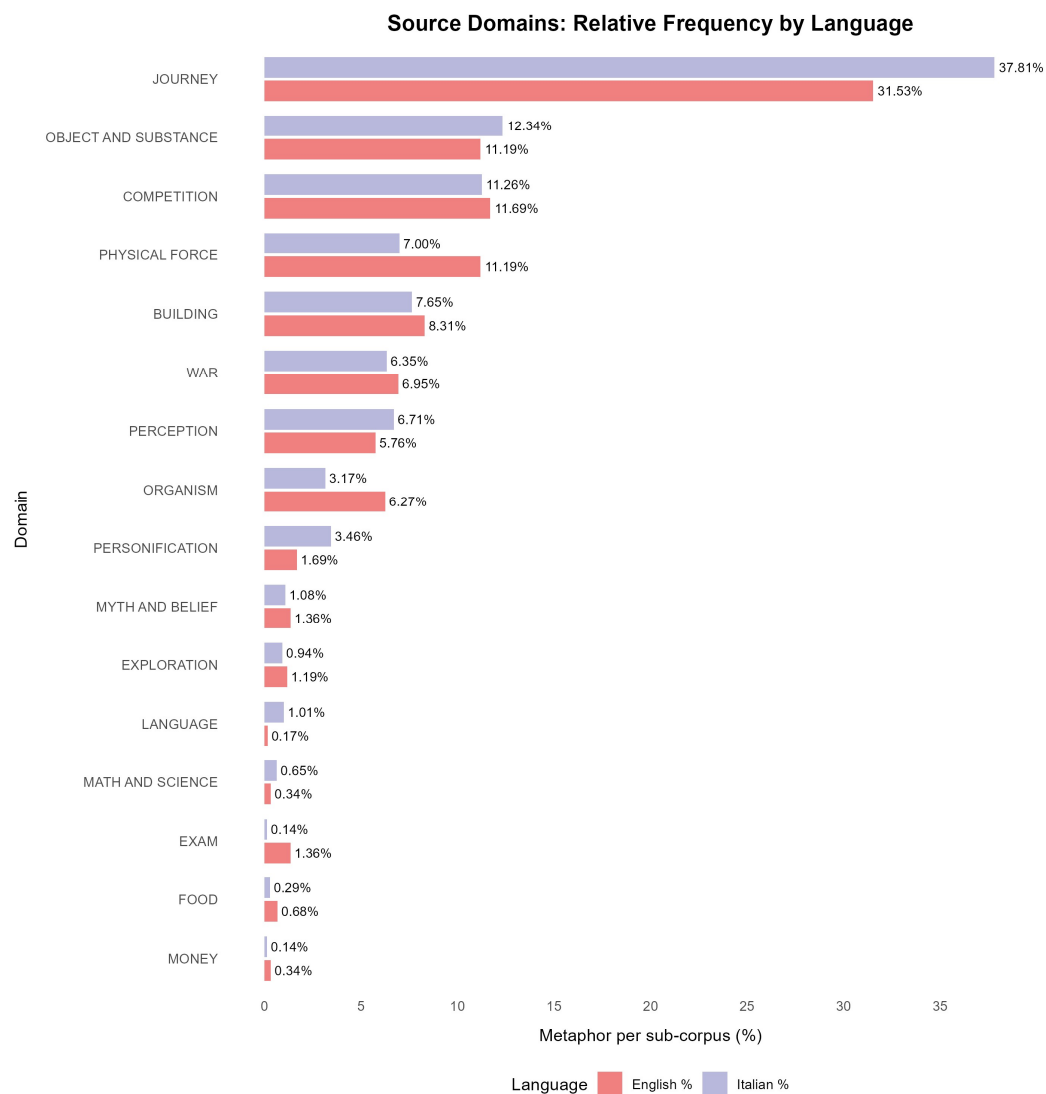
Distribution of Source Domains in the Corpus

Domain	Absolute Frequencies	Relative Frequencies	Absolute Frequencies ITA	Relative Frequencies ITA	Absolute Frequencies ENG	Relative Frequencies ENG
JOURNEY	710	35.93%	524	37.81%	186	31.53%
OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE	237	12.00%	171	12.34%	66	11.19%
COMPETITION	225	11.39%	156	11.26%	69	11.69%
PHYSICAL FORCE	163	8.25%	97	7.00%	66	11.19%
BUILDING	155	7.84%	106	7.65%	49	8.31%
WAR	129	6.53%	88	6.35%	41	6.95%
PERCEPTION	127	6.43%	93	6.71%	34	5.76%
ORGANISM	81	4.10%	44	3.17%	37	6.27%
PERSONIFICATION	58	2.94%	48	3.46%	10	1.69%
MYTH AND BELIEF	23	1.16%	15	1.08%	8	1.36%
EXPLORATION	20	1.01%	13	0.94%	7	1.19%
LANGUAGE	15	0.76%	14	1.01%	1	0.17%
MATH AND SCIENCE	11	0.56%	9	0.65%	2	0.34%
EXAM	10	0.51%	2	0.14%	8	1.36%
FOOD	8	0.41%	4	0.29%	4	0.68%

Domain	Absolute Frequencies	Relative Frequencies	Absolute Frequencies ITA	Relative Frequencies ITA	Absolute Frequencies ENG	Relative Frequencies ENG
MONEY	4	0.20%	2	0.14%	2	0.34%
<i>TOTAL</i>	1,976	100%	1,386	100%	590	100%

Figure 5.1

Relative Frequency of Source Domains by Language



The distribution reveals a markedly uneven allocation of metaphors across domains. The JOURNEY domain is by far the most frequent, accounting for 710 occurrences (35.93% of all identified metaphors). It is followed at a considerable distance by OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE (237, 12.00%) and COMPETITION (225, 11.39%). Together, these three domains account for nearly 60% of all sustainability metaphors in the corpus, indicating that a relatively small number of conceptual frames dominate the metaphorical landscape of sustainability discourse in both languages. The middle tier of domains comprises PHYSICAL FORCE (163, 8.25%), BUILDING (155, 7.84%), WAR (129, 6.53%), and PERCEPTION (127, 6.43%), which collectively represent a further 29% of the total. The remaining nine domains, from ORGANISM (81, 4.10%) to MONEY (4, 0.20%), together account for only about 12% of the corpus, and several of them (MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE¹¹, EXAM, FOOD, MONEY) occur with such low frequency as to preclude substantial generalisation.

The JOURNEY domain occupies the first position in both sub-corpora, although it accounts for a larger share of the Italian metaphors (37.81%) than of the English ones (31.53%). Below the most frequent domain, the hierarchies begin to diverge. In the Italian sub-corpus, OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE holds the second position (12.34%), followed by COMPETITION (11.26%). In the English sub-corpus, by contrast, COMPETITION ranks second (11.69%), and PHYSICAL FORCE shares the third position with OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE (both at 11.19%). Further differences emerge in the lower tiers. The ORGANISM domain is nearly twice as prominent in the English sub-corpus (6.27%) as in the Italian one (3.17%), while, conversely, the PERSONIFICATION domain is proportionally more represented in Italian (3.46%) than in English (1.69%). Among the less frequent domains, the EXAM domain is notably more common in English (1.36%) than in Italian (0.14%), while the LANGUAGE domain appears more frequently in the Italian sub-corpus (1.01% versus 0.17%). These differences in domain ranking demonstrate that, while the two sub-corpora share a core set of conceptual metaphors for sustainability, the frequency and relative weight assigned to specific domains vary across linguistic contexts. The qualitative analysis that follows (see Section 5.2 and Chapter 6) explore the discursive and rhetorical implications of these distributional patterns in greater detail.

In addition to the cross-linguistic comparison, the data were also examined at the level of individual newspapers, in order to assess whether metaphor density varies across different publications. Table 5.2 reports the raw metaphor count, total token count, and normalised frequency¹² for each of the eight newspapers, grouped by language. Due to the individual newspaper sub-corpora varying considerably in size, the normalised frequencies allow for a meaningful comparison of metaphor density. It should be noted, however, that these frequencies do not reflect the overall density of metaphor in each newspaper. Because the analysis was restricted to concordances for *sustainability/sostenibilità* and *sustainable/sostenibile*, the normalised frequency captures specifically how many metaphors

¹¹ The label MATH AND SCIENCE is used as an abbreviation for MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE in figures and tables to optimise space

¹² Expressed as the number of metaphorical expressions per 10,000 tokens

occur in the discussion of these terms, relative to the token size of each sub-corpus. Figure 5.2 presents the normalised frequencies visually.

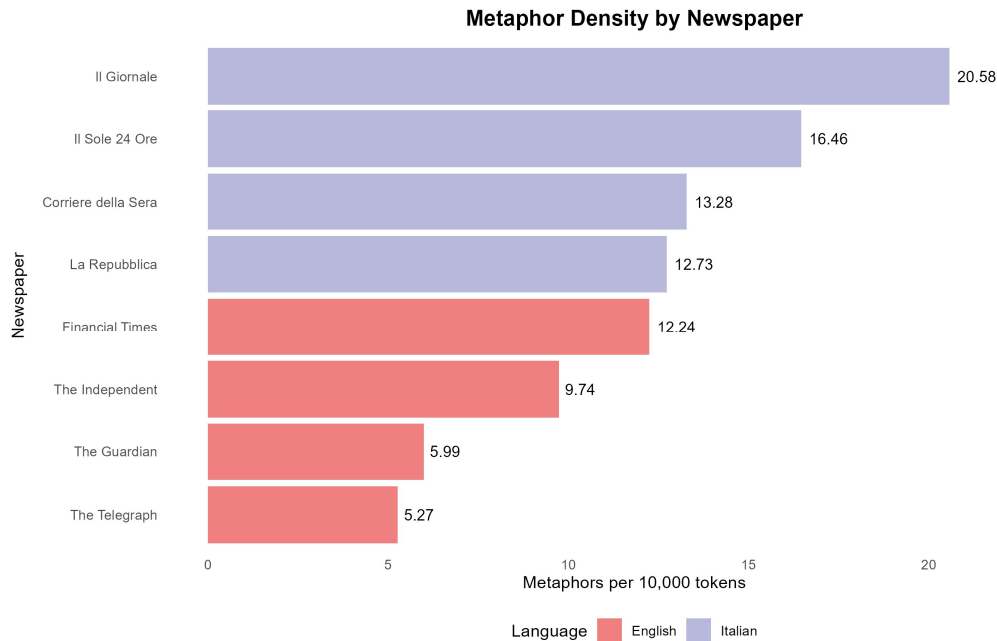
Table 5.2

Metaphor Density by Newspaper

Language	Newspaper	Absolute frequency	Total tokens	Normalised Frequency
ITA	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	369	277,838	13.28
ITA	<i>Il Giornale</i>	144	69,983	20.58
ITA	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	452	274,553	16.47
ITA	<i>La Repubblica</i>	421	330,759	13.28
	Total (ITA)	1,386	953,133	14.54
ENG	<i>Financial Times</i>	149	121,705	12.24
ENG	<i>The Guardian</i>	159	265,392	5.99
ENG	<i>The Independent</i>	242	248,496	9.74
ENG	<i>The Telegraph</i>	40	75,918	5.27
	Total (ENG)	590	711,511	8.29
	Total	1,976	1,664,644	11.87

Figure 5.2

Normalised Frequency for Metaphors by Newspapers



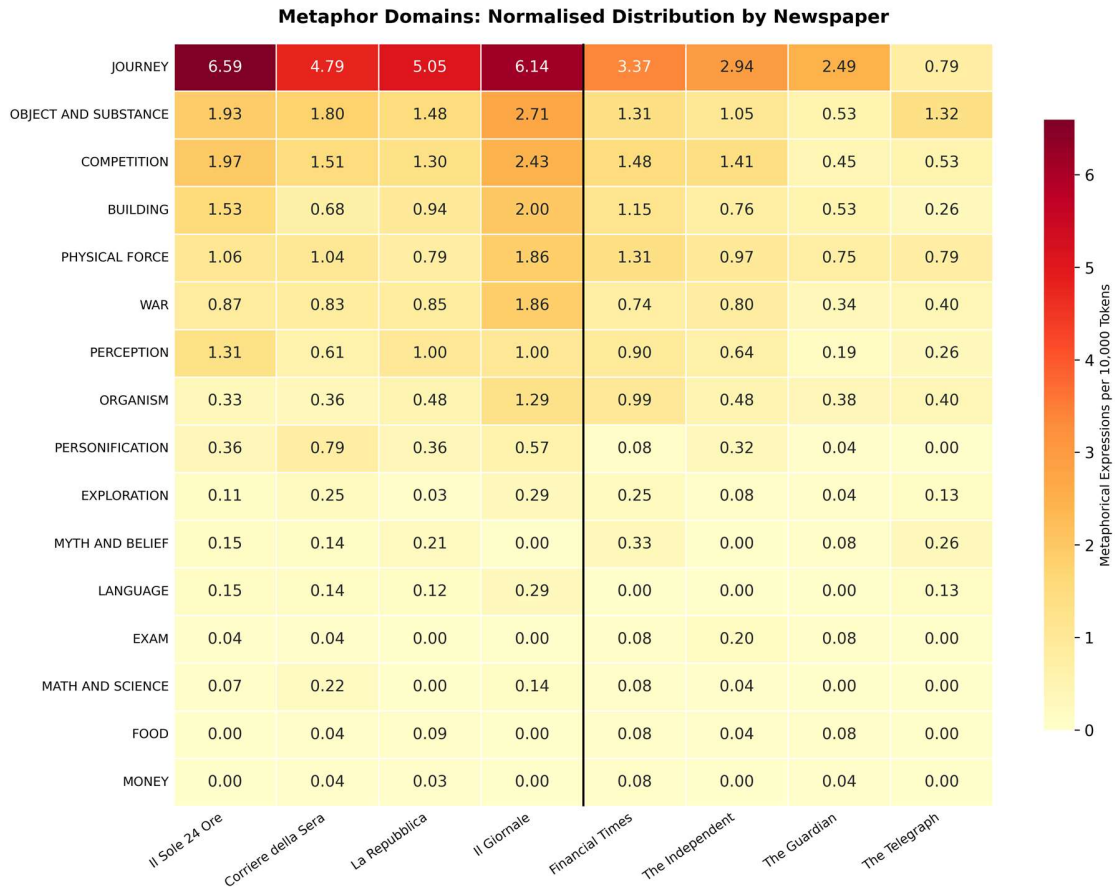
The normalised frequency values confirm the broader cross-linguistic trend identified above: all four Italian newspapers show a higher metaphor density than any of the four English newspapers. Among the Italian newspapers, *Il Giornale* exhibits the highest density (20.58), while in absolute terms it has the smallest sub-corpus and the lowest raw count among the Italian titles. This indicates that the texts included from *Il Giornale* are particularly rich in figurative language relative to their length. By contrast, *La Repubblica*, which contributes the second-highest raw count (421), displays the lowest normalised frequency among the Italian papers (13.28), reflecting the substantially larger size of its sub-corpus (330,759 tokens). Among the English newspapers, the *Financial Times* stands out with a normalised frequency of 12.24, a value comparable to those of the Italian papers and considerably higher than the other English titles. *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* show notably lower densities (5.99 and 5.27 respectively), suggesting a more restrained deployment of metaphorical language in their sustainability coverage, at least within the dataset.

Figure 5.3 presents the normalised distribution of metaphor domains across individual newspapers¹³, revealing how domain-level patterns vary not only across languages but also across publications.

¹³ Expressed as the number of metaphorical expressions per 10,000 tokens

Figure 5.3

Normalised Distribution of Domains by Newspaper



The JOURNEY domain dominates in all eight newspapers, but its normalised density varies considerably. Among the Italian titles, *Il Sole 24 Ore* (6.59) and *Il Giornale* (6.14) display the highest JOURNEY density, while *Corriere della Sera* shows a comparatively lower value (4.79). Among the English newspapers, the *Financial Times* leads (3.37), followed by *The Independent* (2.94) and *The Guardian* (2.49), with *The Telegraph* showing a markedly lower density (0.79). The gap between the highest and lowest values is substantial: *Il Sole 24 Ore*'s JOURNEY density is more than eight times that of *The Telegraph*, suggesting that the prominence of this conceptual frame varies not only across the two languages but also significantly across news outlets. *Il Giornale* stands out not only for JOURNEY but for elevated densities across nearly all mid-frequency domains. Its values for OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE (2.71), COMPETITION (2.43), BUILDING (2.00), PHYSICAL FORCE (1.86), and WAR (1.86) are the highest among all eight newspapers, confirming that its high overall metaphor density is distributed across multiple conceptual domains rather than concentrated in JOURNEY alone. The *Financial Times*, by contrast, displays a more even distribution across the mid-frequency domains, with

COMPETITION (1.48), PHYSICAL FORCE (1.31), OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE (1.31), and BUILDING (1.15) all falling within a relatively narrow range.

Several domain-specific patterns are also worth noting. The ORGANISM domain, while relatively infrequent in the corpus as a whole, shows a notably high density in *Il Giornale* (1.29) and the *Financial Times* (0.99). The LANGUAGE domain appears almost exclusively in the Italian sub-corpus, with all four Italian newspapers recording values between 0.12 and 0.29, while three of the four English titles show a value of 0.00. Conversely, the EXAM domain is more prominent in the English sub-corpus, driven primarily by *The Independent* (0.20), and is almost entirely absent from the Italian newspapers. These patterns suggest that certain conceptual domains within the data are largely confined to one linguistic and cultural context.

Having presented the overall quantitative trends within the data and the patterns that emerge across the variables established within the corpus, the analysis now turns to a discussion of the qualitative results. This discussion explores how each of the source domains is exploited in context as the stage on which a wide range of scenarios takes place, and the discursive implications that they carry. As Section 5.1 has shown, JOURNEY constitutes by far the most frequent domain, and is thus the focus for the remainder of Chapter 5.

It should be noted that, while the focus of the qualitative analysis lies on the identification and interpretation of metaphorical expressions, the discussion necessarily engages with broader textual segments in which these expressions are embedded. Metaphors do not operate in isolation, but rather acquire their full discursive force through the surrounding co-text and the communicative context in which they occur. Attending to these wider passages is therefore essential to understanding how a given metaphor functions within a specific discursive setting and how it contributes to the construction of contextual meaning. By situating metaphorical expressions within their immediate textual environment, the analysis aims to capture not only the conceptual mapping at work but also the rhetorical and pragmatic effects that emerge from the interplay between metaphor and discourse. Relatedly, as will become apparent throughout the analysis, the metaphorical expressions discussed do not always directly feature *sustainability* or a collocation with *sustainable*; they can refer to specific dimensions, or processes that fall within the broader scope of sustainability, as established in the sub-target framework (see Section 4.6). This is a consequence of the concordance-based approach outlined in Section 4.3: the concordances are anchored to *sustainability* and *sustainable*, but the surrounding co-text often introduces related concepts that are themselves framed metaphorically, and that are inextricably linked to sustainability, as is frequently made explicit by the writers and speakers themselves. The analytical approach informs how the examples are presented: they have the form of complete sentences, and can integrate elements beyond the immediate concordance span. The concordance display in AntConc was already set to the maximum width available (see Section 4.3); in addition, the original texts were consulted whenever the concordance window did not provide sufficient context. The examples reproduced here therefore incorporate surrounding material where this was judged necessary for a full understanding of the metaphorical expression and its discursive function.

Furthermore, because the concordance-based method retained the title of all articles, metaphors appearing in headlines were also analysed. As will be seen throughout the qualitative discussion, headlines frequently deploy metaphorical expressions that frame the content of the article and establish evaluative orientations before the reader encounters the body text. Where relevant, these title-level metaphors are therefore included in the discussion.

5.2 JOURNEY

Since Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) original formulation, the JOURNEY source domain has been shown to be pervasive across a wide range of discourse. Its wide applicability can be attributed to its grounding in the Event Structure metaphor, a generic-level conceptualisation constructing states as locations, changes as movements, purposes as destinations, difficulties as impediments to motion and long-term and purposeful activities as journeys (Lakoff, 1993). Because JOURNEY inherits its basic structure from the Source–Path–Goal schema, it functions as a default way of construing temporally extended, goal-directed processes. Due to the richness of experiences associated with this schema, the perspective it can offer on the target domain can focus on different parts of a journey, highlighting, alternatively, its beginning, an intermediate phase, or its endpoint. In doing so, it attributes varying levels of relevance to achievements that have already been reached, current progress, developments situated in the future, or the final aim of the process (Semino, 2002). A further feature of the domain is what Lakoff (1993) calls *duality*: events and processes may be construed in terms of location (e.g. “milestones”, “crossroads”), thereby attributing movement to actors who reach them, or in terms of movement itself (e.g. “moving forward”, “on the right track”), thus conferring agency unto the events themselves. The metaphor tends to carry positive connotations (Charteris-Black, 2004): the entrenched mapping PURPOSEFUL CHANGE IS MOTION TO A DESTINATION (Radden, 1996) presupposes that the endpoint is desirable, that delays are natural, and that obstacles are expected. In discourse, this frequently legitimises the chosen direction as both purposeful and necessary, while implicitly casting alternatives as deviations, regressions, or failures to make progress. Teleology is therefore built into the conceptual structure: a coherent path is assumed, and alternative endpoints are generally backgrounded or delegitimised as unwelcome options to avoid. This framing can also redistribute agency. Speakers may highlight intentional action, attributing agency to themselves, or diminish responsibility by attributing momentum to impersonal forces, sometimes naturalising political decisions as inevitable trajectories (Charteris-Black, 2004). The high degree of entrenchment and conventionality of JOURNEY metaphors often results in these evaluative implications passing largely unnoticed.

These dynamics become particularly salient in sustainability discourse, where JOURNEY has emerged as a dominant framing (Frischherz, 2010). In business communication, sustainability is frequently presented not as a fixed goal but as an ongoing, incremental process of adaptation and learning (Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023; Milne et al., 2006). While this

suggests commitment, it also risks redefining sustainability in terms of perpetual movement rather than measurable outcomes, thereby deferring more radical change (Milne et al. 2006). Fuoli and Beelitz (2023) show that in corporate net-zero communication, *journey* and *pathway* are among the most common collocates of *net zero*, reinforcing an image of continuous advancement despite the apparent non-negotiable deadline of the net zero target. A comparable pattern occurs in green-living blogs, where JOURNEY language frames environmental behaviour as a personal, incremental path, with authors describing themselves as “still-on-the-road travellers” taking a “step in the right direction” (Atanasova, 2019a, p. 7). This supports a narrative of individual improvement while sidelining structural or systemic transformations. By portraying progress as coherent, desirable, and ongoing, it conforms to growth-oriented transition narratives and reinforces the assumption that economic expansion and sustainability form mutually reinforcing trajectories. Yet this rests on the premises that progress is linear, that endpoints are self-evidently desirable, and that delays and obstacles are natural rather than political. Precisely because the metaphor suggests inevitability, it can obscure criticism, positioning dissent as a deviation from “the path” and foreclosing alternative visions of environmental change. Scenarios elaborate the JOURNEY domain into culturally recognisable storylines with typical participants, roles, and expected developments, for example, states travelling together along a shared path. Within the JOURNEY domain, I established six overarching scenarios: DESTINATION (Section 5.2.1), PATH (Section 5.2.2), ACTIVE AGENT (Section 5.2.3), ACCELERATION (Section 5.2.4), CONSTRAINED MOTION (Section 5.2.5) and TURN (Section 5.2.6). It should be noted that there is an inevitable level of overlap between the scenarios, inasmuch as all expressions profile the JOURNEY domain and oftentimes elements that could be attributed to either one or another of the overarching scenarios interact with each other. Due to the size of the JOURNEY domain, this analytical choice was guided by the notion that an intermediate level of analysis positioned between the domain and the context-specific scenarios would contribute to an understanding of overarching patterns within the domain. The main criterion for categorising the expression in this manner was an identification of the feature that constituted the focal point of the metaphor, namely, whether the most central aspect was, for instance, the directionality of the movement, its unfolding, or deviations from a current trajectory. However, it should be acknowledged that examples cannot always be unambiguously categorised and may instead be interpreted with reference to multiple categories. The remainder of the chapter will illustrate in more detail the scenarios and the specific features characterising each of them, and examples will serve to better illustrate where overlap among the different scenarios occurred and the criteria guiding the categorisation choice.

Below, Table 5.3 summarises the distribution of scenarios within the JOURNEY domain, which is presented visually in Figure 5.4.

Table 5.3*Absolute frequencies for scenarios within the JOURNEY domain*

Scenarios	Number of metaphors
Destination	289
Path	230
Active Agent	60
Acceleration	54
Constrained Motion	49
Turn	28
TOTAL	710

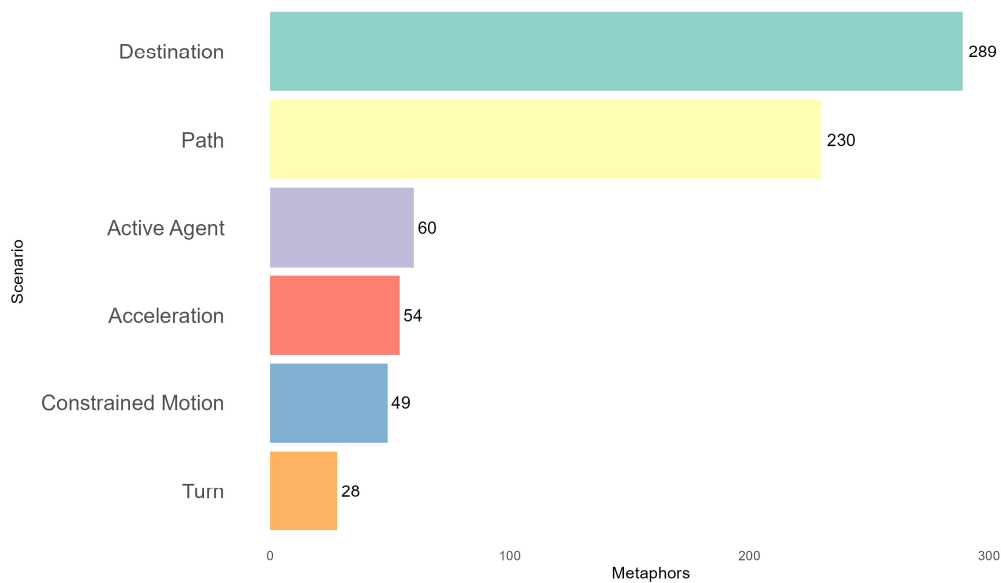
Figure 5.4*Absolute frequencies for scenarios within the JOURNEY domain*

Table 5.4 summarises in more detail the distribution of scenarios across newspapers, providing both the absolute frequencies and the normalised frequencies¹⁴, which are presented in Figure 5.5. The rest of the chapter presents each of the scenarios and their specific features in more detail, proceeding from most to least frequent scenario.

¹⁴ Expressed as the number of metaphorical expressions per 10,000 tokens

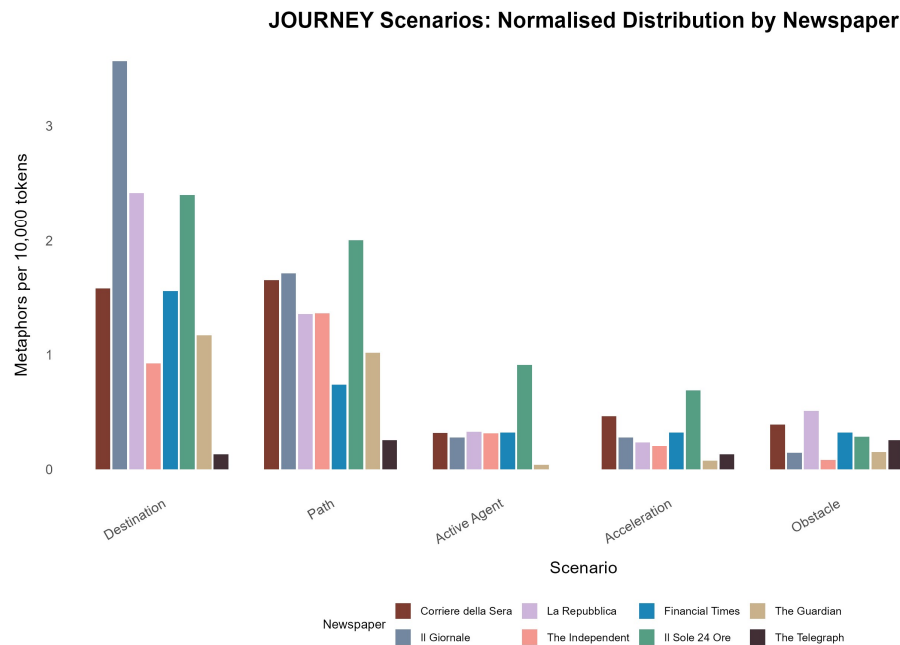
Table 5.4

Scenario distribution within the JOURNEY domain by newspaper with absolute frequencies and normalised frequencies in brackets

Scenarios	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	<i>Financial Times</i>	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	<i>The Independent</i>	<i>La Repubblica</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Il Giornale</i>	<i>The Telegraph</i>	Total/ Scenario
<i>Destination</i>	66 (2.40)	19 (1.56)	44 (1.58)	23 (0.93)	80 (2.42)	31 (1.17)	25 (3.57)	1 (0.13)	289
<i>Path</i>	55 (2.00)	9 (0.74)	46 (1.66)	34 (1.37)	45 (1.36)	27 (1.02)	12 (1.71)	2 (0.26)	230
<i>Active Agent</i>	25 (0.91)	4 (0.33)	9 (0.32)	8 (0.32)	11 (0.33)	1 (0.04)	2 (0.29)	0 (0.00)	60
<i>Acceleration</i>	19 (0.69)	4 (0.33)	13 (0.47)	5 (0.20)	8 (0.24)	2 (0.08)	2 (0.29)	1 (0.13)	54
<i>Constrained motion</i>	8 (0.29)	4 (0.33)	11 (0.40)	2 (0.08)	17 (0.51)	4 (0.15)	1 (0.14)	2 (0.26)	49
<i>Turn</i>	8 (0.29)	1 (0.08)	10 (0.36)	1 (0.04)	6 (0.18)	1 (0.04)	1 (0.14)	0 (0.00)	28
Total/ Newspaper	181	41	133	73	167	66	43	6	710

Figure 5.5

Scenario distribution within the JOURNEY domain by newspaper



5.2.1 Destination

All examples classified under the DESTINATION category foreground a destination as the main element in the scenario. While scenarios within the JOURNEY naturally interact, the analysis focuses here firstly on instances where the establishment of an arrival point is explicitly formulated and confers structure to the figurative image evoked. In total, 289 examples have been identified; this scenario is the most frequent within the JOURNEY domain and occurs across all newspapers in the corpus. Its widespread usage can be linked to the fact that it takes advantage of the JOURNEY domain in the most immediate way possible, portraying processes as undeniably purposeful due to having a clear endpoint to reach. This destination can be sustainability itself or related targets, defined with varying degrees of specificity regarding the characteristics and the requirements of the movement necessary to arrive there. This section presents an overview of the most common terms and their frequencies, while fuller examples are provided later.

By far, the most frequent lexical item functioning as vehicle terms in the figurative expressions in this scenario is *verso*, occurring 74 times; its English equivalent, *towards*, also appears among the most frequent tokens, with 19 occurrences. These prepositions explicitly designate the destination as the endpoint of a movement, describing motion with a clear and definite goal that remains ongoing, still moving toward its target. The prepositions *a* and *alla*, occurring respectively 28 and 24 times, function similarly to *towards*, indicating orientation towards something. The preposition *alla* specifically represents the feminine articulated variant, which matches the grammatical gender of *sostenibilità* in Italian: of the 24 occurrences of *alla*, 20 do in fact precede *sostenibilità*, while the remaining 4 introduce the related concepts of *neutralità climatica* ('climate neutrality'), *neutralità carbonica* ('carbon neutrality'), *certificazione volontaria [di] le performance in materia sociale e ambientale* ('voluntary certification attesting social and environmental performance'), and *transizione ecologica e digitale* ('ecological and digital transition'). The English equivalent *to* also appears 13 times. A similar function is fulfilled by *direzione* ('direction', 18 occurrences), suggesting orientation towards a goal that has not yet been reached, and awareness of the direction the movement must undertake to be completed successfully. The English equivalent *direction* occurs 6 times.

The second most frequent token, *raggiungere* ('reach'), occurring 41 times, refers to the action itself, signalling a movement that has fulfilled its purpose. Notably, although singularly it designates a definitive result, contextual analysis reveals it is often used to discuss future intentions to reach a destination, as will become evident in the more detailed discussion of this scenario. The English equivalents *reach* and *reaching* occur respectively 5 and 3 times. The related noun form qualifying the act of reaching, *raggiungimento*, occurs 20 times. Related Italian terms include *arrivare/arrivarci* ('to arrive', 8 occurrences), *arrivo* ('arrival', 2), and *arrivati* ('arrived', 1), totalling 11 instances. The figurative destination of these verbs is often sustainability itself, a lexical item collocating with *sustainable*, or a related sub-target. Where this is not the case, it is frequently expressed as *targets*, occurring 16 times, or its

Italian equivalents *obiettivo* (10 occurrences) and *obiettivi* (13). The term *percorso* ('path'), which appears here when it is included in linguistic metaphors where the focus is on a destination to reach, appears 28 times. Finally, the verb *accompagnare* ('accompany') and the corresponding noun *accompagnamento* occur respectively 10 and 2 times, adding a further element beyond the basic structure of movement toward a destination by indicating that there is an entity accompanying another on this journey; the direct English equivalent does not appear.

The patterns emerging from this quantitative analysis are explored below in greater depth through qualitative examination of how these metaphorical expressions function within their discursive contexts. The discussion is structured by grouping example on the basis of shared feature that exemplify relevant characteristics of the DESTINATION scenario.

5.2.1.1 A destination to reach

The following examples explicate the fundamental scenario that establishes a destination and comments to some extent on how to reach it. This scenario is employed across a range of contexts, beginning with the first example, which primarily concerns trade policies and relations between states and supranational entities.

- (1) To be a leader on climate, the EU [...] needs to help other regions to change their economic systems, not only threaten them with measures that they see as protectionism in a green wrapper. The European Green Deal will succeed only if it fosters a global green deal that advances Europe's trade partners along their own paths to sustainability (Financial Times)

The definition of sustainability in example (1) acts as a shared destination for various global participants, including the European Union and its trade partners. Crucially, this framework acknowledges that there is no single, prescribed trajectory for implementing sustainable practices. Instead, each participant is positioned as an agent capable of charting an independent journey. This flexibility allows for significant structural innovation within different economic systems, provided they all converge at the same endpoint. The justification for allowing these diverse paths lies in the practical reality of global trade. The argument suggests that it is futile for the European Union to remain a *green island in a dirty world*. If the EU reduces domestic emissions but continues to import carbon-intensive goods from nations with laxer standards, the problem of global emissions remains unsolved. In this scenario, the EU would merely be shifting the burden of pollution to other regions, which contradicts the core objectives of the European Green Deal. Furthermore, a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach could be politically damaging. If the EU imposes carbon-based import penalties without accounting for the unique circumstances of its partners, these measures may be perceived as *protectionism in a green wrapper*. This metaphor suggests that environmentalism is being used as a decorative layer to hide a true intent: favouring the European domestic market. Such a perception could lead to resentment and trade disputes rather than environmental progress.

Ultimately, while the destination is common, the travellers are distinct. If the EU reaches the goal of sustainability in isolation while its trade partners fall behind or feel economically penalised, the entire effort becomes counterproductive. Because the EU is further along in its journey, with an established policy framework for climate neutrality, it should adopt the role of a leader. In this capacity, the EU can support trade partners in advancing their own unique paths toward the shared goal of global sustainability.

- (2) Un vero e proprio «barometro» in grado di misurare il posizionamento di ciascun prodotto in riferimento ai fattori Esg (Environmental, social, governance), dice Fontana Rava [Direttore Servizi di Investimento e Assicurativi presso Banca Mediolanum]. Il punto di arrivo di questo percorso, avviato nel 2020 in collaborazione con la Cattolica, sarà un indicatore sintetico di sostenibilità. «A valle di questo processo, se il cliente vorrà migliorare il proprio profilo Esg, riceverà dei suggerimenti pratici» (Corriere della Sera)

A true 'barometer' capable of measuring the positioning of each product in reference to ESG factors (Environmental, social, governance), says Fontana Rava [Director of Investment and Insurance Services at Banca Mediolanum]. The endpoint of this journey, launched in 2020 in collaboration with Cattolica [University], will be a synthetic sustainability indicator. 'Following this process, if the client wants to improve their ESG profile, they will receive practical suggestions'

This concordance foregrounds the notion of an arrival point within the financial domain, operationalising the trajectory by identifying a concrete instrument as its endpoint: a 'synthetic sustainability indicator' (*indicatore sintetico di sostenibilità*). This perspective is presented by the Director of Investment and Insurance Services at Banca Mediolanum, who outlines the bank's measures to assess each product's positioning in relation to environmental, social, and governance factors, aimed at guiding customers in choosing among its range of banking, credit, investment, and insurance products. The scenario is constructed by explicitly naming the endpoint while simultaneously framing the path toward it as an ongoing process; Banca Mediolanum is therefore depicted as advancing along this path in partnership with Cattolica University. In practical terms, the endpoint resulting from this process is a comprehensive rating model, which can provide as an output the sustainability profile of a client on the basis of the various products and services it uses with the bank. This instrument is additionally defined metaphorically as a 'barometer' (*«barometro»*), literally a tool to measure air-pressure and figuratively an indicator, "data that reflects the evolution of a phenomenon, especially economic" (De Mauro, 2016)¹⁵.

From this endpoint, Fontana Rava suggests that the resulting data could serve as a basis for clients to *improve their ESG profile* (migliorare il proprio profilo Esg'), a process in which the bank positions itself as a point of reference, offering practical guidance on the actions to undertake for the customers. Ultimately, the initiative functions both as a commercial product and as a symbolic performance of ethical commitment: the manager promotes the bank's services while simultaneously enacting its adherence to sustainability principles. The

¹⁵ 1. TS meteor. strumento per la misurazione della pressione atmosferica
2. CO fig., dato che rispecchia l'evolversi di un fenomeno, spec. economico

creation of a quantifiable indicator responds to a recurring tension which emerges through the corpus, that between the abstract, aspirational rhetoric of ESG and the demand for concrete evaluative tools, thus attempting to anchor the discourse in measurable criteria and reasserting the bank's authority within it. Yet, as is oftentimes the case with JOURNEY scenarios, the endpoint remains prospective: the indicator is not yet available but anticipated, and its announcement functions primarily to project the institution's credibility into the future, signalling Banca Mediolanum's commitment to sustainability.

- (3) «Il documento [[il secondo bilancio di sostenibilità di ATB, riferito al biennio 2020/2021] è la bussola che orienterà le nostre azioni negli anni a venire - aggiunge Scarfone -. Se Bergamo è tra le 100 città europee scelte per arrivare alla neutralità climatica entro il 2030, lo si deve anche a questa strategia, a cui abbiamo contribuito in modo significativo». Il bilancio di sostenibilità ha poi calcolato il valore economico generato dal gruppo Atb [Azienda Trasporti Bergamo, l'azienda di trasporto pubblico della città] (Corriere della Sera)

“The document [ATB's second sustainability report, covering the 2020-2021 biennium] is the compass that will guide our actions in the years to come - adds Scarfone -. If Bergamo is among the 100 European cities chosen to arrive at climate neutrality by 2030, it is also thanks to this strategy, to which we have contributed significantly”. The sustainability report then calculated the economic value generated by the ATB group [ATB, Azienda Trasporti Bergamo, Bergamo's public transport operator]

In this example, the destination is defined as 'climate neutrality' (*neutralità climatica*), and the entity undertaking this goal-oriented action is the Italian city of Bergamo. Notably, the concrete result foregrounded in the figurative frame, that of Bergamo not contributing to global emissions of greenhouse gases, is projected into the near future, with the deadline of 2030, constructing a temporally deferred outcome. The concrete result that is being celebrated here is a positive evaluation of the initiatives undertaken by the city; the implication is that current measures are not only adequate but will inevitably lead to the goal, that of arriving at climate neutrality. It is the General Director of ATB, the city's public transport operator, who voices this narrative, speaking in the first-person plural, on behalf of the company, and positioning ATB as a key agent in the process. Through references to low environmental impact electric buses or bike-sharing services and similar initiatives, which are qualified using the conventional WAR metaphor 'strategies' (*strategie*), the speaker claims a significant causal role for ATB in Bergamo's inclusion among the 100 European cities selected to reach climate neutrality by 2030. These strategies are delineated in the sustainability report by ATB, its 'compass' (*bussola*) that will orient decision-making, ensuring the company's contribution to the city's journey. Thus, the report is constructed as an essential tool for advancement, offering guidance on a journey yet to be embarked upon, with the implication that without it, the travellers would be lost. Hence, the metaphor elevates the corporate report to the status of strategic necessity to successfully conclude the journey. This projects an idea of reliability, inasmuch as a compass always points to true north: ATB's sustainability path is clear and predetermined. This image evokes futurity, with the future tense and the temporal collocation 'in the years to come' (*negli anni a venire*) and projects the document's relevance into extended future.

The overall image therefore depicts Bergamo as a traveller with a defined destination and ATB as a crucial companion ensuring steady progress toward it. Within this JOURNEY scenario, ATB propels the city onward precisely because its course is guided by the orienting force of its sustainability report. Furthermore, while the environmental dimension is given precedence, the economic aspect is introduced. Ecological responsibility and market rationality are linked, framing environmental improvement as a source of ‘economic value’ (*valore economico*). This framing reinforces the dominant win-win discourse in sustainability reporting, claiming both ethicality and profitability, and constructing the corporate entity as part of the environmental solution. Such positioning is made possible by the sustainability report itself, which functions as a self-legitimizing instrument, defining its own success metrics and performing transparency while retaining control over the narrative.

- (4) Plenitude [società italiana controllata da Eni, attiva nella produzione di energia rinnovabile e nella vendita di gas ed elettricità], che ha un target di 15 GW di capacità installata rinnovabile al 2030, ha annunciato nel suo primo report di sostenibilità un percorso di decarbonizzazione per raggiungere la neutralità carbonica delle attività e dei servizi e prodotti offerti al 2040 (Corriere della Sera)

Plenitude [an Italian energy company controlled by Eni, active in renewable energy production and the retail of gas and electricity], which has a target of 15 GW of installed renewable capacity by 2030, announced in its first sustainability report a decarbonization pathway to reach carbon neutrality of activities and services and products offered by 2040

A similar journey-based framing occurs in the corporate context of example (4), where the main social actor is Plenitude, an Italian energy company involved in the sale and distribution of gas and electricity, the production of renewable energy, and the management of electric vehicle charging points. The JOURNEY scenario is here elaborated through an explicit reference not only to the destination but also to the route leading there: Plenitude is described as being on a ‘path of decarbonisation’ (*percorso di decarbonizzazione*) aimed at reaching carbon neutrality (*raggiungere la neutralità carbonica*). The lexical pairing of *path* and *destination* provides a more fully structured metaphorical frame, emphasising both directionality and progress. This is an example of an ‘hybrid’ expression, where key elements of both the DESTINATION scenario and of the PATH both occur, participating in the same mapping. Both linguistic metaphors can be attributed to the same mapping, delineating one path with an endpoint of climate neutrality. As explained in the introduction to this section, figurative expressions were categorised in the DESTINATION scenario when a clear endpoint to the movement instantiated was central in the scenario constructed: in this case, such an endpoint is the objective of climate neutrality. The sustainability report, similarly to the one in example (3) by ATB, serves as both a rhetorical and institutional marker of commitment, signalling to stakeholders that the company is actively engaged in the transition and positioned to deliver tangible results. The reference to an intermediate milestone (‘15 GW of installed renewable capacity by 2030’, *target di 15 GW di capacità installata rinnovabile*) constructs a medium-term horizon, while the ultimate goal of carbon neutrality by 2040 projects responsibility further into the future. This temporal distancing allows the company to present its actions as ambitious and forward-looking, while deferring accountability and maintaining discursive

control over what progress entails. The process of achieving decarbonisation is depicted as a linear and controllable trajectory, involving investments in offshore wind projects and renewable energy capacity. As in the previous example, assertions of success are expressed with certainty, despite their orientation towards a distant future. This reinforces a sense of inevitability and authority, aligning with a broader corporate sustainability discourse that equates technological advancement and investment capacity with environmental responsibility. This framing, while projecting optimism, leaves limited room for critical reflection on the potential contradictions between fossil fuel dependence, long-term targets, and short-term profitability imperatives.

- (5) The announcement caused consternation among climate groups over how this order would be consistent with the airline's [Qantas, the Australian flag carrier] plan to reach net zero by 2050. Parker [Andrew Parker, Qantas's Chief Sustainability Officer] said sustainable aviation fuel was the most realistic path to net zero because it could be used to power conventional jet aircraft (Financial Times)

- (6) «Siamo convinti – sottolinea Marcello Grosso, responsabile sviluppo sostenibile risk e compliance di Poste Italiane – che l'impegno orientato a una crescita sostenibile verso la neutralità climatica sia l'unica strada percorribile per ottenere un vantaggio competitivo durevole nel tempo e funzionale alla creazione di valore condiviso» (Sole 24 Ore)

"We are convinced," emphasizes Marcello Grosso, head of sustainable development, risk and compliance at Poste Italiane, "that commitment oriented to sustainable growth towards climate neutrality is the only road that can be travelled to obtain a lasting competitive advantage over time and one that is functional to the creation of shared value"

Like example (4), examples (5) and (6) combine both a destination and a path leading to it. What distinguishes them is the explicit evaluation attributed to the path that has been identified, as *the most realistic path* or 'the only road that can be travelled' (*l'unica strada percorribile*). In the English example, the aim is overtly framed as reaching net zero by 2050, constructing the same destination as in previous examples. The main actor is Qantas, an airline company operating in a sector widely recognised as a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. The temporal horizon is projected even further into the future than in example (3), discussing the city of Bergamo, and example (4), discussing Plenitude, deferring accountability by nearly three decades. A potential contradiction is foregrounded, since the airline has announced an order for 12 new aircrafts which *caused consternation among climate groups*, due to its being judged as inconsistent with the company's net zero plans. This potential contradiction is immediately negated by Andrew Parker, the Chief Sustainability Officer, who dismisses these concerns over the fleet expansion as possibly hindering the company's sustainability commitments. Sustainable aviation fuel is presented not simply as a path, but as *the most realistic path to net zero*. By invoking technical constraints, that is, the inadequate range capability of alternative technologies for long-haul operations, Parker grounds Qantas's strategy in ostensibly objective engineering limitations, recasting what could appear as a business preference into a matter of necessity. The evaluative modifier *most realistic* foregrounds a pragmatic stance, legitimising continued expansion and strengthening the assumption, activated through the *path* metaphor, that this

route will lead to the destination in question, as paths are typically wont to do. The implication is clear: in selecting this particular measure, Qantas is not merely pursuing sustainability but making the only viable choice that will actually guarantee arrival at the destination. This framing epitomises a widespread “having your cake and eating it too” logic: the airline can simultaneously expand its fleet, increase long-haul capacity, and claim climate leadership, resolving what would otherwise appear as an irreconcilable tension by relying on speculative future technologies.

The sentiment articulated in (5) is echoed and intensified in (6). Where Parker framed sustainable aviation fuel as *the most realistic path to net zero*, Grosso’s formulation proves even more categorical and peremptory, in its role as the ‘head of sustainable development’ (*responsabile sviluppo sostenibile*) of the Italian postal service. The commitment to sustainable growth toward climate neutrality is characterised as ‘the only road that can be travelled’ (*l’unica strada percorribile*). This phrasing eliminates alternatives entirely, constructing not merely preference or pragmatic selection but existential necessity: there is no other viable route. The commitment is already ‘oriented to sustainable growth’ (*orientato a una crescita sostenibile*), a collocation that exemplifies the positioning consistently maintained by corporate voices throughout the corpus: the notion that implementing sustainability naturally aligns with growth. Businesses are not renouncing their existential aim of expansion; rather, they frame themselves as pursuing growth sustainably. ‘Sustainable growth’ (*crescita sostenibile*) thus becomes something to orient toward, and this orientation is itself directed ‘towards’ (*verso*) the destination of ‘climate neutrality’ (*neutralità climatica*). This multilayered deployment of the JOURNEY metaphor reveals a critical complexity: the path is not simply linear. Orienting toward sustainable growth, moving toward net zero; these themselves constitute a ‘road’ (*strada*), yet they are not the ultimate destination. The final objective, explicitly articulated, is ‘to obtain a lasting competitive advantage over time and one that is functional to the creation of shared value’ (*ottenere un vantaggio competitivo durevole nel tempo e funzionale alla creazione di valore condiviso*). Climate neutrality, positioned grammatically and rhetorically as destination, actually functions discursively as a waypoint, a necessary stop along a longer journey whose true endpoint is sustained competitive positioning.

What distinguishes the formulation in (6) from (5) is not merely the intensification of path singularity (from *most realistic* to *unica*, ‘only’), but the explicit articulation of a nested journey structure. Where Qantas’s framing maintained net zero as the apparent final destination while implicitly maintaining the focus on growth, Poste Italiane’s discourse makes the hierarchy transparent: sustainability and climate neutrality must lead to competitive advantage and profit. This framing exposes the fundamental logic animating corporate sustainability discourse: environmental responsibility is reconfigured as strategic instrument, and climate action as means rather than end.

- (7) “L’impianto di alimentazione a torre solare – spiega Steinfeld [Aldo Steinfeld, docente al Politecnico Federale di Zurigo e responsabile del progetto] – è stato gestito per l’implementazione industriale e può essere una pietra miliare tecnologica verso la produzione di combustibili aeronautici “sostenibili”. In nove giorni di funzionamento, nel reattore

dell'impianto spagnolo [l'impianto pilota di produzione di combustibile solare realizzato dal team di Steinfeld nel 2017 presso l'IMDEA Energy Institute in Spagna] la quantità di energia solare convertita in syngas sostenibile è stata del 4% (La Repubblica)

"The solar tower power plant – explains Steinfeld [Aldo Steinfeld, professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and head of the project] – has been operated for industrial implementation and can be a technological milestone toward the production of 'sustainable' aviation fuels." In nine days of operation, in the reactor of the Spanish plant [the pilot solar fuel production facility built by Steinfeld's team in 2017 at the IMDEA Energy Institute in Spain], the amount of solar energy converted into sustainable syngas was 4%

Example (7) echoes example (5), since it specifically discusses the solution that Parker defined as the most realistic path, "'sustainable' aviation fuels' (*combustibili aeronautici "sostenibili"*). The destination outlined here is 'their production' (*la produzione*), presented as an ongoing activity advancing forward. The focus is a groundbreaking solar fuel project, the result of the work of a research group lead by Professor Steinfeld (the one discussing the results), using solar energy to convert water and CO₂ into synthetic kerosene (jet fuel) that could help make aviation carbon neutral. Within the scenario, the path that leads to production of sustainable aviation fuels is marked by a 'milestone' (*pietra miliare*). The term has acquired in its figurative usage a connotation of importance, conferring relevance and weight to the announcement; it is commonly used to mark an "event of exceptional importance" (De Mauro, 2016)¹⁶, anchoring the notion of progress to the concrete image of road markers placed along roads to indicate distances. This development is framed as one such point on the journey, implying an intermediate stage: implementation has moved beyond its beginning phase but is still far from completion.

The expected progress, however, depends on technological advancement, which is acknowledged as uncertain. This uncertainty is mitigated by the way progress is presented: it is hedged through conditional language, as something that 'can be' (*può essere*) a milestone, rather than as a technological breakthrough already yielding truly sustainable fuels. This tentative phrasing is empirically motivated by the reality that the technology is still far from truly sustainable at scale: it is only being applied at an experimental level, and its industrial scalability remains unproven. Moreover, this cautious scepticism is further reinforced by the usage of inverted commas for 'sustainable' ("*sostenibili*"), which appears to call into question whether they truly merit that designation. While the fuel is theoretically carbon-neutral, the overall sustainability depends on a variety of factors. The positive, technical aspect pointing to technology as the solution is central here, but its fundamental fault is highlighted: although incremental changes through technology can individually constitute milestones towards sustainable solutions, they remain contingent on future developments. It may indeed mark progress on the path toward sustainability, but it does not guarantee completion of the journey.

¹⁶ 3. CO fig., avvenimento di eccezionale importanza, tappa basilare

5.2.1.2 Starting out

The examples in this section shift the focus to the initial stage of the JOURNEY, portraying sustainability efforts as newly underway and still tentative.

- (8) Whether it's the perceived cost, or feeling like their business is too small to make a real difference, taking steps towards net zero can feel overwhelming. The truth is, taking your first steps towards sustainability is much easier than you probably think. Don't believe us? Well, here are five common sustainable business myths, busted (The Guardian)
- (9) Myth #2: There is a lack of support for small businesses to start their journey to net zero. A survey by BT [the UK telecommunications company] in conjunction with Small Business Britain found that although 99% of small firms recognise the importance of sustainability, three-quarters (77%) don't know how to measure their carbon emissions and need support. If you feel lost, the good news is that there are plenty of resources and free online tools to help you get started (The Guardian)

These two extracts from the same article in *The Guardian* establish a carefully constructed persuasive framework, addressing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and positioning them as capable participants in achieving net zero emissions. Example (8) suggests that the notions of net zero and sustainability exhibit semantic overlap, a relationship supported by the parallel construction of the post-modifying PPs, *towards net zero* and *towards sustainability*. This simplifies the sustainability landscape for its SME audience, reducing the multifaceted dimensions of environmental responsibility to a singular, carbon-centric objective. This discursive formulation conveys the idea that, for businesses, implementing sustainability is effectively equated with achieving carbon balance, that is, ensuring that emissions do not exceed the carbon reductions achieved. In practice, this entails adopting lower-carbon alternatives or compensating for residual emissions through offsetting mechanisms. Across both extracts, net zero emerges as the principal goal toward which SMEs are encouraged to direct their efforts, while *sustainability* functions merely as its discursive synonym rather than a broader conceptual category. The indeterminacy of the term 'sustainability' is thus resolved through its reduction to a quantifiable carbon metric, accompanied by a set of pragmatic steps for its implementation.

Example (8) additionally identifies the initial psychological impediment: the perception that *taking steps towards net zero can feel overwhelming*. This framing acknowledges the sense that small businesses lack sufficient support to generate meaningful environmental impact. Example (9) portrays this, consistently with the framing through the JOURNEY domain, as the specific predicament of feeling *lost*, noting that while firms recognise the importance of sustainability, they do not how to *measure their carbon emissions*, and thus how to reach net zero in practical terms. Within journey logic, the notion of possessing a compass, evoked in other examples (see (3), (31), (32)), carries strongly positive connotations: it signals orientation, certainty, and the capacity to navigate toward one's destination reliably. The compass functions as an objective, external instrument that guarantees arrival. Conversely, 'feeling lost' operates as its opposite, evoking disorientation, potential failure, and even

danger. Yet this negative state receives an immediate solution: *the good news is that there are plenty of resources and free online tools to help you get started*. These tools are positioned as the functional equivalent of navigational instruments, guides that eliminate disorientation and enable businesses to embark confidently on their net zero journey. Therefore, the text validates a particular form of SME anxiety while immediately subverting it through reassurance, emphasising *first steps* and characterising them as *much easier than you probably think*. This move transforms the overwhelming task into a series of manageable increments while simultaneously challenging readers' assessments of difficulty, designating them as *myths*, misconceptions requiring correction rather than obstacles demanding substantive solutions.

- (10) Autotrasporto, inizia il viaggio verso la transizione ecologica. Il mondo dell'autotrasporto e della logistica ha "ingranato la marcia" e ormai viaggia verso il futuro, un sistema integrato vitale per l'economia del Paese che mostra la nuova strada imboccata a Transpotec Logitec 2022, aperta in Fiera Milano a Rho fino a domenica 15 maggio con più di 350 espositori. Cambiamento tecnologico profondo che investe i "bisonti" della strada e arriva fino ai mezzi più piccoli e si traduce in mezzi più sostenibili, carburanti meno inquinanti, guida più sicura e confortevole, diffusione dell'elettrico (Il Giornale)

Road haulage, the journey toward ecological transition begins. The world of road haulage and logistics has "shifted into gear" and now travels toward the future, an integrated system vital to the country's economy that shows the new road taken at Transpotec Logitec 2022, open at Fiera Milano in Rho until Sunday May 15 with more than 350 exhibitors. Profound technological change that sweeps over the 'bison' of the road and reaches down to the smallest vehicles and translates into more sustainable vehicles, less polluting fuels, safer and more comfortable driving, the spread of electric vehicles

The figurative language signalling that a JOURNEY has started used in example (10) is topic-triggered, since what is being discussed is the sector of road haulage. The metaphorical scenario is set up in the title *Autotrasporto, inizia il viaggio verso la transizione ecologica* ('Road haulage, the journey toward ecological transition begins'), immediately establishing the conceptual frame through which the writer is presenting the sector's transformation. This formulation echoes the previously analysed emphasis on starting out, though here it is rendered more vividly: the road haulage sector is positioned as embarking upon its journey toward ecological transition. The scenario is further creatively developed in the article, where the sector is described as having "'shifted into gear'" (*ha "ingranato la marcia"*), a metaphor that is signalled through the inverted commas, and now travelling towards (*viaggia verso*) the future, conveying inexorable forward movement. This metaphorical elaboration proves especially effective given the material reality of the subject matter: discussing vehicles that literally undertake journeys renders the JOURNEY schema immediately more effective. What ordinarily constitutes a metaphor that signals an ongoing progress becomes here an especially topical manner of discussing the transition, since vehicles such as trucks do in fact concretely undertake journeys. This concrete connection between the metaphorical frame and the material reality allows the text to exploit vehicle-specific properties in its metaphorical expressions. The phrase 'has shifted into gear' (*ha ingranato la marcia*) draws on the vehicle's gear system to characterise the pace of development, signifying that the

sector has not merely initiated movement but has engaged its mechanisms at a sustained operational speed. This sense of irreversible progress receives explicit reinforcement through the assertion that ‘the new road’ (*la nuova strada*) has already been ‘entered’ (*imboccata*). The technological transformation itself is characterised as something that ‘sweeps over’ (*investe*) the vehicles, carrying connotations of an unstoppable force, an inevitable momentum that overtakes and encompasses the entire sector. Notably, the destination itself, ‘the ecological transition’ (*la transizione ecologica*) denotes an ongoing process rather than a fixed endpoint, deferring definitive achievement while maintaining the notion of momentum.

5.2.1.3 Accompanying and leading

The guiding and accompanying roles implicitly claimed in previous examples (e.g., the ‘compass’ metaphor in (3) positioning ATB as a guide for the city of Bergamo) are made explicit in the following instances, where actors directly cast themselves as guides, leaders, or fellow travellers facilitating forward movement.

- (11) “Questo processo [di sostenibilità avviato dalle imprese negli ultimi anni] ha un costo per l’impresa visto che deve investire di più su prodotti che hanno contenuti di packaging e materie prime sostenibili. È importante quindi che le insegne virtuose comunichino le proprie scelte ambientali ed etiche ai consumatori per guidarli verso acquisti consapevoli” (La Repubblica)

“This process [the sustainability process undertaken by businesses in recent years] has a cost for the business since it must invest more in products that have sustainable packaging and raw material content. It is therefore important that virtuous retailers communicate their environmental and ethical choices to consumers to guide them toward conscious purchases

- (12) Le associazioni di categoria auspicano quindi «un confronto tra il governo e le imprese, per trovare il giusto bilanciamento tra il contributo del settore di fronte alla difficile fase storica che stiamo vivendo, che sia però sostenibile, e il ruolo del comparto nell’accompagnamento del paese verso la decarbonizzazione e la sicurezza degli approvvigionamenti energetici» (Sole 24 Ore)

The trade associations therefore hope for ‘a dialogue between the government and businesses, to find the right balance between the sector’s contribution in the face of the difficult historical phase we are living through, which must however be sustainable, and the sector’s role in accompanying the country toward decarbonisation and energy supply security

- (13) Cority [a provider of ESG and sustainability management software] helps organisations collaborate, exchange information and tell their sustainability story both internally and externally. Central to Cority’s ability to steer businesses towards improved sustainability performance is its Sustainability Cloud. A key value of the cloud technology is that it can streamline the aggregation of sustainability data through integrations (The Independent)

Across these three examples, the central aspect in the JOURNEY metaphor is the presence of specific actors occupying distinctly differentiated roles: those who lead and those who are led. This configuration constructs the sustainability transition as a collective process requiring expert guidance, technical capacity, and structural authority. In the first example, Marco Pedroni, president of Coop Italia, positions ‘virtuous retailers’ (*insegne virtuose*) as those equipped to ‘guide’ consumers ‘toward’ (*guidarli verso*) ‘conscious purchases’ (*acquisti consapevoli*). The guidance relationship necessarily establishes a hierarchy: retailers, having made ‘environmental and ethical choices’ (*scelte ambientali ed etiche*), possess the knowledge and moral authority necessary to direct consumer behaviour. They are established through the verb as not merely facilitators but active leaders shaping consumer trajectories through strategic communication, orientating them towards the proper destination of responsible consumption. This initiative from retailers is evaluated positively, qualified as both ethical and instrumental in enabling consumers to make conscious purchases. Yet the economic dimension is not overlooked: the speaker notes that this process ‘has a cost’ (*ha un costo*), suggesting that consumers’ conscious purchases represent not only the ethically optimal choice but also the desired return on investment for businesses.

Example (12), involving industry associations representing Italy’s utilities and renewable energy sectors, articulates the energy sector’s ‘role in accompanying the country toward’ (*ruolo nell’accompagnamento del paese verso*) the destination of ‘decarbonisation and energy supply security’ (*la decarbonizzazione e la sicurezza degli approvvigionamenti energetici*). The entity leading is explicitly ‘the sector’ (*il comparto*), while the entity being led is ‘the country’ (*il paese*) itself, positioning private industry as shepherding national transformation. Notably, this formulation places decarbonisation and energy security on equivalent footing as co-destinations, legitimising the sector’s continued economic interests. The associations highlight the crucial role that energy companies play in Italy’s transition to cleaner energy sources, but they call for ‘the right balance’ (*il giusto bilanciamento*) between their contribution during this ‘difficult historical period’ (*difficile fase storica*) and their guiding role. The contribution should be ‘sustainable’ (*sostenibile*), which is implicitly intended here in a broader sense as economically so for the sector. Thus, they are framing their role in accompanying the country toward decarbonisation as being predicated on the conditions that this proves economically sustainable for themselves.

Example (13) features instead Cority, a business software provider, whose capacity *to steer businesses toward* the desired goal of *improved sustainability performance* operates through its Sustainability Cloud technology. Businesses become vehicles or vessels requiring an entity to regulate their motion, with their trajectory toward sustainability dependent upon Cority’s data aggregation tools, standardization processes, and analytical capabilities. The verb *steer*, evoking the control of a vehicle’s direction, constructs Cority as possessing both technical mastery and decisional authority. The technology itself is positioned as the navigational instrument enabling this steering function, transforming vague sustainability aspirations into concrete data to be analysed and used effectively.

Collectively, these examples establish a consistent narrative structure wherein journey-goers, whether consumers, nations, or businesses, require external guidance. The sustainability transition emerges as a process necessitating leadership hierarchies, with retailers, energy sectors, and technology providers claiming privileged positions as those qualified to lead others toward predetermined destinations. This kind of scenario is further developed in the following examples, where additional elements are added.

- (14) *“Aiutiamo le imprese a raggiungere una maggiore sostenibilità ambientale ed economica”. “C’è la volontà da parte delle imprese di investire e di garantirsi prezzi stabili per il futuro però bisognerebbe avere la chiarezza di sapere dove vogliamo andare. Il tema della sostenibilità è importantissimo, gli obiettivi sono molto chiari, ma è evidente che per arrivarci c’è bisogno di un percorso che permetta alle aziende di sopravvivere”* (La Repubblica)

“We help businesses reach greater environmental and economic sustainability”. “There is willingness on the part of businesses to invest and to guarantee themselves stable prices for the future, but we should have clarity on knowing where we want to go. The theme of sustainability is extremely important, the objectives are very clear, but it is evident that to get there we need a pathway that allows businesses to survive”

The discourse positions Axpo Italia, a company offering renewable energy solutions, in an explicit helping role, assisting (*aiutiamo*) businesses ‘to reach’ (*a raggiungere*) greater ‘environmental and economic sustainability’ (*sostenibilità ambientale ed economica*). This formulation proves unusual insofar as it explicitly foregrounds economic sustainability alongside environmental concerns, while omitting the social aspect. The speaker depicts businesses as willing to implement changes and, crucially, to ‘guarantee themselves stable prices for the future’ (*garantirsi prezzi stabili per il futuro*). However, the critique raised centres on a purported lack of clarity regarding ‘where we want to go’ (*dove vogliamo andare*), a directional uncertainty that ostensibly hinders those genuinely motivated to pursue sustainability. Yet the subsequent sentences appear to contradict this initial framing. After explicitly highlighting the importance of sustainability, Vicentini clarifies that the ‘objectives’ (*gli obiettivi*) are in fact ‘very clear’ (*molto chiari*), and thus the real issue regards the need of ‘a pathway’ (*un percorso*) ‘to get there’ (*per arrivarci*) that permits businesses to survive. The actual impediment is not directional ambiguity, since the destination remains well-defined, but rather the absence, according to the speaker, of a route that preserves economic viability alongside environmental progress. The scenario articulated contains the requisite elements: clear objectives to reach, entities willing to become journey-goers, and guides prepared to lead them toward these targets. Yet, the guidance role cannot be actualised until a suitable path is traced, one that reconciles environmental needs with economic continuity. What remains lacking, the speaker suggests, are the concrete policy mechanisms, financial instruments, and transitional frameworks necessary to prevent sustainability requirements from causing the failure of businesses.

- (15) «Avendo noi un’azienda più strutturata anche nell’approccio alla sostenibilità, credo sia importante avere un ruolo di trascinamento rispetto ai fornitori, ai clienti, agli stakeholder, alla filiera tutta», aggiunge il neo presidente di Sodalitas [ente italiano per la responsabilità

sociale d'impresa] che rimarca un ruolo di guida per la fondazione creata nel 1995 da Assolombarda e un gruppo di imprese e volontari (Sole 24 Ore)

"Since we have a more structured company, also with regard to our approach to sustainability, I believe it is important to have a driving role with respect to suppliers, clients, stakeholders, the entire supply chain," adds the new president of Sodalitas [Italian foundation for corporate social responsibility] who emphasizes a guiding role for the foundation created in 1995 by Assolombarda and a group of companies and volunteers.

The speaker in example (15), Alberto Pirelli, directly claims a leadership position, defining it initially as a 'driving role' (*un ruolo di trascinamento*). This is justified by Soliditas having 'a more structured company, also with regard to our approach to sustainability' (*un'azienda più strutturata anche nell'approccio alla sostenibilità*), maintaining that it already possesses competences that other companies are still lacking. In Italian, the noun *trascinamento* literally qualifies the physical act of dragging, pulling something or someone along through force or momentum, thus implying considerably greater degree of effort and agency than that conveyed by mere guidance. This lexical choice constructs a scenario where everyone must implement sustainability, yet Pirelli, possessing superior structural capacity, can not only lead but actively drag along 'suppliers, clients, stakeholders, the entire supply chain' (*fornitori, clienti, stakeholder, la filiera tutta*). This process is presented as happening to those that are being dragged, whether willingly or not, establishing a significant power differential by evoking a scene of forced, involuntary motion. Where Pirelli's direct quotation employs this forceful terminology, the article's subsequent rephrasing opts for the more measured 'a guiding role' (*un ruolo di guida*), tempering the implications of coercion while preserving the hierarchical relationship of a traveller leading the others.

5.2.1.4 'Paving the road'

Whereas the previous section examined cases foregrounding the role of leading or accompanying others, the emphasis here is on the preparatory actions that make another's subsequent journey more feasible or accessible.

- (16) Investors want to see more than one type of value from their contributions, and ESG is one way policymaking and profit can be combined to pave the road to net zero. Green investments can help meet climate agreements and fill gaps in sustainability funding. While there may be hurdles with classifications of "greenness", the green economy, as defined by the FTSE Russell model [the green economy classification system developed by index provider FTSE Russell], represents more than 5% of the total listed global equity and is the fastest-growing equity market (The Guardian)
- (17) Razvi [Amina Razvi, chief executive of the SAC] conceded that the Higg data had room for improvement, but maintained that the industry-led initiative had played a valuable role by paving the way for regulated standards in this space. "The SAC [Sustainable Apparel Coalition] was born because there wasn't a harmonised standard that existed," she said.

Authorities are now moving in that direction, notably in the EU, which is preparing new sustainability regulations for the clothing industry (Financial Times)

Across these two examples, a recurring pattern emerges in how institutional and industry actors position themselves as facilitators of sustainable transformation, employing the JOURNEY metaphor to frame their initiatives as preparatory groundwork for future regulatory frameworks and behavioural shifts. Example (16), situated within sustainable finance discourse, positions investors as primary agents driving ESG implementation. Here, investors are characterised as wanting *more than one type of value from their contributions* and thus driving the finance world towards ESG implementation. They are not just looking for financial returns anymore; while it is taken for granted that gains will not be renounced, rule-setting in terms of ESG criteria is seen as the solution to maintain profitability while advancing net zero objectives. *Green investments*, qualifying as such insofar as they *help meet climate agreements*, are presented as the solution combining *policymaking and profit* in order to *pave the road to net zero*. Although net zero is constructed as the endpoint of this motion, the notion of paving the road foregrounds the preparatory dimension of the process: the adoption of ESG criteria is constructed as a necessary precondition for reaching net zero, rather than as movement towards it. Paving a road enables travel but is not itself the journey; similarly, ESG implementation is presented as laying the groundwork for the transition, without implying that progress towards net zero is already underway. Moreover, even this preparatory phase is not without complications: the difficulty of defining what constitutes a genuinely sustainable investment is acknowledged through the metaphor of *hurdles*, yet the text largely glosses over this ambiguity. This oversight is particularly significant: while the rapid expansion of the green economy is presented as evidence that definitional challenges are being surmounted, the fundamental question of who possesses the authority to delineate this *fastest-growing equity market* remains unresolved.

In example (17), Amina Razvi, the chief executive of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), explicitly positions the SAC's rating system for clothing sustainability as having *paved the way* for harmonised sustainability standards when none existed. This framing, crucially characterised as *industry-led*, constructs the SAC as the instantiating force whose preparatory work enabled institutional actors, specifically the EU, to subsequently start *moving in that direction* through formal regulations. Whereas example (16) stopped at the road-paving stage, here the metaphor is extended further Razvi claims that the SAC's preparatory work has already borne fruit, since the existence of a paved road has enabled *authorities* to begin moving in the right direction. Hence, Razvi claims ownership of the initiative that ostensibly established the groundwork for what would eventually become regulated government standards. The SAC made the necessary preparations to create a viable path on which others could tread, and as a consequence of that the other actor in the scenario, the EU, is treading on it. The temporal sequencing is emphasised: industry moved first, establishing groundwork; now the institutional actor is implementing concrete action through forthcoming EU regulations on green claims, offering guidelines for companies claiming to sell or provide environmentally conscious products and services. This narrative can be

contrasted with the framing proposed in example (1), wherein the EU was positioned as a leading green model for other trade partners rather than a follower of industry precedent.

- (18) Quattro manifestazioni - Ipack-Ima, Print4All, GreenPlast e Intralogistica Italia -, più di 1.600 aziende e 11 padiglioni espositivi, per parlare di digitalizzazione e industria 4.0, ma soprattutto per tracciare il percorso verso una nuova consapevolezza in materia di sostenibilità (Sole 24 Ore)

Four exhibitions - Ipack-Ima, Print4All, GreenPlast and Intralogistica Italia - more than 1,600 companies and 11 exhibition halls, to discuss digitalization and Industry 4.0, but above all to chart the path toward a new awareness in sustainability matters

- (19) Abbiamo elaborato un Decalogo con 10 linee guida da seguire per i prossimi anni. Ora presentiamo alcuni progetti, obiettivi e target perché le linee guida diventino passi concreti. Dobbiamo essere più sostenibili per essere più competitivi, ma nessuno può essere lasciato solo. Il nostro settore è già virtuoso, in molti casi ha fatto addirittura da apripista, e ora è giunto il momento di attivare uno schema di filiera che miri a un orizzonte a zero scarti (Il Giornale)

We have developed a Decalogue with 10 guidelines to follow for the coming years. Now we present some projects, objectives and targets so that the guidelines become concrete steps. We must be more sustainable to be more competitive, but nobody can be left alone. Our sector is already virtuous, in many cases it has even acted as a trailblazer, and now the time has come to activate a supply chain framework that aims at a zero-waste horizon.

Example (18), announcing The Innovation Alliance trade fair, employs an Italian conventional expression to describe ‘charting a path’ (*tracciare il percorso*) ‘towards new awareness in sustainability matters’ (*verso una nuova consapevolezza in materia di sostenibilità*). The stated objective here is notably less concrete than in the previous examples: rather than regulatory frameworks or investment standards, the goal is a shift in collective understanding ‘in sustainability matters’ (*in materia di sostenibilità*). The Italian expression *tracciare il percorso* carries connotations of clearly delineating a route and marking it with indications, rendering it traversable for the first time and thus ensuring purposeful movement. It shares with the English *pave the way* in examples (16) and (17) the notion of facilitating others’ progress, but foregrounds the act of mapping direction rather than the material preparation of a surface.

The idea of charting a path leading to this goal carries connotations of indicating direction to facilitate others following, similarly to the English *pave the way* in examples (16) and (17), but emphasising the delineation of a route with potential indications along the way, rendering it traversable for the first time and thus ensuring purposeful movement, rather than material preparation of surface.

In example (19), a fourth scenario articulating this rhetoric of preparatory work concerns FederlegnoArredo’s (the Italian federation for the wood and furniture industries) strategic plan for ecological transition. The sector claims even greater agency through the metaphor of *apripista*, literally denoting “in an alpine skiing race, an athlete who descends before the

actual competition to mark out the course”¹⁷ (De Mauro, 2016), a snow groomer that prepares ski slopes, creating a traversable path where none existed. Its contextual meaning can be most effectively rendered in English as *forerunner* or *trailblazer*, someone who ventures into uncharted territory, thereby enabling others to follow. The speaker Claudio Feltrin, the president of FederlegnoArredo, positions the sector as ‘virtuous’ (*virtuoso*), explicitly linking sustainability to virtue. This positioning co-exist with the notion of ‘being more sustainable to be more competitive’ (*essere più sostenibili per essere più competitivi*), once again establishing sustainability and market competitiveness as mutually constitutive rather than diverging objectives. The guidelines developed through the Decalogue must ‘become concrete steps’ (*diventare passi concreti*), with the metaphor of *steps* representing incremental changes on a manageable scale, while the qualifier *concrete* claims tangible materiality as evidence of the sector’s evoked virtuosity. The Decalogue thus functions as explicit instructions on the steps to be taken, signalling sustained commitment and the intention to continue propelling forward movement. Crucially, this scenario constructs ongoing progress as communal endeavour where ‘nobody can be left alone’ (*nessuno può essere lasciato solo*). Feltrin thereby claims a dual facilitating role for his organisation: having already prepared the way as trailblazer, and ensuring inclusive accompaniment so that all can follow the established path through the Decalogue. This movement is aiming towards the stated destination of ‘a zero-waste horizon’ (*un orizzonte a zero scarti*), a supply chain framework eliminating production waste through circular economy principles.

Common to all four examples (16 – 19) is the pattern of claiming legitimacy through metaphors of path-making, asserting the status of innovators while simultaneously positioning themselves as facilitators that ensure collective participation by simplifying the journey for others. Whether through paving the road, tracing a path, or opening a new trail, these actors position themselves as necessary facilitators whose preparatory work enables subsequent progress.

5.2.1.5 ‘Keep the helm steady’: nautical scenarios

The following four examples of the DESTINATION scenario represent a minor tendency in Italian newspaper discourse, characterised by the evocation of a specific type of JOURNEY that constructs a nautical setting.

- (20) Per agganciare il cambiamento in atto e rafforzare la resilienza occorre tenere la barra sempre dritta verso gli obiettivi di carbonizzazione e i criteri Esg. «In un contesto come quello attuale caratterizzato dalla coda pandemica e dalla guerra in Ucraina - dice la Presidente di Borsa Italiana [la Borsa di Milano] Claudia Parzani [presidente di Borsa Italiana] - il rischio, per le imprese, è quello di limitarsi a tamponare l'emergenza con una visione di corto periodo. Al contrario serve molta lungimiranza, compiendo anche il salto

¹⁷ 1. s.m. e f.inv. TS sport in una gara di sci alpino, atleta che scende prima della gara vera e propria per tracciare il percorso

culturale dell'accesso al mercato dei capitali per effettuare gli investimenti necessari per l'innovazione e la sostenibilità» (Sole 24 Ore)

To catch up with the ongoing change and strengthen resilience, it's necessary to keep the helm steady toward the goals of decarbonisation and ESG criteria. "In a context like the current one characterized by the pandemic's aftermath and the war in Ukraine", says the President of Borsa Italiana [the Italian Stock Exchange] Claudia Parzani [president of Borsa Italiana], "the risk for businesses is to limit themselves to patching up emergencies with a short-term vision". On the contrary, great foresight is required, including the cultural leap of accessing the capital market to make the investments necessary for innovation and sustainability"

In example (20), the nautical journey metaphor is expressed through the necessity to 'keep the helm always straight toward' (*tenere la barra sempre dritta verso*) 'the goals of decarbonisation and ESG criteria' (*gli obiettivi di carbonizzazione e i criteri Esg*). The helm functions as the steering mechanism that maintains directional constancy, and the adverbial phrase 'always straight' (*sempre dritta*) emphasises unwavering trajectory despite turbulent conditions, demanding steadfast adherence to the established course. The vessel is already in motion; what matters now is maintaining heading. Significantly, the speaker, the President of Borsa Italiana (the Italian stock exchange), positions both 'decarbonisation' (*carbonizzazione*) and 'ESG criteria' (*criteri Esg*) as parallel 'goals' (*obiettivi*), co-destinations. ESG criteria, which might alternatively be understood as procedural frameworks or evaluative metrics guiding the journey toward decarbonisation, are instead elevated to destination status themselves, simplifying the navigational task. The positive evaluation of maintaining course is reinforced by the contrast with 'a short-term vision' (*visione di corto periodo*): the image of keeping the helm steady inherently implies 'great foresight' (*molta lungimiranza*) and forward-looking orientation, a capacity to see beyond immediate turbulence and hold one's bearing toward a distant goal. This stands in direct opposition to the risk of merely patching up emergencies, which the speaker identifies with the circumstances of the pandemic's aftermath and the war in Ukraine. The need for sustained effort is further reinforced by the call to make 'the investments necessary for innovation and sustainability' (*gli investimenti necessari per l'innovazione e la sostenibilità*), pairing technological advancement and environmental responsibility as both instrumental in the journey towards decarbonisation and ESG principles. The steady helm thus becomes the organisational discipline necessary to resist short-term pressures that might otherwise divert resources from the long voyage toward ESG compliance and decarbonisation.

- (21) Si registra oggi un certo «affaticamento da Esg», quasi una disillusione dopo la violenta iperbole degli ultimi anni. Può essere utile allora fare il «punto nave» rispetto alla rotta intrapresa verso un futuro sostenibile. Indubbiamente sono stati compiuti alcuni errori nell'ultimo triennio, in primo luogo da parte dell'industria finanziaria. Come già avvenuto nel passato (Internet bubble, Great Moderation, Modern Monetary Theory) anche il paradigma Esg è stato sposato dalla finanza come mainstream ideologico e dogma assoluto degli investimenti, nonostante la limitata base statistica di supporto e l'assenza di definizioni e metriche condivise (Corriere della Sera)

There is today a certain “ESG fatigue”, almost a disillusionment after the violent hyperbole of recent years. It may be useful then to take stock of our position with respect to the course charted toward a sustainable future. Undoubtedly some errors have been made in the last three years, primarily on the part of the financial industry. As has already happened in the past (Internet bubble, Great Moderation, Modern Monetary Theory), the ESG paradigm too has been embraced by finance as an ideological mainstream and absolute investment dogma, despite the limited statistical basis of support and the absence of shared definitions and metrics.

Example (21), similarly to example (20), constructs ESG implementation as a maritime voyage requiring navigational assessment. However, the metaphor used here differs from the one in the previous example as it introduces the notion of the need for some changes in the current approach. The author proposes to ‘take stock of our position with respect to the course charted toward’ (*fare il “punto nave” rispetto alla rotta intrapresa verso*) ‘a sustainable future’ (*un futuro sostenibile*). The NP *punto nave*, marked by inverted commas acting as flag signalling its figurative usage, derives from maritime terminology, denoting the practice of fixing one’s current position at sea to verify trajectory and recalibrate course if necessary. This nautical metaphor establishes a particular evaluative framework: just as sailors periodically determine their coordinates to ensure they remain on the intended route, participants in the ESG transition must assess their current positioning relative to their declared destination. The ‘course’ (*rotta*) itself has already been ‘undertaken’ (*intrapresa*), establishing that the journey is underway. Yet this ongoing voyage has generated what the author characterises as ‘ESG fatigue’ (*affaticamento da ESG*) and disillusionment following the ‘violent hyperbole’ (*violenta iperbole*) of recent years. The modifier ‘violent’ (*violenta*) constructs the initial enthusiasm not as measured optimism but as excessive, even dangerous overstatement, figuratively presented with a PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor as an exertion of force that overwhelmed more cautious assessments. This framing positions the current moment as requiring navigational correction: the ship has departed but may have drifted off course due to the financial industry’s embrace of ESG as ‘ideological mainstream and absolute investment dogma’ (*mainstream ideologico e dogma assoluto degli investimenti*). The critique centres on foundational inadequacies: ‘limited statistical support’ (*limitata base statistica di supporto*) and ‘the absence of shared definitions and metrics’ (*l’assenza di definizioni e metriche condivise*). Without shared metrics, the vessels sailing toward the same destination lack any common coordinated system by which to verify their positions or trajectories. By setting ESG alongside previous financial enthusiasms, such as the Internet bubble, the author constructs a historical pattern wherein the financial industry repeatedly elevates frameworks to dogmatic status prematurely, before adequate empirical foundations have been established. The invocation of *punto nave* thus functions as a call for recalibration grounded in more rigorous assessment tools, implying that the financial sector has been sailing by ideological conviction rather than navigational precision.

Thus, the same nautical schema is utilised to fulfil two fundamentally different functions: in example (20), it legitimises perseverance and steadfastness; in example (21), it invites recalibration and critical reflection, suggesting that the helm may need adjusting rather than simply held firm.

5.2.1.6 Reframing the destination scenario

- (22) Per Tecno, società di consulenza sui temi energetici, la sostenibilità non è una meta da raggiungere, ma il punto di partenza per proiettare le aziende nell'economia del futuro (Corriere della Sera)

For Tecno, an energy consulting firm, sustainability is not a destination to be reached, but the starting point for projecting companies into the economy of the future

Example (22) constitutes a clear outlier in terms of its treatment of the DESTINATION scenario. While most instances emphasise progress toward the goal of sustainability, foregrounding various strategies for reaching it, here the relationship is inverted. Sustainability is no longer the endpoint, a 'destination to be reached' (*una meta da raggiungere*) marking the completion of a process, but rather the 'starting point' (*il punto di partenza*), the foundation from which action begins. It is reframed not as a final objective or resting place, but as the initial premise on which future-oriented business strategies are to be constructed. This formulation signals a shift: rather than treating sustainability as an objective to be pursued once other priorities are secured, Tecno presents it as the organising principle for building competitive, future-facing business models. The conventional framing is necessarily evoked through negation, only to be immediately replaced by an alternative: sustainability becomes a launching point that projects 'companies into the economy of the future' (*proiettare le aziende nell'economia del futuro*). The verb projecting introduces an additional metaphorical dimension of PHYSICAL FORCE, reinforcing the idea of sustainability as a propulsive force rather than terminal state.

Tecno is positioned as the primary actor in this process, conveying a strongly positive evaluation of the implementation of sustainability. Yet, this framing also reflects clear financial interests. Tecno is an Italian consulting firm specialising in energy and sustainability services, supporting enterprises in adopting sustainable practices. Whereas other firms in the same sector often cast themselves in the canonical role of companions guiding clients toward a shared destination (cf. Section 5.2.1.3), Tecno advances a more radical proposal: they do not merely assist SMEs in reaching sustainability, but in harnessing it, treating it not as a goal in itself but as a stimulus for further development.

5.2.2 Path

This scenario comprises all examples that foreground the path itself as the main element in the scenario, shifting attention from where the movement is headed to how it unfolds. In total, 230 examples of metaphorical expression have been identified across all newspapers in the corpus. While sharing many patterns with the DESTINATION scenario, expressions in this scenario exhibit a crucial distinction: the focus lies on the process, the trajectory, and the journey as an ongoing endeavour rather than on reaching a specific endpoint. It frames sustainability as a dynamic and continuous process rather than a fixed achievement,

emphasising progressive movement and development over time. By foregrounding the path, these expressions communicate that meaningful, long-term change is being enacted while simultaneously acknowledging that, being inherently long-term, the journey's completion may still lie far ahead. This emphasis on the path rather than the destination serves an important rhetorical function in sustainability discourse. Evoking notions of progress along a path communicates that significant measures have been and are being implemented while maintaining flexibility for future adjustments, and eventual changes in the pace. Among the lexical items functioning as vehicle terms in this scenario, the most frequent one is *percorso* ('path'), with 77 instances, directly designating the route or trajectory being followed. The English equivalent *path* appears 6 times. Related Italian terms include *strada* ('road', 30 instances), *via* ('route, way', 12), and both *sentiero* ('path/trail', 3) and the plural *percorsi* ('paths', 3). The frequency of *passo* ('step') at 19 occurrences, along with its English counterpart *steps* (7) times and the Italian plural *passi* ('steps', 4), emphasises the incremental nature of progress, with the journey conceived as a series of discrete movements forward. Other notable terms that are relatively frequent include *direction* (10 instances), *roadmap* (9), and *avanti* ('forward/ahead', 8 instances), which collectively foreground the orientation and planning involved in the sustainability trajectory. Other more specific trends are discussed extensively below while presenting examples of usage in context.

5.2.2.1 Starting out

The examples in this section focus on the initial stage of the JOURNEY, portraying sustainability efforts as newly underway and still tentative. This perspective reflects the same scenario tendency identified in Section 5.2.1.2, while differing inasmuch as example (23 – 24) do not clearly specify an endpoint.

- (23) In questo modo la transizione ecologica potrà diventare per le nostre imprese una grande opportunità di innovazione e allargamento del volume di affari, nonché di attrazione per produrre in Italia i nuovi mezzi sostenibili (auto, autobus, ecc.) consentendo all'Italia di essere competitiva a livello internazionale e di collocarsi su un sentiero di sviluppo davvero sostenibile (Il Sole 24 Ore)

In this way, the ecological transition can become for our companies a great opportunity for innovation and expansion of business volume, as well as an attraction to produce in Italy the new sustainable vehicles (cars, buses, etc.), allowing Italy to be competitive at an international level and to place itself on a path of truly sustainable development

Example (23) constructs Italy as an agentive entity 'on a path of truly sustainable development' (*su un sentiero di sviluppo davvero sostenibile*). This institutional framing, voiced by the former Minister of Infrastructure and Sustainable Mobility, conceptualises progress regarding the 'ecological transition' (*transizione ecologica*) as a collective movement undertaken by the national enterprises. Italy is presented as an actor that sets out on this 'path' (*sentiero*), framed as an ongoing and 'truly' (*davvero*) sustainable process. This

qualification serves a dual function: it underscores the seriousness of Italian companies' commitment while simultaneously distancing this trajectory from paths that are not genuinely sustainable. 'Development' (*sviluppo*) is conceptualised as a 'path' (*sentiero*) that can be travelled and the notion of *placing itself on it* ('*collocarsi*') emphasises the initiatory moment, the enactment of a deliberate choice and commitment to a particular direction of growth and progress. The metaphor implies directionality and continuity over time, framing the ecological transition not as a static endpoint but as a sustained trajectory. Such a commitment is presented as providing companies *with a great opportunity for innovation and expansion of business volume* ('una grande opportunità di innovazione e allargamento del volume di affari'). The former is linked to the development of new technologies, products, and processes related to sustainable mobility, while the latter points to how this new know-how can help expand to new markets and generate revenue. By foregrounding these economic benefits, sustainability is positioned as not merely an environmental imperative or regulatory burden, but as a strategic economic opportunity for Italian competitiveness and industrial development. From an institutional perspective, this narrative proves functional in its reframing of the ecological transition from a compliance-driven obligation imposed from above into an avenue for competitive advantage that will be beneficial to the industrial sector. Significantly, the text deploys the notion of sustainable development rather than sustainability; this passage foregrounds the economic pillar alongside environmental concerns, suggesting that the envisioned opportunity for innovation and growth is precisely what renders the development path genuinely sustainable

- (24) Going green can save your business money, streamline operations and demonstrate to customers, suppliers and investors that you are committed to playing your part in tackling the climate crisis. But where do you start? Here are five online tools that can help you as you embark on your small business sustainability journey. 1 Carbon calculators Companies everywhere are committing to the goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050. For many, the first step is calculating the size of their carbon footprint (The Guardian)

The topic of discussion in example (24) is the manners in which small businesses can go green, a course of actions that is once again presented in way that 'sells' it to business through a strategic enumeration of its advantages across three interconnected dimensions: financial savings through reduced costs (*save your business money*), operational efficiency through streamlined processes (*streamline operations*), and strategic positioning through demonstrated commitment to customers, suppliers, and investors in *tackling the climate crisis*. Sustainability is thus constructed as a fundamentally logical and advisable business decision, one that would be unwise not to pursue. However, the text anticipates a key difficulty: small businesses may hesitate not from lack of interest, but from uncertainty about implementation. The question *But where do you start?* acknowledges potential paralysis while simultaneously offering a solution: the answer comes through explicit instructions on how to *embark on the journey*. The verb *embark* refers primarily to the act of boarding a ship or plane. Embarking on something has come to signal the commencement of something "large or important" (Goatly, 2024, p. 294), conferring enhanced relevance to the process. The maritime framing thus imbues the sustainability journey with an adventurous quality, suggesting not merely a routine task but a quest of some magnitude, significant yet navigable.

The travellers on this journey are small businesses, which are positioned as active and offered companionship through *five online tools* that function as guides or navigational aids for the voyage. This assistance mitigates the intimidating factor in embarking on something significant by providing concrete, accessible resources. The notion of embarking, and thus of initiating a long-term process, is reinforced through the explicit framing of carbon footprint calculation as *the first step*. The journey's beginning is rendered tangible and actionable: it starts with a measurement of the impact, naturally leading into what might be termed as the second step, that is, subsequent actions of implementing changes based on that understanding. Once provided with data about environmental impact and energy consumption patterns, businesses can then adjust their practices strategically. This discourse operates within a broader push for enhanced sustainability practices among small businesses. By decomposing the process into clear, achievable steps and framing it as an adventure worth undertaking, the text simultaneously acknowledges the scale of climate action while making it feel accessible. The journey framework allows businesses to position themselves as already in motion even when they have only just begun measuring their footprint, creating momentum that encourages continued progress along the path.

5.2.2.2 Proceeding on the road

A further recurring pattern in this scenario involves expressions that frame the path of sustainability in temporal and progressive terms. The path can be portrayed as one with distant origins, emphasising continuity (*viene da lontano*, 'it comes from afar'); as a road along which there exists a determined will to keep advancing (*vogliamo proseguire su questa strada*, 'we want to continue along this road'); or as a journey already undertaken that has brought the travellers to a significant point (*il percorso intrapreso ci ha portato dallo scorso anno a un impegno ancora più concreto*, 'the path undertaken has brought us since last year to an even more concrete commitment'). What these varied formulations share is a common emphasis on sustainability as an ongoing trajectory characterised by continuous forward movement.

- (25) "Over longer timeframes we believe the structural drivers behind the sustainability trends at both a policy and consumer level will be important tailwinds. Although there is a lot of uncertainty in markets over the near-term direction of travel, we have not seen a deterioration in the longer-term support." (Financial Times)

The term *tailwinds* elicits a nautical/aviation metaphor to frame the long-term support for ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), implying that they will offer a significant contribution to the advancement of *sustainability trends*. A tailwind is a wind blowing in the same direction of travel, offering support, speed, and ease of movement. This should be understood in relation to the use of *short-term headwinds* against sustainability in a previous part of the article, (which will be discussed in section 5.2.5). The two images work in direct contrast: headwinds represent temporary opposition as a force blowing against the direction of travel, while tailwinds recast lasting commitment as a propulsive force. The modifier

important further reinforces this asymmetry, lending the tailwinds a weight and durability that diminishes the significance of the opposing short-term forces. The speaker draws a critical distinction between two timeframes. In the near term, markets face significant uncertainty about *the direction of travel* a phrase that activates the conceptual link between purposive action and oriented movement, echoing the mapping LACK OF PURPOSE IS LACK OF DIRECTION (Lakoff, 1993, p. 222): without clarity about which way to go, progress stalls. In the longer term, however, this uncertainty dissolves. However, the *structural drivers behind the sustainability trends* ensure that there will be no deterioration in the support for ESG principles.

Two elements underpinning this certainty: a *policy level* and a *consumer level*, demonstrating certainty that both the institutional approach and the consumers spending habits will continue to justify commitment to ESG. By qualifying these as *important tailwinds*, the speaker lends them a weight and durability that overshadows short-term opposition: the ship of sustainable finance may face momentary uncertainty about where to point its bow, but the winds behind it have not weakened.

- (26) «Il modello che abbiamo creato - conclude Fontana Rava [Edoardo Fontana Rava, direttore dei servizi di investimento e assicurativi di Banca Mediolanum] - rappresenta un unicum a livello nazionale e, per quanto noto, anche europeo. Siamo orgogliosi di questo risultato, ma lo viviamo come una tappa intermedia nel percorso di progressiva interiorizzazione delle logiche di sostenibilità nel business dell'azienda» (Corriere della Sera)

"The model that we have created - concludes Fontana Rava [Edoardo Fontana Rava, director of investment and insurance services at Banca Mediolanum]- represents a unicum at national level and, as far as known, also European. We are proud of this result, but we live it as an intermediate stage in the journey of progressive internalization of the logics of sustainability in the business of the company"

The speaker is Fontana Rava, Director of Investment and Insurance Services at Banca Mediolanum, who is representing the bank's positioning on sustainability. His statement simultaneously celebrates a significant achievement while framing it as part of an ongoing commitment. The intermediate stage (*tappa intermedia*) he refers to is the ESG rating model that Banca Mediolanum has created to measure the sustainability profile of their entire banking offering. By calling the model a *unicum* both at the national and the European level, he claims exceptional distinctiveness in comparison to all other actors in their sector. This assertion of uniqueness, and the level of initiative that Fontana Rava is claiming for the bank, makes the subsequent framing as merely an intermediate stage (*una tappa intermedia*) more striking: if this unprecedented achievement is only a waypoint, this suggests that the bank's ambition must be considerably greater. The Italian *tappa* denotes a stopping point during a journey: it is a place significant enough to pause, rest, and take stock, yet explicitly not the destination. It is conventionally used figuratively to refer to facts or events that mark moments of passage or evolution, transferring its original connotations from its primary usage. Here, it conveys the notion that having established an ESG rating model is an achievement significant enough to be considered a place to stop, a meaningful milestone on a journey that is still ongoing. However, through the further characterisation of this stage as

intermediate (*intermedia*), Fontana Rava suggests that the endpoint is distant and that there remains a much longer path to walk. What this path constitutes concretely for the bank is described as the progressive internalisation of the logics of sustainability (*progressiva interiorizzazione delle logiche di sostenibilità*). The adjective *progressive* reinforces the incremental, stage-by-stage nature of this transformation, while *internalisation* emphasises the seriousness of the bank's commitment, inasmuch as sustainability must become embedded in the internal logic rather than an external compliance exercise.

5.2.2.3 'Pulling ahead'

- (27) Digitally tracking fuelling helps companies find places to reduce their fuel consumption – a win for sustainability and the bottom line. As more and more partners look for environmentally friendly firms to work with, companies that embrace sustainable practices will pull ahead of their competition (The Independent)

- (28) The Fernery [restaurant at the hotel The Grove] wows with punchy tasting menus, zinging with foraged touches in ingredient-led dishes like squab with celeriac, plumb and nasturtium. And sustainability-wise The Grove is leagues ahead, with 100 per cent renewable energy, fresh spring water, reforestation projects and an emphasis on traceability in the kitchen (The Independent)

Example (27) and (28) shift the focus from collective effort to competitive positioning, highlighting how some actors manage to place themselves further along the path than their rivals. When businesses are compared, differences in sustainability performance are readily conceptualised as differences in position along a shared trajectory. Example (27) specifically discusses the construction industry, arguing that by *embracing sustainable practices* and thus being entitled to label themselves as *environmentally friendly*, firms can secure collaboration from partners. Repeating a recurring motif throughout the concordances analysed, the recommendation to implement sustainable practices is justified and reinforced by the assumption that it will function as a competitive advantage. Sustainability functions as a form of acceleration: if one participant *pulls ahead*, it overtakes competitors by moving faster, thus adopting sustainable practices becomes tantamount to increasing metaphorical speed. The underlying assumption is clear: adopting sustainable practices attracts business and drives growth, and therefore yields competitive advantage. Once that framing is accepted, the conclusion appears self-evident: sustainability is the optimal strategic choice. The negotiation that is at the heart of “selling” sustainability to the industry becomes clear: sustainability is not an obligation, but rather a pragmatic, low-cost route to outpacing competitors without imposing drastic changes.

A very similar framing appears in example (28), though applied to a different sector. In this description of hotels, the idiom *leagues ahead* constructs The Grove as significantly more advanced in sustainability terms than its peers. The writer singles out its reliance on *100 per cent renewable energy*, its use of *fresh spring water*, *reforestation projects*, and rigorous

traceability in the kitchen. The use of *leagues* translates sustainability performance into spatial distance, making The Grove's effort markedly stronger than the more modest measures attributed to other establishments. Across both examples, the same conceptual mapping is activated: progress and competence are understood as forward motion, and success corresponds to moving faster than others along a shared route. The phrasal verb *pulling ahead* denotes the process of outperforming rivals through greater speed or effort while the VP *being leagues ahead* marks the result, the state of having already achieved a substantial lead. Within this metaphoric construal, competitors are implicitly acknowledged as travelling along the same sustainability path, but are at the same time represented as slower or less committed travellers, a framing that downplays the value of their efforts. It is not that these other actors are unsustainable; many display legitimate environmental credentials. But relative to them, the hypothetical construction firms that will follow the advice of embracing sustainability (example 27), or The Grove (example 28), are presented as more ambitious, more comprehensive, and more effective.

5.2.2.4 Charting the course

- (29) «Un approccio che pone il benessere assoluto della persona al centro di ogni azione, vede nell'innovazione lo strumento per attuare questa modalità di agire e nella sostenibilità la bussola per dare un orientamento di senso a questo agire» (Corriere della Sera)

"An approach that places the absolute wellbeing of the person at the centre of every action, sees in innovation the instrument to implement this mode of acting and in sustainability the compass to give an orientation of meaning to this acting"

- (30) Andrea Orcel, ceo di UniCredit: «Quando si parla di finanza sostenibile si è spesso posto l'accento sulla questione ambientale. Ma il sociale dell'Esg spesso passa in secondo piano, quando in verità dovrebbe essere la nostra bussola» (Il Sole 24 Ore)

Andrea Orcel, CEO of UniCredit: "When one speaks of sustainable finance, the accent has often been placed on the environmental question. But the social of ESG takes a back seat, when in truth it should be our compass"

The compass metaphor (*bussola*) was already encountered in example (3) within the DESTINATION scenario, where it functioned as part of a broader navigational frame oriented towards climate neutrality. The present section examines two further instances in which orientation itself becomes the central feature. Additionally, another use that can be grouped together with these is that of *stella polare* ('north star'), used to refer to sustainability as a guiding principle in the context of the usage of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Italy. In all cases, the orientation metaphor evokes a predominantly nautical scenario and frames sustainability as providing directional guidance: as a compass or the north star epitomise the notion of the most reliable sources possible when on deck to provide the correct direction to set the course in, sustainability similarly serves to steer various actors and their efforts in the right direction.

In example (29) the speaker describes sustainability as ‘the compass to give an orientation of meaning’ (*la bussola per dare un orientamento di senso*) to action. Within his framework, sustainability functions as one element in a larger navigational system: *benessere assoluto della persona* (‘the absolute wellbeing of the person’) is the destination; innovation serves as the instrument of movement; and sustainability acts as the compass providing directional reference. Example (30) shifts instead the focus from sustainability as a unified concept to its internal composition, specifically the hierarchy among the constituent elements of ESG. Andrea Orcel, CEO of UniCredit, explicitly addresses an imbalance already noted in previous discussions: while ESG is canonically understood as having three pillars, encoded in its name, emphasis has often been placed on the environmental question (*si è spesso posto l’accento sulla questione ambientale*). However, a radical reorientation is proposed. What Orcel argues should be ‘our compass’ (*la nostra bussola*) is precisely the social dimension of ESG (*il sociale dell’Esg*), the element that has too often taken ‘a back seat’ (*passa in secondo piano*) to environmental concerns. Banks should deploy their capacity to make a difference by foregrounding issues such as employment, community welfare, social cohesion, and economic inclusion. Unlike example (29), the compass metaphor in example (30) does not construe sustainability in general as the main driver of innovation; instead, it frames innovation as requiring a reordering of priorities according to the relative importance of different sustainability dimensions. The social pillar should provide the primary reference point when navigating ESG commitments, as the core orienting principle rather than an afterthought.

- (31) [Il voto dell’Europarlamento sullo stop alla produzione di auto a diesel e benzina dal 2035]
Segna una tappa significativa perché indica una direzione e fissa una data. E sono convinto che il mercato e le imprese saranno più veloci della politica. Il settore dell’auto avrà bisogno di un sostegno per accompagnare la riconversione, ma la strada è tracciata. Ormai è chiaro che la sostenibilità conviene e paga anche dal punto di vista economico. La doppia transizione deve però avvenire senza lasciare indietro nessuno (Il Sole 24 Ore)

It [[the European Parliament’s vote to ban the production of diesel and petrol cars from 2035]] marks a significant stage because it indicates a direction and fixes a date. And I am convinced that the market and companies will be faster than politics. The automotive sector will need support to accompany the reconversion, but the road is traced. By now it is clear that sustainability is convenient and pays also from the economic point of view. The double transition must however happen without leaving anyone behind

The context for example (31) is the European Union legislation regarding the automotive industry, specifically regulations banning the production of diesel and petrol cars from 2035. This example exploits a variety of metaphorical expressions drawn from the JOURNEY domain already encountered in previous examples: the intermediate stage, the traced road, and the need to accompany. These scenario builders work together to construct a nuanced representation of the transition process, highlighting different facets of the ongoing transformation. The event being discussed is the European Parliament’s vote to stop diesel car sales from 2035, characterised by the speaker as a ‘significant stage’ (*tappa significativa*) and not as an endpoint, due to its directional function: ‘it indicates a direction and fixes a date’

(*indica una direzione e fissa una data*). While example (25) referred to uncertainty on the markets over the near-term direction of travel, the legislative decision is portrayed here as providing both orientation and a concrete timeline, establishing clarity about where the journey is headed and when key milestones must be reached. The stage functions as a navigational marker that allows all actors to calibrate their efforts accordingly. However, the speaker introduces a distinction by suggesting that the actors involved will move at differing speeds while nonetheless following the same direction of travel indicated by the EU Parliament. Some travellers, namely ‘the market and companies’ (*il mercato e le imprese*), will progress faster than others, specifically ‘politics’ (*politica*). The speaker expresses notable confidence in the former group, grounding this stance in the assertion that ‘sustainability is convenient and pays also from the economic point of view’ (*la sostenibilità conviene e paga anche dal punto di vista economico*). Accordingly, awareness of this economic benefit, paired with the legislative action that has ‘traced the road’ (*la strada è tracciata*) to be followed, is presented as simplifying the process for the automotive industry and leading to fast advancement. This recurring frame of sustainability not as a constraint but as an economic opportunity underpins the expectation that market forces and businesses will be incentivised to move ahead along the path, outpacing political initiative.

This assertion is tempered by additional considerations, notably the recognition that the automotive sector ‘will need support to accompany the reconversion’ (*avrà bisogno di un sostegno per accompagnare la riconversione*). This introduces a contrasting element with the previous image of swift independent advancement, suggesting that the industry will in fact need some assistance by fellow travellers during this difficult transition. This leads to the final metaphorical expression, denoting how the journey must proceed ‘without leaving anyone behind’ (*senza lasciare indietro nessuno*). ‘The double transition’ (*la doppia transizione*), green and digital, must ensure that workers in traditional industries are supported in retraining, that communities dependent on these sectors receive assistance, and that social cohesion is maintained. The success of the journey is measured not only by the speed of those in front but by the successful collective arrival of all travellers. Together, these interconnected JOURNEY metaphors construct a complex picture: a path clearly marked and a direction definitively set through legislative action, multiple actors moving at different speeds at the industrial and the institutional level, fuelled by the imperative of collective progress. The stage of the 2035 vote functions within this broader PATH scenario as both confirmation of navigational certainty and a catalyst for movement.

The notion of the path being signalled or marked in some way emerges from several vehicle terms recurring in this scenario: *tracciata* (‘traced’, 3 occurrences), *tracciare* (‘to trace’, 3), and *segnato* (‘marked’, 2). These terms construct the sustainability path as a route that has been carefully and purposefully delineated, whose direction has been indicated through visible markers or traces that travellers can recognise and follow. The following example illustrates how this notion of a marked path functions within sustainability discourse to establish both clarity of direction and urgency of action.

- (32) Lo stesso rating d'impresa per valutare i crediti sta cambiando. Non più solo parametri economico finanziari, ma anche uno sguardo sempre più attento anche agli sforzi che le imprese stanno facendo per la sostenibilità. La strada è segnata, insomma, ed è bene che grandi e piccole imprese tengano presente la traccia e il fatto che il tempo della transizione non sarà illimitato (Corriere della Sera)

The very company rating to evaluate credits is changing. No longer only economic-financial parameters, but also an increasingly attentive look also at the efforts that companies are making for sustainability. The road is marked, in short, and large and small companies should keep in mind the trace and the fact that the time of transition will not be unlimited

This extract provides an example of these expressions referring to the road to travel on being marked or signalled in some way (*la strada è segnata*), used by a regional director for Intesa Sanpaolo bank. The text emphasises that the path towards sustainability has been clearly defined, and companies, both 'large and small' (*grandi e piccole imprese*), would do well to 'keep in mind the trace' (*tengano presente la traccia*), and to the direction indicated by these signs. Changes must be implemented within a limited timeframe, and it is now incumbent upon businesses to act accordingly. The road is considered marked because the corporate rating (*rating d'impresa*), that is, the evaluation system used by financial institutions to assess whether to extend credit to businesses, is changing. Traditionally, this rating relied exclusively on economic and financial parameters; however the system now incorporates 'an increasingly attentive look' (*uno sguardo sempre più attento*) towards 'the efforts that companies are making for sustainability' (*gli sforzi che le imprese stanno facendo per la sostenibilità*). This shift represents a fundamental transformation in how creditworthiness is determined: sustainability efforts are becoming consequential for businesses seeking loans or investment. The text employs a SIGHT metaphor to convey this reorientation: by directing its gaze towards sustainability efforts, the credit evaluation system places these efforts centre-stage, foregrounding their relevance. The implementation is framed as achievable precisely because this shift in the focus of attention is clear, and the road is marked: the path has been laid out through institutional support, transformed banking criteria, and available resources. Companies have all the instructions they need, and should focus on the trace that is already there to initiative movements on this road, in order to respect the established timeline, since 'the time of transition will not be unlimited' (*il tempo della transizione non sarà illimitato*). This creates urgency for all companies, from major corporations to small enterprises, suggesting that the signposts indicating the route to travel apply to all actors involved.

5.2.2.5 Steps

The notion of progression along a path is further elaborated through expressions that break down the journey into discrete units of movement or steps. Lexical items denoting steps "are frequently and conventionally used metaphorically in reference to changes and events" (Semino, 2002, p. 121) decomposing complex processes into sequenced, manageable units,

from the undertaking to continued action forward (Goatly, 2024). This framing manifests most prominently through the vehicle term *passo* ('step') and the plural *passi*, and the English equivalent *steps*. The frequent collocation *primo passo/first step* accounts for 6 of these occurrences, while other qualifiers characterise steps as *grandi* ('big', 1 occurrence), *avanti* ('forward', 5) and *in più* ('further', 1), *meaningful* (1), or, in more detail, as *piccoli ma concreti e continui* ('small but concrete and continuous'). These formulations collectively construct sustainability not as a single transformative leap but as a succession of incremental movements, each positioned relative to others to evoke the notion of forward progress along the path.

(33) "Il progetto della grande impronta è un primo passo, come quello del primo uomo sulla luna", ha commentato il sindaco di Termoli Francesco Roberti, che ha patrocinato l'iniziativa." Il cambiamento climatico è già in atto e non si può più attendere: dobbiamo riprogrammare il nostro modo di vivere partendo da azioni semplici, come risparmiare, non sprecare, spegnere la luce quando non necessario (La Repubblica)

"The large footprint project is a first step, like that of the first man on the moon", commented the mayor of Termoli, Francesco Roberti, who sponsored the initiative. 'Climate change is already under way and we can no longer wait: we must rethink our way of living starting from simple actions, such as saving, avoiding waste, and turning off the light when it is not needed'"

The project of the 'large footprint' (*grande impronta*) referred to here is an art installation designed by an agency as a means to give concreteness to the notion of the carbon footprint. By literally creating a large footprint on the beach, the agency is literalising the figurative expression into a concrete visual. The notion of a carbon footprint functions as a metaphorical shorthand for a variety of effects and repercussions that our daily activities have on the planet. This metaphor has become extremely conventional (Koteyko, 2012; Koteyko et al., 2010; Nerlich & Koteyko, 2010), and is listed in the OED as "the environmental impact of a particular individual, community, or organization, or of a specific event, product, etc., measured in terms of the total associated greenhouse gas emissions, and typically expressed in terms of the (annual) equivalent in tons of carbon dioxide" (OED, *carbon footprint*). Due to its having become so established in environmental discourse, it can be argued that, similarly to the greenhouse effect metaphor (Augé, 2020, p. 246) the carbon footprint metaphor may not be as impactful as it would have been when it was first introduced. Hence, the installation seeks to recover this lost impact by producing an actual footprint on the ground, with the communicative aim of inviting its audience to actually think of their actions and choices as leaving a visible mark on the surface of the planet. The footprint is part of a broader initiative aimed at incentivising the reduction of our annual carbon footprint, which is fundamental to achieving net zero emissions. The mayor's comment introduces a direct metaphor, signalled by 'like' (*come*), comparing the figurative 'first step' (*primo passo*) represented by the installation to Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon. The reference evokes an iconic moment that symbolised a leap forward for humanity. Although the comparison might appear to overstate the relevance and the symbolic value of the artwork, it functions, like the concrete footprint itself, to restore force to the now highly conventional metaphor of a "first step". While the installation achieves this by giving physical form to the metaphor, the

mayor's analogy instead elaborates on the familiar phrase through a comparison with another, far more famous step, in order to increase its communicative impact and emphasise that even a small action can begin a broader transformational process. The scale of the comparison amplifies not only the importance of the installation, but also the larger vision of sustainability that underpins it. The footprint functions as the first in a sequence of initiatives aimed at raising awareness of individual carbon footprints and encouraging more sustainable behaviour, marking the beginning of a longer programme of environmental engagement at the local level.

The moon-landing metaphor also introduces connotations of ambition, determination and collective progress, and elevates a local intervention into the symbolic opening of a more substantial shift. Climate change provides the rationale for presenting this installation as a meaningful first step. The urgency of contrasting it, expressed in the statement that 'we can no longer wait' (*non si può più attendere*), is used to focus on individual initiative and call for a radical reconsideration of everyday choices. The footprint visualises the scale of individual emissions and aims to make the threat more tangible. By making the "invisible" carbon footprint visible, the installation is intended to prompt practical behavioural changes, such as saving energy or reducing waste. According to the mayor, we must 'rethink our way of living beginning with simple actions' (*riprogrammare il nostro modo di vivere partendo da azioni semplici*), from avoiding waste to switching off unnecessary lights. Within this framing, the comparison to the moon landing becomes a way of presenting everyday sustainable choices as the starting point of a collective shift. Just as the first step on the moon set in motion a trajectory that eventually helped shape the modern world, by means of this metaphor Roberti portrays individual actions against climate change as capable of initiating a similarly consequential transformation. The central focus is on the urgency of the situation. This reinforces a narrative of individual responsibility in addressing climate change.

5.2.2.6 TRAIN JOURNEY scenarios

A subset of expressions draws on the image of a TRAIN JOURNEY to construct more elaborate scenarios and trigger a cluster of scenario-specific implications that would not be available in more general JOURNEY metaphors. The TRAIN scenario constitutes a richly elaborated sub-domain within political metaphor discourse, especially in discussions of EU dynamics (Musolff, 2004; Semino, 2002). Its distinctive characteristics make it particularly suited to conceptualising coordinated, large-scale transformations requiring synchronised effort among multiple actors who move together toward shared objectives. Because trains have a complex internal organisation, comprising a locomotive, carriages, driver, passengers, the source domain can encode differentiated roles and hierarchies (Musolff, 2004).

A first key feature is that, unlike individual vehicles that can freely change direction, trains move along fixed tracks. This creates a structured path that constrains movement and defines the route in advance. Within this logic, derailment becomes the paradigmatic catastrophe.

The widespread expressions “on track” and “off track” derive from this schema (Semino, 2002, p. 123): being “on track” signals adherence to the planned method and intended goals, whereas being “off track” or “going off the rails” indicates deviation, failure, or even unacceptable conduct (Goatly, 2024; Zhen, 2025). This conventional metaphor is exploited throughout the present corpus: sustainability initiatives described as *on track* are implicitly framed as progressing successfully, while delays or failures are cast as being *off track*, and thus problematic.

A second feature is the imperative of coordinated speed. This applies to the conceptualisation of participants as passengers; whereas independent travellers might be ahead or behind with respect to each other, as seen in previous examples (27 – 28), passengers aboard the same train are necessarily progressing as a unit. Additionally, an alternative framing cast participants instead as train carriages. This maintains the notion of collective, unified motion, while allowing for differentiated levels of agency and initiative. When one participant is cast as the locomotive, it assumes a markedly active role: it pulls the rest of the convoy forward, while the others, in their role as carriages, have limited agency in determining whether, when, or how to participate in the motion. This logic underlies the depiction of the “Franco-German engine” (Musolff, 2004, p. 59) driving European integration, and is echoed in this corpus in a headline portraying the region of Lazio as the locomotive pulling Italy and Europe toward sustainable development.

A third salient dimension is temporality. Trains operate on strict timetables with fixed departure times. Missing a departure entails exclusion from the journey, since catching a moving train requires exceptional effort and even then, may not be possible. Hence, the TRAIN scenario offers a ready-made, rich and articulated packet of assumptions and evaluations that can be drawn that transfer readily to the target, as will be shown in the example below. These assumptions are culturally entrenched and therefore transferred automatically to the target domain. The result is a ready-made structure: punctuality is good, lateness is costly, and missing the train is a failure. These inferences can be readily activated in the examples that follow.

- (34) «Con il Pnrr [Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza] alcuni elementi introdotti dalla tassonomia sono utilizzati per richiedere garanzie di sostenibilità ambientale ai soggetti coinvolti nella realizzazione dei progetti». Insomma, la tassonomia diventerà il biglietto per salire sul treno, ormai già partito, della transizione ecologica nel Vecchio Continente (Il Sole 24 Ore)

“With the PNRR [Italy’s National Recovery and Resilience Plan], some elements introduced by the taxonomy are used to require guarantees of environmental sustainability from the subjects involved in the realisation of projects”. In short, the taxonomy will become the ticket to board the train, which has already departed, of ecological transition in the Old Continent.

The speaker is presenting the “Guidelines for the Application of Taxonomy in Business”, a guide designed to help companies, particularly SMEs, navigate the EU taxonomy. This concordance deploys the TRAIN sub-scenario to frame the ecological transition in ‘the Old Continent’ (*nel Vecchio Continente*) as a vehicle already in motion across Europe. The train

stands for the EU-wide transition itself, and the actors meant to board are businesses, more specifically SMEs (small and medium enterprises), which the Guidelines explicitly target. The metaphor is extended by adding an element beyond the basic TRAIN schema: the requirement of a ticket. It is common knowledge that boarding a train requires possession of a valid ticket. Hence, within this mapping, the ecological transition is conceptualised as a train, and the EU Taxonomy is mapped onto the ticket required for businesses to board it. Compliance with taxonomy criteria functions as the necessary credential granting access to PNRR funding opportunities, green loan channels, and supply chains. The required ‘guarantees of environmental sustainability’ (*garanzie di sostenibilità ambientale*) are presented as verifiable evidence that firms meet the standards that determine their eligibility for participation and their ability to come on board. The metaphor gains additional evaluative force through the claim that the train has ‘already departed’ (*ormai già partito*), which renders compliance with the taxonomy particularly urgent. This framing portrays the Italian business sector as latecomers facing the concrete risk of missing out on the opportunities generated by the European transition if firms fail to adapt in time. Their ability to board the collective EU train for the transition is called into question and dependent upon a significant effort to “run after” the train. The common-sense assumptions activated by the scenario, that punctuality is preferable to lateness and catching the train is better than missing it, are transferred from the source to the target (Musolff, 2004) without needing to be explicitly spelled out. The implication is that many firms have made a mistake in delaying their alignment with the taxonomy, missing the chance to board the train when it was still at the departure station, and would now be wise to accelerate efforts to avoid exclusion from future funding. Joining the EU’s ecological transition becomes analogous to the preference of catching a real train in time and thus becomes self-evidently desirable. Ideally, firms would already be aboard the train; given that this opportunity has been missed, they must now compensate by securing access at a subsequent station within a narrowed temporal window, avoiding the definitive and dispreferred outcome of being excluded from the journey altogether.

5.2.2.7 Questioning the path

- (35) One possible future scenario is that those who can afford to will use more and more energy and puff out more and more emissions, keeping themselves comfortable in an increasingly hostile climate, making it more and more inhospitable for everyone else. As the heatwaves roll in, is this the path we want to set ourselves on? Smith Mordak is director of sustainability and physics at engineering consultancy Buro Happold (The Guardian)

Buro Happold is a British firm that provides engineering consultancy for buildings and infrastructure. Its director is framing our collective choices about climate adaptation through the metaphor of a path, a deliberate route we either choose to follow or reject. The path Mordak describes entails a scenario in which the wealthy increasingly rely on energy-intensive air conditioning for personal comfort, generating emissions that exacerbate the

effects of climate change for the broader population. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: a privileged minority shields itself from extreme heat through short-term technological interventions that accelerate long-term collective deterioration. As inequality deepens, those excluded from such relief experience an increasingly *inhospitable* climate while bearing the consequences of others' choices. The metaphorical path functions on multiple levels: firstly, it emphasises the active agency inherent in setting ourselves on a particular course. This trajectory is not inevitable but rather chosen; we are not inadvertently stumbling into this future but actively constructing it through purchasing decisions and policy frameworks. By posing the rhetorical question *is this the path we want to set ourselves on?* Mordak challenges readers to consider whether society's current direction represents a sanctionable choice. Secondly, the notion of setting out on a path suggests a trajectory that, once initiated, develops momentum and becomes progressively more difficult to abandon, instantiating a process where ultimate outcomes are shaped through accumulated decisions. The threat looming at the end of this path of greater inequality and environmental collapse may not manifest with immediate urgency, which complicates present decision-making. However, the delayed consequences are no less concrete: current choices will condemn future populations, and potentially distant communities, to suffer outcomes that present beneficiaries may never experience directly.

Once far along a particular route, reversal requires implementing increasingly difficult corrective measures. Beyond a certain threshold, return becomes impossible. Mordak's rhetorical structure invites conscious evaluation: before proceeding too far down this trajectory, we must evaluate whether its destination represents an outcome we are prepared and willing to live with. If current route is judged untenable, then, following the notion that different means of achieving a result are conceptualised as different paths (Lakoff, 1993), the implication is that an alternative route is available and must be weighed seriously. The window for course correction remains open but is narrowing; an alternative path, involving changes in the approach to climate adaptation, is still possible, if we collectively choose to take it.

5.2.3 Active agent

While other scenarios conceptualise sustainability or related concepts as destinations to reach or means through which actors travel, in these 60 metaphorical expressions sustainability itself becomes the entity actively carrying out motion. This construction reflects a broader set of conceptual mappings in which abstract processes are treated as moving entities, such as external events being represented as objects approaching or departing, or the treatment of time, ideas, market fluctuations, and institutional changes as entities capable of motion (Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff, 1993; Radden, 1996; Semino, 2002). In line with this, sustainability is portrayed here not as a passive endpoint but as an autonomous participant. A marked shift emerges in the type of motion that is envisioned. Progress, innovation and changes, typically understood as the consequences of striving to

become more sustainable, are here represented through the personification of sustainability as an entity in motion. Rather than emphasising agency, the metaphorical construal foregrounds the configuration of motion events, with sustainability depicted as walking, accompanying, entering, leading, or making its way into new areas. These expressions profile different aspects of movement, including manner, directionality, and co-occurrence with other entities.

In this construal, sustainability moves into spaces where it was previously absent, advances alongside other actors, and is even represented as something to be pursued. In each case, the abstract process is conceptualised as a mobile entity whose motion signals shifts in social, economic, or institutional conditions. At the lexical level, the predominance of the expression *di pari passo* ('at the same pace') foregrounds co-motion and synchronisation, with *passo* ('step/pace'; 12 occurrences) and *pari* ('equal/same'; 11 occurrences) emerging as the most frequent items in this set. Other recurring verbs encoding concrete motion, such as *va* ('goes'), *entra* ('enters'), and *passa* ('passes'), further specify the event structure of the metaphorical journey. The following section therefore examines the specific motion events attributed to sustainability and the relational patterns they establish with other entities.

5.2.3.1 Coordinated motion

As previously stated, multiple instances draw upon the Italian idiomatic expression *di pari passo* and similar lexicalisations to suggest a harmonious advancement in which sustainability evolves alongside other elements. These examples primarily address the integration of sustainability with various dimensions of growth, or highlight the equal importance assigned to different facets of sustainability. Within this broader pattern, certain expressions further emphasise the notion of walking together through imagery of physical proximity and coordinated movement. Phrases such as *a braccetto* ('arm in arm') and *hand in hand* convey a particularly close level of alignment and mutual reinforcement, suggesting that sustainability and other objectives advance in tandem rather than separately. This framing portrays sustainability not as an isolated priority but as inherently compatible with, and inseparable from, complementary goals such as social programmes or business innovation.

- (36) Servono «scelte equilibrate e compatibili con gli interessi del secondo Paese manifatturiero europeo», dice il viceministro Pichetto. Per Fim e Cisl [sindacati italiani dei metalmeccanici] è «indispensabile definire una cabina di regia tecnica: la sostenibilità ambientale deve camminare di pari passo con quella sociale e industriale» (Corriere della Sera)

Balanced choices compatible with the interests of the second-largest manufacturing country in Europe' are needed, says Vice Minister Pichetto. For FIM and CISL [Italian metalworkers' trade unions], 'it is indispensable to define a technical control room: environmental sustainability must walk at the same pace of social and industrial sustainability

- (37) La filosofia di Sesa [azienda italiana di servizi informatici] poggia sulla convinzione che la crescita possa generarsi solo andando di pari passo con la sostenibilità economica, sociale e ambientale: nel 2021 gli obiettivi di crescita sostenibile sono stati inseriti nello statuto tra i compiti prioritari del Cda (Corriere della Sera)

Sesa's [an Italian IT services company] philosophy is based on the belief that growth can only be generated by keeping pace with economic, social and environmental sustainability: in 2021, sustainable growth objectives were included in the charter among the priority tasks of the Board of Directors

In example (36), the Italian unions FIM-CISL (representing metalworkers and general workers) employ the idiomatic expression 'walk at the same pace' (*camminare di pari passo*) to argue that environmental sustainability must progress with the same speed as 'social and industrial sustainability' (*quella sociale e industriale*). The idiomatic phrase in Italian denotes the activity of walking at the same pace, thereby ensuring no one is left behind, and is figuratively deployed to insist that progress must proceed uniformly across multiple dimensions. The unions are contending that environmental sustainability goals cannot be pursued in isolation at the expense of social and industrial concerns. The metaphor constructs the transition as a journey where multiple travellers, the three facets of sustainability, must maintain coordinated speed and direction. Essentially, the statement demands that the green transition does not outpace social and industrial capacity, but rather advances synchronously with maintaining employment, industrial competitiveness, and social stability, rather than prioritising environmental goals in a manner that leaves the other dimensions struggling to catch up or abandoned entirely. This figurative expression echoes more explicit comments on the three aspects of sustainability throughout the corpus, observing that the environmental aspect seems to be the primary focus of attention. Critically, the unions choose to invoke 'industrial' (*industriale*) rather than economic sustainability, despite the latter conventionally representing the third pillar of sustainability. This lexical choice fulfils two main functions: on the one hand, it redirects the concern from a purely economic interest that might be perceived as utilitarian and profit-based to one that is preoccupied with the well-being and state of the industry of a country, explicitly foregrounding its connections to jobs, wages, and productivity. On the other hand, it grounds the feared consequences of the transition in more concrete terms, focussing on the survival and viability of the manufacturing sector itself. By anchoring their concern in industrial sustainability, the unions keep the focus on workers' conditions and the broader state of Italy's economy, offering a tangible picture of the potential repercussions of letting environmental sustainability get ahead of the other two elements.

Example (37) adopts instead the more conventional nomenclature, although the order in which they are presented (economic first, followed by social and lastly environmental) reverses the hierarchy typically implied in sustainability discourse. In this scenario, the three aspects are joined by another fellow traveller, who appears as a recurring character in corporate discussions of sustainability: 'growth' (*crescita*). Similarly to example (36), the four elements are envisioned as 'keeping pace with' (*andando di pari passo*) each other, conveying the equal importance attributed to all four through the idea of synchronised movement and

equal speed. The continuity of growth is presupposed, yet its ethical reconfiguration lies in Sesa's claim that such growth is conditional upon sustainability. Growth is therefore not conceived in opposition to sustainability but as its outcome, a conviction that is given institutional substance through the inclusion of 'sustainable growth objectives' (*obiettivi di crescita sostenibile*) in the company's corporate charter (*statuto*).

(38) Swiftpak, a Certified B Corporation, firmly believes that innovation and sustainability go hand-in-hand. By continuously innovating, the Reading-based packaging supplier is in a position to introduce more sustainable products, lower its carbon footprint and minimise waste. Swiftpak strives to continue to keep sustainability at the forefront of its R&D process (The Independent)

Example (38) offers a similarly harmonious image of joint advancement and progress conveyed as two entities proceeding *hand-in-hand*, an image of physical closeness which implies a tighter bond than the synchronised but independent movement evoked by *di pari passo* ('at the same pace') in examples (36) and (37). Just as two people holding hands move together, their clasped hands signalling both connection and, more concretely, coordinated motion, the metaphor suggests that when two abstract notions are described as being *hand-in-hand* they advance side by side, in harmony, and remain inextricably linked in purpose and pace. In this case, the companion of sustainability is innovation, a pairing that frames sustainability not as a constraint but as a catalyst for developing new products that respond to evolving environmental demands. Continuous innovation, presented as the practical expression of pursuing sustainability, produces both environmental benefits, through reduced carbon footprint and waste, and competitive advantages, as new green products become market opportunities. This framing underpins Swiftpak's discourse, the company being a packaging supplier specialising in customised, sustainable solutions. Technological and design innovation are depicted as the primary means of achieving sustainability, thereby legitimising the company's operations as ethical and socially valuable. Rather than viewing environmental regulations as constraints, Swiftpak reframes them as stimuli for further innovation, opportunities to develop materials and systems that ensure compliance while preserving efficiency. Innovation is operationalised through the R&D process, where the firm is portrayed as making a substantial effort to embed sustainability as a core element, keeping it *at the forefront* and assigning it a central role. The connection between innovation and sustainability is first established metaphorically through the scenario of them walking *hand-in-hand*; once this connection is naturalised, it provides the foundation for the subsequent argument that ongoing innovation allows Swiftpak to *introduce more sustainable products, lower its carbon footprint, and minimise waste*. The company is consequently cast in strongly positive terms: efficient, innovative, sustainable, and therefore ethical. Within this discourse, sustainable solutions are found not by reducing consumption, but by replacing less efficient modes of production and consumption with more efficient ones.

(39) La scelta di Aurora [un quartiere di Torino], quartiere «difficile», non è stata casuale e la sostenibilità andrà a braccetto con i programmi educativi per i giovani. La Onlus torinese Balon Mundial ha realizzato un progetto a lungo termine per migliorare il senso di appartenenza alla comunità, l'accesso alle strutture sportive e l'aumento della sicurezza (Corriere della Sera)

The choice of Aurora [a neighbourhood of Turin], a “difficult” neighbourhood, was not accidental, and sustainability will go arm in arm with educational programmes for young people. The Turin-based nonprofit Balon Mundial has developed a long-term project aimed at improving community belonging, access to sports facilities, and increasing safety

In example (39), sustainability is portrayed as advancing at the same pace as ‘educational programmes for young people’ (*i programmi educativi per i giovani*), but the idiom ‘will go arm in arm’ (*andrà a braccetto*) conveys more than simultaneity. The Italian expression refers literally to two people walking arm in arm, thus ensuring that they necessarily move at the same rhythm. The image of walking arm in arm implies a degree of physical closeness that exceeds the hand-in-hand pairing in example (38): linking arms suggests a tighter bond between the two entities. This is metaphorically mapped onto the notion of harmony between two entities, suggesting not merely coordination but a genuine shared purpose that underpins their concordant progress. In this sense, the phrase naturalises the compatibility of environmental and social aims, depicting them as mutually reinforcing rather than competing. It implies that the environmental initiative of a recycled football field, discussed in the article, is not just an ecological intervention but is designed to simultaneously achieve social and educational goals. In this case, the term sustainability on its own appears to denote primarily environmental sustainability, insofar as it qualifies the initiative of recycling plastic waste and offsetting CO₂ emissions. Its “companion”, the educational programmes, can in turn be categorised as in fact examples of social sustainability. The article further elaborates on this latter aspect, explaining how the nonprofit organisation is revitalising a marginalised area by improving safety, and offering structured, inclusive activities for youth (*migliorare il senso di appartenenza alla comunità, l’accesso alle strutture sportive e l’aumento della sicurezza*). Therefore, the coordinated advancement of sustainability and social initiatives is presented as translating into long-term positive repercussions on the community protagonist of these innovations, demonstrating how the figurative motion of sustainability and its harmonious progress is tied to concrete impacts.

- (40) The OECD outlined specific areas in which continued blockchain integration with sustainable infrastructure can be beneficial, including emissions certification, decentralising the financing of infrastructure, and making better use of existing infrastructure assets. “Blockchain will play an important role in the intelligent value chain, and while technology and sustainability do not always go together, the rise of blockchain and demand for improving ESG [environmental, social and corporate governance] reporting can change that” (The Guardian)

In contrast to examples (36 – 39), this concordance introduces a new perspective, inasmuch as harmony is questioned: technology and sustainability *do not always go together*. A recent report identifies several *specific areas* where deeper *blockchain integration with sustainable infrastructure* could be beneficial, for instance in the case of emissions certification or the decentralised financing of infrastructure. Yet the accompanying comment negates the previous images of an ideal match between sustainability and other elements, complicating the seamless shared movement suggested in earlier scenarios. The image of two entities failing to move together introduces dissonance and exposes a divergence. Technology can undermine sustainability if deployed without attention to environmental and social costs, for

instance, through rare mineral extraction, high energy consumption, or short product lifecycles. This formulation introduces a note of tension with respect to the earlier example, which presented innovation and sustainability as naturally going *hand-in-hand*, highlighting instead that progress in one domain does not automatically entail progress in the other. The article, however, ultimately reframes this tension as solvable, since the speaker maintains that sustainability and technology can, in fact, go together: the key is blockchain. Considering the recent developments of the blockchain, and the growing *demand for improving ESG*, he thus maintains that the blockchain can play a supportive role by enabling accurate monitoring of environmental and social impacts, especially through emissions accounting and ESG reporting. This potential contribution is currently complicated by the inherent challenges of sustainability work, including the measurement, auditing, and reporting of emissions across complex operations and supply chains. Blockchain thus becomes the entity capable of restoring coordinated movement and re-establishing the figurative synchrony.

5.2.3.2 Modes of progress

A subset of expressions depicts the introduction of sustainability as the action of entering or making its way into a specific social, economic, or institutional space. Sustainability becomes an entity newly appearing in or gaining access to contexts where it was previously absent or marginal, treating sustainability as a newcomer whose arrival alters the existing landscape. In the examples below, increasingly complex types of movement are presented.

- (41) “A incontrare domanda, una tecnologia che ci permette di produrre dei prodotti sani, freschi e di qualità, senza privare il pianeta delle sue risorse. Quando l’evoluzione sostenibile viene incontro ai consumatori fornendo risposte concrete, insieme è possibile creare un mondo nuovo con una velocità strabiliante” (La Repubblica)

“Meeting demand is a technology that allows us to produce healthy, fresh, and high-quality products without depriving the planet of its resources. When sustainable evolution meets consumers halfway by providing concrete answers, together we can create a new world with astonishing speed”

The movement is presented here in a more overtly agentive way, with ‘sustainable evolution’ (*l’evoluzione sostenibile*) depicted as taking deliberate initiative. The Italian expression *viene incontro*, rendered in English as ‘meets halfway’, does more merely denote a meeting between two entities. It evokes the image of walking toward someone to reduce the distance they must cover, a familiar figurative way of conveying an effort to accommodate another’s needs and ease their path. The underlying metaphor is therefore one of intentional motion undertaken to relieve another party’s burden. The sustainable evolution described here refers to technological and agricultural developments, specifically vertical farming, that address environmental pressures while responding to consumer expectations. This is the perspective advanced by the CEO of Planet Farms, who presents vertical farming as an evolutionary shift in agriculture that is intrinsically sustainable and simultaneously attentive to consumer

demands for healthy, fresh, high-quality food produced 'without depriving the planet of its resources' (*senza privare il pianeta delle sue risorse*).

In this framing, sustainable evolution moves toward consumers: it provides solutions that make sustainable behaviour attainable without requiring individuals to sacrifice convenience. Sustainability becomes an entity that actively endeavours to meet consumers halfway, rather than something consumers must independently strive toward. Meaningful innovation, in this view, embeds sustainability from the outset; transformative change occurs when sustainable evolution approaches consumers with concrete, practicable responses rather than abstract aspirations. Benatoff reinforces this by emphasising the rapidity of the process ('with astonishing speed', *con una velocità strabiliante*), portraying sustainable evolution as a force capable of 'creating a new world' (*creare un mondo nuovo*) at an astonishing pace once it begins to meet consumers where they are, understand their needs, and provide concrete answers and solutions.

- (42) Climate climbs the business school curriculum; Sustainability. Environmental topics are moving from fringe to mainstream, reports Sarah Murray. Given the shortfall in the skills and knowledge needed to achieve global net zero emissions by 2050, many celebrated the news in May that billionaire venture capitalist John Doerr had given \$1.1bn to establish a climate change school at Stanford University (Financial Times)

The movement attributed to sustainability becomes increasingly complex, shifting from meeting others halfway and to climbing. Example (42) groups climate, sustainability and environmental concerns under the same conceptual umbrella, and presents the innovation discussed in the article regarding them as undergoing two types of movement. The first is encoded in the title, where climate topics are described as *climbing the business school curriculum*. This metaphor evokes effort, sustained exertion and the conquest of higher ground. The curriculum is implicitly construed as structured hierarchically, akin to a vertical scale or ladder of importance, and climate-related topics are depicted as ascending through its levels, not as a passive inclusion but as an achievement comparable to a climber reaching a summit after a prolonged ascent. This interpretation is reinforced by the second figurative expression, which portrays environmental topics as *moving from fringe to mainstream*. The spatial opposition between periphery, defining marginal, specialised, or optional topics, and the core, representing instead widely adopted, essential ones, constructs the trajectory of climate education as a shift from niche to central status. The metaphor highlights both the previous marginalisation of these topics and their current repositioning as central to business education. Both modes of motion attributed to climate and environmental topic introduce a concrete initiative in the form of significant funding from a venture capitalist to establish a climate change school at Stanford University. This investment is framed as a decisive step towards addressing what is perceived as a significant deficit in *skills and knowledge* needed to confront the concrete challenges posed by the climate crisis and meeting global net-zero targets within the established timeframe. The image in the title of climbing therefore anticipates the argument developed in the article: that climate concerns are gaining relevance in the curricula of one of the most famous universities in the world, moving from the edges of business education to its core through sustained, purposeful motion.

- (43) And, while much of this may indeed be more green-wash than true commitment, there's definitely been a shift in the importance that global travel brands - including airlines - are putting on emphasising their eco-credentials. It reflects the way in which sustainability has crept up the agenda for us civilians, with events like COP26, held in Glasgow in November, and the release of the latest damning IPCC report over the summer, infiltrating the national psyche (The Independent)

In the range of nuances through which sustainability is characterised as a moving entity, example (43) selects a particularly specific manner of motion: it *has crept up the agenda*. The verb *creep up* denotes slow, almost imperceptible movement, typically quiet enough to escape attention and thus surprise or even startle whoever is being approached in such a manner. Additionally, beyond the primary sense of slow, imperceptible advancement, creeping up on someone carries connotations of stealth and latent threat, evoking the image of an entity that approaches undetected and, by the time it is noticed, is already too close to be easily dismissed. Used figuratively, it frames sustainability as having gained importance gradually and without widespread notice, so that its current centrality appears to have taken many by surprise. The article suggests that events such as COP26 in Glasgow and the publication of *the latest damning IPCC report* have pushed climate concerns further into the public consciousness. The adjective *damning* underscores the severity of the report's findings and helps explain why this issue, once treated as peripheral, has acquired, rather unexpectedly, a sense of urgency.

The metaphor of creeping up therefore captures a shift in perception: sustainability has not arrived with grand announcements, nor been forced onto the agenda, but has advanced quietly until it became impossible to ignore. This increasing prominence is reflected in the behaviour of global travel brands, including airlines, which have begun to emphasise their environmental credentials. The article acknowledges that much of this may amount to greenwashing rather than substantive commitment, yet the rhetorical need for companies to present themselves as environmentally responsible is itself portrayed as evidence of how far sustainability has moved up the hierarchy of concerns. The metaphor thus conveys two ideas at once. First, that the rise of sustainability has been incremental rather than abrupt, shaped by accumulating signals such as international climate conferences and alarming scientific reports, conferring concreteness to the serious consequence of unsustainable behaviours. Secondly, that its ascent has altered expectations across sectors: companies now feel compelled to acknowledge ecological issues that were previously overlooked or avoided, even if the authenticity of their claims remains questionable. The creeping motion encapsulates a shift that is both stealthy and subtle in its development and striking in its consequences, revealing how sustainability has come to occupy a far more central position in public discourse and corporate self-presentation than before.

- (44) Carne, green strategico per un terzo della filiera «Nella filiera delle carni e dei salumi la sostenibilità fatica ancora a farsi strada. Nonostante l'elevata attenzione di consumatori e policy-maker, in Italia solo il 30% delle aziende adotta approcci sostenibili strutturati in fatto di pianificazione strategica, rendicontazione, comunicazione» [da un'indagine di Altis, Alta Scuola Impresa e Società dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore] (Il Sole 24 Ore)

Meat, green is strategic for a third of the supply chain. "Sustainability is still struggling to make headway in the meat and cured meats supply chain. Despite the high level of attention from consumers and policymakers, in Italy only 30% of companies adopt structured sustainable approaches in terms of strategic planning, reporting, and communication" [from a study by Altis, Alta Scuola Impresa e Società of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore]

The expression 'is still struggling to make headway' (*fatica ancora a farsi strada*) in example (44) introduces an explicit element of difficulty into the kind of movement attributed to sustainability. Whereas earlier metaphors depicted the motion of sustainability as successful, here its progress is framed as an ongoing effort whose outcome is uncertain. The metaphor presupposes a path that must be opened and a terrain that resists advancement. Progress is therefore neither automatic nor smooth: sustainability must carve out space for itself or overcome obstacles that impede its advance. The emphasis on struggling marks this movement as something that does not unfold easily or naturally, despite surrounding conditions that might otherwise be expected to facilitate it. The data that follows reinforces this image of impeded progression. Despite the *high level of attention from consumers and policymakers* ('l'elevata attenzione di consumatori e policy-maker'), which would normally create both regulatory and market incentives to adopt sustainable practices, only 30% of companies in the Italian meat and cured meats supply chain adopt *structured sustainable approaches* ('approcci sostenibili strutturati'). These measures, consisting of *strategic planning, reporting, and communication* ('pianificazione strategica, rendicontazione, comunicazione'), are implemented by only a minority of firms, and this low uptake is what makes sustainability appear as something that struggles to make inroads. Within this framing, sustainability is cast as an actor encountering friction in an established system that resists structural transformation. The metaphor points toward forms of active obstruction, which might be due to institutional habits, operational priorities, or cultural resistance, even though the text does not identify which mechanisms are responsible. Sustainability is not portrayed as a policy choice that firms naturally adopt, and thus depending on their initiative, but rather as an entity independently attempting to enter the sector and forced to negotiate space for itself. This framing highlights a structural tension: while external expectations from consumers and policymakers intensify, internal transformation remains limited, creating a gap between external demand for sustainability and internal implementation.

5.2.3.3 Momentum

This section examines expressions in which sustainability, or the ESG principles associated with it, is endowed with autonomous momentum, advancing along a trajectory that other participants must either pursue or yield to. Whereas previous sections within this scenario depicted sustainability moving in coordination with other entities or making its way into new domains, the focus here shifts to a more pronounced sense of independent motion: the entity drives forward with such force that engagement becomes a matter of keeping pace or of accepting an inevitable advance.

- (45) Un legno a km zero che racconta l'altra grande anima di Itlas [produttore italiano di pavimenti in legno]: «Rincorriamo in maniera maniacale l'eco-sostenibilità nel solco di un percorso green iniziato negli anni 2000» (Corriere della Sera)

A zero-mile wood that reflects the other great soul of Itlas [an Italian wooden flooring manufacturer]: "We obsessively chase eco-sustainability, following the track of a green path that began in the 2000s"

The verb 'chase' (*rincorriamo*) assigns to sustainability the role of an entity that moves ahead of the company, requiring ongoing effort, vigilance, and determination to reach it. Rather than framing sustainability as something already secured or fully internalised, the founder of Itlas, a manufacturer of wooden flooring and interior surfaces, presents it as an entity that is constantly in motion, and that the firm must actively pursue. The literal meaning of *rincorrere*, to run after someone or something that is moving away, foregrounds this asymmetry: sustainability advances on its own trajectory, while Itlas continually strives to catch up. This framing intensifies the sense of strenuous commitment, emphasised by the founder's description of pursuing sustainability 'obsessively' (*in maniera maniacale*). Ecological responsibility is not simply a corporate value but an integral part of the 'soul' (*anima*) of the company, making the pursuit existential rather than strategic. At the same time, the metaphor constructs sustainable implementation as an inherently unstable and evolving process: each achievement shifts the endpoint further along, requiring renewed exertion. The company's efforts are implicitly cast as exceptional because they involve constant, disciplined chasing of a goal that never stands still.

The expression 'following the track of a green path' (*nel solco di un percorso green*) further anchors this pursuit in a long-term trajectory. The original Italian *solco* ('furrow') evokes a pre-established track shaped gradually through work and care, drawing on agricultural imagery to suggest depth, continuity, and discipline rather than abrupt change. It signals that the company's environmental commitments are not opportunistic or recent but cultivated over decades. Paired together, the two figurative expressions allow the speaker to present this narrative: Itlas is following a deeply rooted, carefully maintained green path, while simultaneously exploiting this already established foundation to sustain the prolonged effort to chase sustainability goals that are perpetually ahead. This enhances the image of a firm that is guided by sustainability at every step, yet never considers the work complete.

- (46) "I just don't want to go there, it's too sensitive," said one London-based fund manager. "The ESG net zero zeitgeist is so all powerful you just can't stand in its way." Global sustainable fund assets have almost tripled in the past three years (Financial Times)

In example (46), ESG principles are framed as an unstoppable force advancing through the financial world. Defining them as a *zeitgeist* already confers particular significance, imbuing ESG with the status of the general spirit of the period. This *ESG net zero zeitgeist* is depicted as inexorably advancing within the asset management industry, with a momentum so great that obstruction seems impossible, as *you just can't stand in its way*. Unlike prior metaphors where sustainability climbs, creeps, struggles, or is pursued, this representation conveys inevitability: cultural and market pressures around ESG appear all-powerful, leaving little

room for dissent. The fund manager's words suggest not only recognition of this momentum but also a sense of impotence, as objecting to ESG norms feels akin to attempting to physically block a sweeping, unstoppable motion. Sustainability is advancing with such force that standing in its way is not merely difficult but rather inconceivable, highlighting both the momentum of ESG principles and the anxiety their perceived inevitability generates within the financial sector. Describing ESG as *all-powerful* further imbues it with an almost dangerous force, suggesting that resistance would be futile or potentially even costly. The fund manager using this metaphor perceives this cultural shift in the market as unavoidable, and from this perception stems a critical perspective on this change. The figurative expression encodes a negative connotation, foregrounding an ideological adoption that discourages discussion, critique or nuanced adjustments.

5.2.4 Acceleration

Within the subset of 54 examples in this section, JOURNEY remains the overarching source domain, but the focus shifts from direction or path to acceleration. Since purposeful activities are conceptualised as self-propelled motion, their rate of progress is understood through the SPEED OF MOVEMENT mapping (Lakoff, 1993; Radden, 1996). Therefore, increases in the intensity or rate of action are mapped onto increases in speed, and speed itself becomes an indicator of effectiveness or success. If progress “gathers pace”, this implies that the previous pace was insufficient, either because it began late or because the measures implemented were too limited even after the necessity to move was formally recognised. Thus, the metaphor does not merely describe movement; it evaluates it. Whereas more generic JOURNEY metaphors tend to convey a sense of steady, reassuring advancement, the ACCELERATION framing introduces a sense of urgency and pressure to intensify efforts. This parallels other metaphors in the corpus, such as those drawing on the WAR domain, implying that the current rate of the sustainability transition is inadequate relative to the scale of the problem. Modulating speed therefore becomes a way of modulating commitment: acceleration is presented as positive, signalling the need to compensate for earlier inertia or for delays rooted in political or corporate reluctance to confront environmental risks. This scenario does not focus on the path undertaken or the destination to be reached: it foregrounds the mode of travel, and, pre specifically the requirement to change the rate at which movement occurs.

Lexically, this scenarios manifests itself through the use of the verb *accelerate*, occurring 6 times, and its Italian counterpart *accelerare*, found 12 times in the infinitive and 14 cumulative times across inflected forms. Related terms include the nouns *accelerazione* (‘acceleration’, 8 occurrences) and *acceleratore* (‘accelerator’, 5), while other lexical items reinforcing this semantic field are the modifier *faster* (2), the verb *velocizzare* (‘to speed up’, 1), and the noun *speed* (1). A sharper change in pace is also conveyed through nouns of kinetic action lexicalising manner rather than path, such as *salto* (‘jump’, 3 occurrences), *balzo* (‘leap’, 2), and *corsa* (‘run’, 1). Finally, terms such as *verso* (‘toward’, 6 occurrences) and *raggiungere*

(‘to reach’) and related lexical items totalling 3 occurrences, direct this intensified motion toward specific goals or destinations. The examples discussed below illustrate how this ACCELERATION scenario is deployed to frame the sustainability transition as both overdue and urgently in need of intensification.

(47) All three retailers have signed up to Textiles 2030, an initiative co-ordinated by the UK charity Waste and Resources Action Programme, to accelerate moves to greater sustainability in fashion. Fashion, especially the cheaper fastfashion end of the business, has faced growing scrutiny about the environmental impact of its products (Financial Times)

(48) La pagella dei consoli di tutto il mondo: Milano città da 7,5. Usare le Olimpiadi come «acceleratore di sostenibilità». È la raccomandazione che arriva all’Italia - e a Milano in particolare - dai consoli di mezzo mondo, riuniti ieri alla Camera di Commercio (Corriere della Sera)

The report card from consuls around the world: Milan gets a 7.5. Using the Olympics as a “sustainability accelerator”. This is the recommendation coming to Italy - and Milan in particular - from consuls from around the world, gathered yesterday at the Chamber of Commerce

In example (47), the call to *accelerate moves* toward sustainability emerges only after establishing the urgent need for change, since fast fashion faces growing scrutiny over its environmental damage, reflecting growing awareness of how industry practices harm ecosystems. The phenomenon of overconsumption, driven by increasingly cheap clothing, generates severe consequences: excessive carbon emissions, intensive water use, and massive textile waste. Significantly, the language of accelerating rather than initiating the transition presupposes that fast fashion is already in motion towards the destination of *greater sustainability*. Moreover, qualifying the goal as *greater sustainability*, and not simply *sustainability*, suggests that a certain “amount” of sustainable practice already. In practical terms, acceleration manifests through multiple channels: more rigorous regulatory enforcement against greenwashing requiring transparent claims; independent industry-led collaborations like *Textiles 2030* establishing ambitious collective sustainability targets; and clearer communication to consumers about environmental impact paired with incentives for sustainable options. Thus, the discursive construction of fast fashion needing to increase its pace of sustainability implementation performs a dual function: it conveys a critique of current practices, while recognising that to some extent initiative has already been taken.

Example (48) similarly builds on the same scenario, introducing the term “*acceleratore di sostenibilità*” (‘sustainability accelerator’), explicitly marked by the inverted commas. In Italian, this term denotes both in general terms something that fulfils the function of accelerating, and, more specifically, the gas pedal in a vehicle. This dual meaning evokes a driving scenario wherein intensifying an activity corresponds to pressing the accelerator to drive faster. Once again, the JOURNEY metaphor presupposes sustainability initiatives already in motion in Milan, evidenced by the city’s 7.5 rating for existing projects of urban transformations in terms of infrastructure and new green spaces. The exhortation to use the Olympics as an *acceleratore* frames the event as a catalyst with a fixed deadline that would

speed up timelines and stimulate more ambitious projects. Rather than initiating sustainability from zero, the Olympics can propel existing sustainability efforts forward at an accelerated pace. In both examples, the framing validates existing initiatives as meaningful steps requiring intensification.

5.2.4.1 Pressing on the gas pedal

In this section the driving scenario implicit in example (48), using *acceleratore*, becomes fully developed, with sustainability conceptualised as a vehicle whose speed can be regulated.

- (49) C'è anche un altro tema, a spingere le imprese tedesche a rivedere la catena delle forniture in un'ottica più vicina, ed è quello della tutela dell'ambiente. Non ci sono solo gli obiettivi dell'Agenda 2030, o le richieste dei consumatori più giovani, a spingere sull'acceleratore della sostenibilità: il numero dei distributori che hanno richiesto ai loro fornitori di essere green è aumentato del 24% (Il Sole 24 Ore)

Another issue is also pushing German companies to rethink their supply chains from a more sustainable perspective: environmental protection. There aren't only the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, or the demands of younger consumers, pressing on the gas pedal of sustainability: the number of distributors who have requested their suppliers to be green has increased by 24%

Sustainability efforts, and more specifically, 'the objectives of the 2030 Agenda' (*gli obiettivi dell'Agenda 2030*) and 'the demands of younger consumers' (*le richieste dei consumatori più giovani*), among others, are portrayed in the text as 'pressing on the gas pedal' (*spingere sull'acceleratore della sostenibilità*), overtly physicalising the notion of acceleration as propulsion of a vehicle. This formulation maps the concept of intensifying action onto the domain of driving, equating the notion of increasing effort with that of stepping on the gas pedal to gain speed. In this specific context, the metaphor thus constructs sustainability as a vehicle in motion whose speed can be controlled through the gas pedal, and the action of pushing on it as transmitting more impetus to the movement. The notion of exerting pressure is already introduced with a more conventional PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor, where it is the primary issue foregrounded here, 'environmental protection' (*tutela dell'ambiente*), motivating German companies to adopt more sustainable supply chain perspectives. By constructing a specific scenario wherein sustainability possesses a gas pedal requiring active pressure, the text necessarily sets up the need for agents occupying the driver's seat and performing the pushing action, motivated by the cause of environmental protection. Significantly, three concurrent forces are constructed as "pedal-pushers": firstly, the UN's 2030 Agenda goals, creating obligation through institutional pressure. Then, the demands of younger consumers, creating market pressure and challenging companies to maintain competitiveness. Lastly, and more tangibly, the requirements of distributors, whose demand for green suppliers has notably increased, is foregrounded. The latter is presented as the most measurable and immediate force: the 24% increase in distributors demanding green suppliers provides quantifiable evidence of acceleration. The extract thus frames the

sustainability push as collective in nature, with institutions, consumers, and retailers converging to propel German companies toward supply chain revision. To extend this metaphor, if these three agents collectively occupy the driver's seat, determining direction, speed, and intensity of effort, then German companies function as passengers adapting to driver demands and modifying practices to maintain their place in the vehicle. Hence, the metaphor frames companies' rethinking as a necessary accommodation to externally imposed acceleration rather than a voluntary initiative.

5.2.4.2 Forms of intensified motion

Examples (50 – 53) illustrate the range of lexical realisations through which intensified motion is encoded in the corpus, from incremental adjustments framed as an additional step to more pronounced changes of pace conveyed as a jump or as a call to pick up the pace. Across these instances, the metaphorical exhortation to modify the speed of progress is paired with varying degrees of concrete substantiation, revealing how the ACCELERATION scenario can either accompany tangible commitment or function as a rhetorical positioning unsupported by actual change.

- (50) Nonostante le risorse ingenti a disposizione (avviate dall'ex ministro Delrio con fondi nazionali, poi implementate dal Pnrr [Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza] e dai fondi complementari voluti dal ministro Giovannini), si dovrebbe fare ancora un passo in più per accelerare il percorso della sostenibilità e cogliere a pieno l'opportunità data dal Recovery: per raggiungere l'obiettivo dei 7,2 anni servono ancora cinquemila nuovi autobus (Il Sole 24 Ore)

Despite the substantial resources available (initiated by former minister Delrio with national funds, then implemented by the PNRR [Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan] and complementary funds requested by minister Giovannini), one more step should still be taken to accelerate the path of sustainability and fully seize the opportunity provided by the Recovery: to reach the target of 7.2 years, five thousand new buses are still needed

This passage presents sustainability as a path being followed; however, the movement is not framed in terms of going towards a definite destination. Rather, the focus is on the ongoing progress along 'the path of sustainability' (*il percorso della sostenibilità*). This process is, however, not advancing at the required pace, despite the substantial investments referred to in the article, and requires 'one more step' (*un passo in più*) to achieve the desired rate of progress to meet a tangible, quantifiable target: reaching the European benchmark of an average fleet age of 7.2 years. Fleet age, that is, the mean age of vehicles in service, is a key indicator of sustainability progress in public transport, as a younger fleet implies the replacement of older, higher-emission vehicles with newer, lower-emission models. The recognition of a path functions to convey a positive sense of continuity, while the call to take 'one more step' acknowledges a degree of inadequacy in the current pace of the process. The

adverb ‘still’ (*ancora*) and the intensifier ‘more’ (*in più*) signal an ongoing process that needs additional impetus, while the metaphorical use of ‘step’ (*passo*) frames this additional effort as feasible rather than drastic. It marks a reasonable, actionable increment within a longer journey, a manageable manner of causing the desired acceleration rather than a radical overhaul. This step is made explicit: purchasing 5,000 additional buses beyond those already financed, in order to renovate the fleet more extensively and close the gap with the European average more rapidly. In this context, progress is measured in concrete, empirical terms: the reduction of fleet age becomes the quantifiable indicator of movement along the path toward sustainability. It serves as an ideal metric, inasmuch as it is objective, gradual, and directly correlated with emissions reduction. Finally, foregrounding the ‘opportunity provided by the Recovery Fund’ (*opportunità data dal Recovery*) as a fleeting window of external support that can accelerate Italy’s transition introduces a sense of possibility and urgency. The deontic construction ‘should be taken’ (*si dovrebbe fare*) encodes a stance of preference rather than obligation, while the impersonal *si*-construction suppresses explicit agentivity, allowing the actor responsible for implementing the action to remain unexpressed. The passage constructs sustainability as a collective, goal-oriented process progressing at a measurable pace that is, crucially, open to acceleration in order to reach the destination in time. While the framing remains broadly positive, given the acknowledgement of progress and the potential for increased speed, the need for additional momentum is once again central to the scenario evoked.

- (51) «La sostenibilità è un fatto concreto, puntuale e trasparente - dice [Angelo Radici, presidente di RadiciGroup] -. Presentiamo il Bilancio di Sostenibilità in anticipo rispetto allo scorso anno, questo è già un grosso salto. Stiamo investendo molto denaro e soprattutto molto tempo, per migliorarci sempre più. Conta la concretezza» (Corriere della Sera)

“Sustainability is a concrete, punctual, and transparent fact”, he [Angelo Radici, president of RadiciGroup] says. “We are presenting the Sustainability Report ahead of schedule compared to last year, this is already a big jump. We are investing a lot of money and especially a lot of time, to improve ourselves more and more. What counts is concreteness”

In example (51), the speaker frames the company’s progress as ‘a big jump’ (*un grosso salto*), signalling a meaningful advance in sustainability reporting and corporate responsibility. The metaphor presents acceleration as an abrupt, concentrated burst that produces a noticeable shift in position, implicitly valuing punctual breakthroughs over gradual, incremental advancement. By presenting the Sustainability Report ahead of schedule, the company is positioned as demonstrating enhanced transparency and accountability regarding its environmental and social performance. Sustainability is not seen as an abstract ideal but as ‘a concrete, punctual, and transparent fact’ (*la sostenibilità è un fatto concreto, puntuale e trasparente*), a principle substantiated by the data in the report. Thus, in concrete terms, what the speaker is framing as the ‘big jump’ is simply presenting a Sustainability Report ahead of schedule, something that might seem minor in isolation. However, it is the discursive construction around this jump that makes it noteworthy: the report itself becomes the embodiment of sustainability as measurable, visible, and verifiable. Ultimately, what he presents as progress is not a sudden leap but the culmination of sustained effort. The phrase

‘a lot of money and especially a lot of time’ (*molto denaro e soprattutto molto tempo*) is revealing in this respect: both nouns are governed by the verb ‘are investing’ (*stiamo investendo*), which conventionally collocates with money but is here extended to time, activating the widespread conventional metaphor TIME IS MONEY. Time, the resource singled out with the intensifier ‘especially’ (*soprattutto*), is thus construed as an asset to be allocated strategically, reinforcing the image of sustainability as a matter of disciplined, long-term commitment. As the final statement asserts ‘what counts is concreteness’ (*conta la concretezza*); therefore, the report, clearly constituting tangible, measurable proof of actual commitment towards sustainability, does in fact contextually represent ‘a big jump’, marking an improvement from the previous year.

(52) More than 6,000 senior officials, scientists and activists from more than 120 countries attended a five-day U.N. Ocean Conference in Lisbon, Portugal. A declaration published on the final day said delegates were “deeply alarmed by the global emergency facing the ocean,” whose sustainability is “critical” for the planet. The declaration said that “action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet our goals”. “Greater ambition is required at all levels to address the dire state of the ocean” (The Independent)

(53) In 2007 Virgin Atlantic set a target of a 30% reduction in CO₂ per revenue tonne kilometre (CO₂/RTK) by 2020, which the company later described as “a big target and we’re sticking with it”, according to the report. In a 2014 sustainability report, with a reduction in CO₂/RTK of only 8% from baseline, the airline admitted: “We’re nearly halfway through our target period and know we have to pick up the pace” (The Guardian)

The previously suggested risk of insufficient progress is an established fact in examples (52) and (53): in the first concordance, the speed at which progress is being made with regard to protecting the oceans is too slow and too limited to achieve the goals set by the international community in SDG 14 “Life Below Water”, meant to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”. The issue is presented as a *global emergency* due to the *dire state* of the oceans, yet the delegates feel that the approach lacks sufficient consideration of how critical reversing these problems is. Protracted negotiations and gaps between declarations and actual implementation are resulting in failure to meet protection goals before irreversible damage occurs. The journey toward sustainability in terms of ocean protection is underway, through measures reversing ocean degradation or reducing pollution, but it is lagging behind schedule and not advancing at the pace demanded by the severity of the crisis. Within the logic set in the ACCELERATION scenario, if a specific speed is required to reach the target, and progress continues below that threshold, acceleration becomes necessary. This is not explicitly formulated in terms of a need to speed up, but rather by calling for *greater ambition* to match the urgency of the situation and fix the current inadequate speed. Once again, acceleration is positioned as necessary due to temporal pressure, inasmuch as ocean ecosystems are approaching irreversible tipping points, and achievable through conscious initiative.

While example (52) is situated in the institutional framework of a U.N. Conference, example (53) reports instead the point of view of an airway company, Virgin Atlantic Airways. Airlines have increasingly come under scrutiny due to their role in the emission of CO₂, stemming

from their reliance on fossil fuels for their airplanes. Therefore, there has been a general tendency among them to set targets in order to reduce to some extent their emissions; in this specific case, this amounted to initially setting an official commitment to a *30% reduction*. The airline company is the main participant, representing itself as a traveller and establishing a destination to be reached, as the specific objective of reaching a certain amount of emissions reduction. This is evaluated positively by being described as *a big target*, that they maintain to be actively pursuing in the temporal constraints explicitly delineated with a deadline in 2020. However, the subsequent sustainability report acknowledges difficulties in sticking with the plan for this big target: the airline is halfway through the target period, with the timeline expressed in spatial terms, and the actual reduction in CO₂ does not reflect the expected value resulting from linear progress, suggesting that the track Virgin Atlantic is on will lead the airline to missing the 2020 target by a wide margin. The company thus acknowledges it is not going fast enough, representing itself as an entity walking and taking on the obligation to *pick up the pace*. This is presented in terms of modality with the deontic *have to*, emphasising the binding nature of their carbon reduction targets and their acknowledgement that faster action is necessary to meet their deadline. Failing to do so would expose the target as empty rhetoric, damaging corporate credibility and undermining claims of environmental responsibility. That is, in fact, what happens: as the article goes on to explain, in the next annual report the initial *big target* is dropped with no explanation and a new, considerably less ambitious one of 15% reduction by 2026 instead of 30% by 2020 is announced. The original commitment is effectively abandoned and replaced with a watered-down substitute, reducing the cut in emissions and extending the timeline to do so. The pace has not, evidently, been picked up, retroactively conferring to the JOURNEY metaphor the status of mere positioning, not substantiated by actual actions. Virgin acknowledged the need to accelerate to demonstrate awareness and commitment, without the acknowledgement transforming into actually solving the issues highlighted.

Previous examples paired the call for modifying the speed of motion, and thus action, with concrete initiatives such as the sustainability report published by a company or the purchase of five thousand new buses to renew the fleet. While in all cases, evoking an ACCELERATION scenario demonstrates awareness of the issue, it is the subsequent steps undertaken that differentiate whether the figurative language was merely supporting an empty positioning or framing in immediate terms an actual willingness to enact change.

5.2.5 Constrained Motion

Within the JOURNEY domain, difficulties are often conceptualised as impediments to motion (Lakoff, 1993) or wrong paths leading into cul-de-sacs (Musolff, 2004). This scenario comprises 49 metaphors where the central notion is that of some element such as an obstruction, slowdown or deviation, that is disruptive of regular progress in a journey which ideally would entail moving forward unimpeded. The focus is on the moments when that motion is resisted, diverted, or even reversed, not by choice of who is implementing the

movement, but due to factors causing friction. Therefore, a variety of difficulties in implementing sustainability are seen as obstacles. The underlying schema shifts from control over progress and pace in the ACCELERATION scenario to loss of traction: progress is portrayed as uncertain, obstructed by barriers, diverted by temporary deviations, or undone altogether. These metaphors expose the criticalities of a journey, showing that even when the destination is clear, the motion toward it can be uneven or reversible, and the prospect of progress along the metaphorical path is no longer linear or assured. Due to this category having relatively fewer examples, and most of these examples constructing a more articulate scenario where various elements concur in evoking an image where there is a motion and some kind of obstacle or friction, the general tendencies in terms of lexical items are less indicative of tendencies in the data. However, it can still be observed that the adverb *indietro* ('backwards') is the most common lexical item, with 16 occurrences. While the generic terms *percorso* ('path') and *strada* ('road') appear 7 and 5 times respectively, within more extended constructions that foreground impediment to movement, the next more salient terms include *hurdles* (3), *slowing* (2), the nouns *freno* ('brake', 2) and *frenata* ('braking', 1), as well as *detours* (1) and *barrier* (1). The examples reveal a spectrum of impediments and impairments to sustainability progress, ranging from friction that merely hampers movement to full reversal of direction. In the former case, temporary resistance signifies that progress remains possible but demands effort against opposing forces, and a notion of irregularity can be introduced, since movement might be portrayed as persisting but losing rhythm. The notion of deviation is made explicit in phrases with bend or detour, where movement is temporarily deflected from the intended trajectory yet remains recoverable, suggesting a temporary, remediable departure rather than a collapse. Finally, some metaphors foreground instead the more critical notion of a reversal of direction, denoting how the optimism encoded in talking about the sustainability journey most of the time tends to sideline the notion that such a journey is always subject to the risk of not only stalling, but even going backwards, cancelling progress that has already been made. All of these nuances are explored and discussed in specific context through the concordances illustrated below.

5.2.5.1 Barriers

These expressions frame obstacles as sources of friction or drag that create resistance along the path and slow momentum rather than as insurmountable barriers or forces causing regression. Progress becomes harder, requiring greater effort to advance, but movement is not stopped or reversed.

- (54) Aviation faces hurdles to hit goals for cutting emissions [...] Last September, airline leaders and President Joe Biden touted an agreement to cut aircraft emissions 20% by 2030 by producing 3 billion gallons of SAF by then and replacing all conventional jet fuel by 2050. Climate experts praised the idea but said the voluntary targets are overly optimistic (The Independent)

The metaphor employed in the title frames aviation as an agent on a journey, confronting obstacles along its path. The destination is cutting carbon emissions, an issue to which the aviation industry contributes significantly. This presents a fundamental problem: the most immediate solution would require reducing the number of flights, something airlines are reluctant to consider for economic reasons. Consequently, alternative solutions are frequently put forward, such as Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), which is discussed repeatedly throughout the corpus. As the article notes, *airline leaders and President Joe Biden* set an ambitious goal to cut emissions significantly by 2030 through producing *3 billion gallons of SAF* annually, with a definitive pivot to SAF by 2050. The journey metaphor thus establishes clear elements: a traveller (the aviation industry), a path (developing and producing SAF), and a destination (exclusive reliance on SAF), all within specific temporal constraints. However, the notion of *hurdles* along this path signals that this goal appears considerably challenging, with experts defining it as *overly optimistic*. The hurdles, notably in the plural form, range from slow improvements in the efficiency of aircraft engines to the current levels of production of SAF, well below the target initially envisioned. The production process itself presents another obstacle: SAF costs approximately three times more than conventional jet fuel. These challenges are compounded by a paradox: as demand for air travel continues to increase, the limited efficiency gains risk being cancelled by a growing volume of carbon-emitting planes, suggesting that these hurdles, combined with rising demand, might even lead to regression rather than progress.

These concrete, multifaceted issues significantly hinder aviation's *touted* goals of cutting emissions, casting serious doubt on both the feasibility and timeline of the proposed measures. The path is obstructed by barriers at every stage, suggesting that reaching the destination by 2050 may require either removing far more hurdles than currently anticipated or fundamentally reconsidering the route itself.

(55) Un problema che resta da affrontare nella Penisola, si legge nel report, è quello della burocrazia: è importante snellire le procedure, rimuovendo le barriere amministrative e informative che scoraggiano gli investimenti sostenibili. Ed è necessario fornire una direzione strategica coerente sugli investimenti sostenibili e garantirne l'effettiva implementazione (La Repubblica)

A problem that remains to be addressed in the Peninsula, the report notes, is that of bureaucracy: it is important to streamline the procedures, removing the administrative and informative barriers that discourage sustainable investments. It is also necessary to provide a coherent strategic direction for sustainable investments and to ensure their effective implementation

Example (55) employs a lexically similar term to *hurdles*, *barriers* ('barriere'), to depict obstacles that stand in the way of sustainable investments, effectively discouraging them (*che scoraggiano gli investimenti sostenibili*). The reference to the *Peninsula* ('Penisola') situates the issue within the Italian context, foregrounding the systemic and structural nature of the challenges described. Such difficulties are construed as barriers, preventing passage and thus blocking the forward motion along a path toward a goal. According to the report discussed here, initiatives seeking to invest money toward sustainable measures face two main categories of obstruction: bureaucratic complexity, slow procedures, regulatory constraints

(administrative barriers) and lack of the clear communication, guidance, and transparency (informative barriers). These structural issues are identified as discouraging initiatives with regard to sustainable investments, preventing them from going forwards. At the same time, clear solutions functioning to remove (*rimuovendo*) said barriers are indicated, in the form of streamlining procedures (*snellire le procedure*), in order to provide a strategic direction (*una direzione strategica*) for these investments; it is through this direction that it is ensured they will actually come to fruition. The addition of the verb ‘removing’ enhances the materiality of the image, evoking a physical act of lifting an object out of the way, making the path accessible again. This physicality underscores the idea that the obstacles are not immovable; they are objects placed in the path by human systems and can therefore be displaced through deliberate intervention.

The introduction of direction extends the metaphor beyond the simple act of clearing obstacles: it is not sufficient to allow motion by eliminating barriers. Motion must unfold along a coherent and purposeful route. According to the report’s recommendations, ensuring that sustainable investments are actually implemented requires establishing such a route, making it clear to potential investors where and how they should proceed. While opaque regulations operate as barriers, clear and streamlined ones function as directional aids. Extending the journey metaphor further, these regulatory clarifications function as road signs guiding travellers along the path to sustainability, shifting the imagery from obstruction and removal to orientation, coordination, and directed forward movement.

(56) While some clients [of UK wealth managers] have reframed their approach to energy investments in the light of the crisis and the jump in oil, gas and coal prices, most are committed to the net zero agenda and companies that take account of environmental, social and governance (ESG) values. Wealth managers told FT Money investors remained faithful to sustainability despite the “short-term headwinds” against it. Admittedly, big ESG-based funds have been battered (Financial Times)

In example (56), the obstacles impeding the advancement of sustainability are characterised as *headwinds*, once again evoking something that prevents a journey from progressing smoothly and at the desired pace. This term generally qualifies a wind blowing against the direction of travel, and it readily evokes a wind blowing directly against the bow of a ship. Its metaphorical use is conventional enough to be registered in dictionaries with its figurative meaning of “a circumstance or factor which inhibits progress, recovery, etc.” (OED). Within the text, the metaphor is explicitly signalled through inverted commas, marking the figurative nature of the expression. The specific headwinds identified involve the crisis instantiated by the Ukraine war and the subsequent *jump in oil, gas and coal prices*, which caused fossil fuel stocks to soar. Simultaneously, ESG funds suffered poor performance, described as having been *battered*, a metaphor of physical assault that conveys the severity of their underperformance through imagery of violence and damage. These factors have influenced investors, leading to the effect captured by the *headwinds* metaphor. Notably, this characterisation differs from the notion of evoking barriers or hurdles. While those evoke fixed, physical objects that impede movement and must somehow be overcome or surmounted, headwinds inherently imply temporality. Like winds that rise and fall,

headwinds constitute a present menace, that is nevertheless temporary, expected to dissipate without requiring active intervention in the form of removal, but rather to be endured. This transient feature is further reinforced by the temporal adjectival modifier *short-term*, which further diminishes the magnitude of the threat. The noun already encodes a transitory setback requiring resistance rather than problem-solving; the adjective adds the notion that such resistance will only be necessary for a brief period of time. Additionally, in a latter part of the article this image is extended through the complex construction *important tailwinds to define the structural drivers behind the sustainability trends* (see section 5.2.2.2), contrasting fleeting opposition to enduring support. This scenario acts as a justification for the reported attitude of wealth managers, who assert that investors have *remained faithful* to ESG investing. The choice of the adjective *faithful* is particularly significant, since it denotes a kind of commitment which is not a rational, evidence-based calculation but rather a faith-based conviction. This framing suggests that ESG investing transcends mere profit optimisation, operating instead as a matter of principle or belief that persists regardless of temporary setbacks. The scenario thus highlights difficulties in the financial world while simultaneously framing them as fleeting inconveniences rather than structural problems. Unlike the *hurdles* facing aviation, which cast doubt on the feasibility of achieving stated goals, the noun *headwinds* suggest obstacles that will naturally dissipate with time. Rather than acknowledging significant barriers requiring specific solutions in order to climb over them, the wealth managers whose opinion is reported here position these challenges as temporary weather conditions that merely require investors to remain steadfast until more favourable winds return. The journey, in this framing, need not be rerouted or reconsidered; it simply requires patience and perseverance until conditions improve.

5.2.5.2 Uncertain steps

In these examples, motion is not directly impeded by an element construed as a barrier; rather, it is slowed down or disrupted by difficulties that are conceptualised within the scenarios as factors affecting the dynamics of movement, rendering it more irregular, unstable, and less predictable.

- (57) Si diffonde la cultura dell'energia pulita come leva utile alla competitività ed è un passo avanti rilevante per la salvaguardia del Pianeta. Un tragitto, quello verso la sostenibilità, che viene percorso a marce alterne. L'industria si dedica alla produzione di ciò che ha un mercato e se, nonostante il crescente impegno ambientale, ci sono segmenti in cui si procede con passo incerto, occorre che i consumatori si facciano delle domande (La Repubblica)

The culture of clean energy is spreading as a lever for competitiveness and a significant step forward in safeguarding the planet. The journey toward sustainability, however, is being taken in fits and starts. Industry produces what has a market, and if, despite growing environmental commitment, there are sectors where progress moves forward with an uncertain step, consumers themselves must start asking questions

The passage articulates a complex scenario, first evoking a 'step forward' (*passo avanti*) represented by the industry's growing sensitivity towards renewable energy sources and the spreading culture of clean energy, which can function as a lever for competitiveness. Such a step is qualified as 'significant' (*rilevante*), underscoring its importance. Thus, progress in environmental awareness and commitment within the industry is initially established as a positive development that has advanced the journey forward. However, a disruptive element is then introduced: the observation that this journey towards sustainability, despite this forward step, contains critical contradictions, depicted as motion proceeding in fits and starts. The Italian phrase *a marce alterne* refers directly to vehicle gears, evoking the image of different vehicles, representing different companies or industry sectors, travelling along the same road but in different gears and thus at different speeds. The metaphor captures movement at an irregular, shifting pace, revealing unevenness in the level of commitment to advancing on the journey. What this scenario communicates, therefore, is that not all entities involved in this journey are proceeding at the same speed in a unified effort; some demonstrate less inclination to shift into higher gear. This is exemplified by a stark contradiction: while awareness of renewable energy and clean energy, framed not only as environmentally important but also as enhancing corporate competitiveness, has increased, the use of synthetic textile fibres, which are highly polluting and less durable, continues to grow simultaneously. Companies focusing on renewable energy can be conceptualised as having shifted into higher gear and thus proceeding at greater speed, while those still heavily using synthetic textiles remain in lower gear. The framing emphasises this contradiction: the industry moves towards renewable energy and clean energy culture, yet synthetic fibre use keeps expanding, causing the journey towards sustainability to proceed 'with an uncertain step' (*con passo incerto*) in certain segments, rather than maintaining steady, consistent forward progress.

Once again, when discussing industry motivation, the text foregrounds competitiveness. Clean energy culture is first presented as spreading because it functions as a tool for competitiveness, and only secondarily as a step forward in 'safeguarding the planet' (*per la salvaguardia del Pianeta*). This ordering is reinforced by the observation that 'the industry dedicates itself to producing what has a market' (*l'industria si dedica alla produzione di ciò che ha un mercato*): when market demand and economic interests conflict with environmental goals, it is the former that inevitably prevails. When the article suggests that consumers must begin asking questions (*si facciano delle domande*), the implicit argument becomes clear: if consumers want the industry to unanimously shift into a higher gear and accelerate its journey towards sustainability, they must demonstrate purchasing habits aligned with environmental concerns. Responsibility for the uncertain, irregular pace is thus partially attributed to consumers: progress depends not merely on industry initiative but on whether consumer demand creates sufficient market incentive to make sustainability economically competitive.

5.2.5.3 Detours

This section captures scenarios where movement towards sustainability veers off the optimal course while retaining overall directionality. Progress is acknowledged, though temporarily off course, with the trajectory disrupted or becoming uneven due to external factors presented as inescapable. Thus, the journey continues, but not along the ideal path.

(58) Anche voi metterete i pannelli solari sui tetti? [Domanda rivolta ad Alberto Frausin, presidente di Federdistribuzione] «Abbiamo appena siglato una serie di protocolli per favorirne l'utilizzo». La sostenibilità è ancora una sfida possibile? O saremo costretti a acquistare i prodotti Ogm che avevamo bandito? «Nel breve termine qualche "curva" rispetto alla retta via bisognerà farla, sapendo però che il nostro percorso è segnato» (Corriere della Sera)

Will you also install solar panels on your roofs? [question to Alberto Frausin, president of Federdistribuzione, the federation of modern Italian distribution companies] "We've just signed a series of protocols to promote their use". Is sustainability still a viable challenge? Or will we be forced to buy the GMO products we banned? "In the short term, we'll have to make some "bends" from the straight and narrow, but we know that our path is set"

Example (58) shifts focus from the nature of obstacles themselves to the characteristics of the road to sustainability, as articulated from the perspective of Alberto Frausin, president of Federdistribuzione (the federation representing modern distribution companies). When asked whether sustainability remains a viable challenge or whether the sector will be forced to purchase GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) products previously banned, Frausin's response constructs an elaborate journey scenario centred on the path itself. He introduces the concept of the 'straight path' (*retta via*), which denotes not merely a direct route but carries moral and ethical connotations: in Italian, it signifies an upright and honest course of action. In this context, the straight path refers to the retail sector's commitment to sustainability and ecological transition, represented as the ideal, direct route towards environmental responsibility without compromises or deviations. However, Frausin acknowledges that reality necessitates 'some "bends"' (*qualche "curva"*), explicitly marked with inverted commas. These bends constitute deviations or detours from the ideal sustainability path, compromises that may be necessary in the short term, with regard to potential temporary acceptance of less sustainable practices, such as products like GMOs that had been banned. The curves are explicitly framed as tactical adjustments required to respond to immediate pressures, and not definitive measures.

The metaphor evokes the notion of a winding road rather than a straight highway, where travellers must navigate around obstacles rather than proceeding directly towards their destination. Despite acknowledging these necessary deviations, the speaker insists that *our path is set* ('il nostro percorso è segnato'), claiming ownership of sustainability measures and establishing that, while these deviations might prove to be unavoidable in the short term and the journey may temporarily veer off course, its overall direction remains fixed. Since the path has already been laid out, even when forced to take curves away from the straight path the traveller will always know where the main route lies and be able to return to it. The

question itself frames sustainability as a 'challenge' (*sfida*), implying inherent difficulty or uncertainty of outcome, and further suggesting that purchasing GMOs would signal its impossibility. However, Frausin's response reframes the issue: purchasing GMOs does not signify the failure of the sustainability challenge, but rather a momentary adaptation to exceptional circumstances. The challenge becomes more demanding, the journey more circuitous, but the destination remains unchanged. This framing allows Frausin to acknowledge practical difficulties while maintaining rhetorical commitment to sustainability, suggesting that flexibility in execution need not compromise commitment to ultimate goals.

(59) Carmakers globally may be shifting to electric vehicles, but defenders of the combustion engine, such as Toyota, argue that it could ultimately provide a more sustainable route for the transition from petrol cars. Critics, however, counter that carmakers cannot afford such detours when trying to address causes of climate change (Financial Times)

Example (59) frames the transition in the automotive sector as a shift going from petrol to electric vehicles, presented as a possibility rather than a certainty through the hedging of *may be*. However, this shift is criticised by those proposing alternative approaches to the transition, highlighting a conflict between competing perspectives. The argument for *a more sustainable route for the transition from petrol cars* is set forward by *defenders of the combustion engine*, represented here by Akio Toyoda, president of Toyota and chair of Japan's car industry lobby. They argue that improving existing technologies, such as hydrogen engines, biofuels, and carbon-neutral fuels, can reduce emissions while preserving manufacturing infrastructures and jobs. In this sense, the *sustainable route* is sustainable for the industry and society, safeguarding employment, and economic stability, rather than being purely environmental. Critics, however, define sustainability in environmental terms, foregrounding the issue of climate change and measures to address it. Evaluated against this standard, Toyoda's proposal falls short, as it slows the adoption of zero-emission technologies. The fundamental contrast here is between two understandings of sustainability, due to one of the core tensions at the heart of such a multifaceted concept. On the one hand, proponents of the combustion engine emphasise system-level sustainability: allowing the industry to survive and adapt without collapsing under the costs of radical change, while still mitigating environmental impacts. On the other hand, critics fundamentally disagree with this vision, discarding the combustion engine as a *detour* the world cannot afford. Even when modified, these engines rely on inefficient processes and carbon-intensive infrastructures. As the bends discussed in the previous example, the detours represent delays, in this case slowing the transition to genuinely zero-emission mobility. The previous scenario framed the bends as an unavoidable evil and posed the accent on the positive aspect of the fact that, while the industry would have to veer off the straight path, it would find its way back to it and reach the destination. The cost in terms of time becomes the dominant concern here, being foregrounded as an obvious consequence of the detours that cannot under current circumstances be accepted. Investment in so-called "green" combustion risks extending dependence on fossil fuels, wasting crucial time in meeting global climate targets. While the representative of companies in example (58) presented the bends as constituting the necessary flexibility in pursuing sustainability, the

critics in example (59) regard the detours in unequivocally negative terms, as unacceptable diversions that threaten climate goals.

5.2.5.4 An uphill road

Other expressions, by contrast, characterise the road itself as inherently challenging. The sustainability route is depicted as ‘uphill’ (*in salita*), ‘long’ (*lungo*), ‘rugged’ (*impervio*), ‘unclear’ (*non netto*), or ‘narrow’ (*stretto*), squeezed between production needs and sustainability objectives. These characterisations frame difficulty as stemming not from external barriers but from the intrinsic properties of the journey itself and of the terrain through which progress must be made.

- (60) Chi persevera nell’uso della chimica di sintesi, che determina una concreta impronta ecologica e l’inquinamento di suoli e acque, non è chiamato a pagare un costo ambientale. Anzi, se si vede imposto un modello più sostenibile, chiede le compensazioni. Probabilmente dovremmo cominciare a cambiare prospettiva ma la strada è davvero in salita, soprattutto in un periodo in cui le speculazioni sono sempre in agguato e in ogni condizione di instabilità prendono il sopravvento (La Repubblica)

Those who persist in the use of synthetic chemicals, which leave a significant ecological footprint and pollute soil and water, are not required to pay an environmental cost. Indeed, if they find themselves forced into a more sustainable model, they demand compensation. We should probably start changing our perspective, but the road is truly uphill, especially in a period when speculation is always lurking and takes over in any situation of instability

In example (60), the road is presented as being ‘uphill’ (*in salita*), thus depicting difficulties as a marked slope in the road, making it harder to travel. This is the perspective of a member of Slow Food, an Italian organisation promoting sustainable food systems and biodiversity. The issue here is that of the environmental costs of agriculture, referred to as a ‘significant ecological footprint’ (*concreta impronta ecologica*), a conventional and established metaphor in sustainability discourse. The uphill road refers to the difficulty of changing perspectives on environmental costs in agriculture. The resistance to adopting a more sustainable model is perceived as an imposition, since the alternatives to chemical pesticides which would lower the footprint are currently significantly more expensive. While farmers demand compensation for the financial damage of having to stop using chemical pesticides, they do not take into consideration the environmental damage that is a consequence of their using them. Thus, the metaphor suggests that achieving ecological transition in agriculture is like climbing uphill, requiring significant effort, facing resistance from gravity (economic interests), and progressing slowly despite commitment. In addition to all of these elements, the difficulty of speculations is highlighted. The destination is sustainable agriculture with reduced pesticide use, but the road is steep and difficult, with resistance from farmers, high costs of abandoning chemical pesticides, and speculations acting as additional obstacles or weights making the climb harder. The uphill nature emphasises that this transition will not

happen naturally or easily, but will require deliberate effort, policy changes, and overcoming significant economic resistance.

(61) “Non esistono ricette facili - prosegue Corazzari [Cristiano Corazzari, assessore alla Pesca della Regione Veneto] -, ma la volontà della Regione del Veneto e delle altre regioni dell’Alto Adriatico di coniugare la sostenibilità ambientale alla sostenibilità economica e sociale. Sono certo, avendo ascoltato tutti gli interventi, che sarà un percorso impervio ma assolutamente alla nostra portata” (La Repubblica)

“There are no easy solutions”, Corazzari [Cristiano Corazzari, Regional Councillor for Fisheries of the Veneto Region] continues, “but the Veneto Region and the other regions of the Northern Adriatic are determined to combine environmental sustainability with economic and social sustainability. I am certain, having listened to all the contributions, that it will be an arduous path, but one that is absolutely within our reach”

Example (61) employs a different adjective to define the road as ‘arduous’ (*impervio*), a term that denotes terrain that is difficult to pass through or access. The speaker is Cristiano Corazzari, the Regional Councillor for Fisheries of the Veneto Region, addressing the challenge of making the fishing and aquaculture sector simultaneously environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable. He notes the difficulty of reconciling these three dimensions, observing that there are ‘no easy recipes’ (*ricette facili*), that is, no clearly laid out steps to follow for combining these aspects while ensuring all receive equal attention. This vision of full sustainability across all three pillars thus becomes the destination awaiting at the end of this arduous path. However, while the difficulties are acknowledged, Corazzari describes the path as ‘absolutely within our reach’ (*assolutamente alla nostra portata*). Whereas the CONSTRAINED MOTION scenario in example (60) focussed on the perspective of the uphill road to arrive at the production of sustainable food systems and biodiversity, in example (61) the arduous path is immediately characterised as a challenge that can be faced and overcome. Though recognising that the road ahead will be obstacle-laden, Corazzari insists that it remains achievable for the region. The path is long, unclear, uphill, and reaching the destination is not guaranteed, with numerous elements working against it. Yet the speaker conveys certainty, marked emphatically by ‘absolutely’ (*assolutamente*), that it can be done.

5.2.5.5 Going backwards

This category represents the most severe expressions of impediment, where movement reverses direction altogether, actively undoing previous progress towards sustainability. Rather than merely slowing or deviating, the journey moves backwards relative to prior trajectory, cancelling previous gains. These expressions construct sustainability not as obstructed but as regressing, with achievements lost rather than temporarily delayed.

(62) Come vi muovete sulla sostenibilità? [Domanda rivolta a Gabriele Burgio, presidente e amministratore delegato di Alpitour] «Per noi la sostenibilità non è solo ambientale ma economica e sociale. Il Covid ha fatto fare un salto indietro, avevamo tolto le confezioni monouso, la plastica ora abbiamo dovuto tornare indietro. Abbiamo inaugurato lo smart working ben prima del Covid» (Corriere della Sera)

How are you proceeding on sustainability? [question to Gabriele Burgio, president and CEO of Alpitour, an Italian travel and tourism group] "For us, sustainability isn't just environmental, but also economic and social. Covid caused us to make a jump backwards; we had eliminated single-use packaging, and now we had to go back to plastic. We started working remotely well before Covid"

In example (62), an extract from an interview, the first question already establishes a motion metaphor, asking Gabriele Burgio, CEO of the Italian travel and tourism group Alpitour, about his company's approach to sustainability, which is framed as a matter of 'proceeding on' (*vi muovete sulla sostenibilità*) this issue. The expression in Italian, which does not have a direct equivalent in English, denotes measures that are being taken with regard to a specific issue. In his answer, Burgio firstly clarifies his company's understanding of sustainability as comprising all three pillars, thus implicitly suggesting that, alongside the environmental dimension, there is also an economic one, interpretable as ensuring the company's survival, and a social one, foregrounded in the latter part of his reply. The JOURNEY metaphor is employed to represent the environmental aspect, depicting the fact that progress had to be undone as 'a jump backwards' (*un salto indietro*). This lexical choice intensifies the sense of regression, conveying suddenness, backward movement, and a more substantial loss than the milder notion of a simple step backwards would convey. What is implicitly framed as previous progress, in terms of removing single-use packaging and reducing plastic use (*avevamo tolto le confezioni monouso, la plastica*), had to be reversed during the pandemic. This regression is presented as being imposed by an external agent, Covid, which forced the company to accept this setback and revert to using plastic, as expressed in 'we had to go back' (*abbiamo dovuto tornare indietro*). The ordering of the two factors in Burgio's answer allows him to deliver the "bad news" in environmental terms first, recognising that this significantly impacts on the previous sustainability progress. However, he concludes by highlighting how smart working, interpreted here as an instance of social sustainability, was implemented even before it became a necessity during Covid, thereby emphasising how his company anticipated this trend. Thus, while the scenario foregrounds the setback suffered on the environmental front, with no immediate solution being offered, the closing reference to smart working redirects attention to social sustainability, allowing Burgio to offset the negative assessment with evidence of proactive commitment elsewhere.

(63) Dal 24 febbraio i prezzi delle materie prime energetiche sono schizzati in alto, con effetti sorprendenti sulla produzione di beni intermedi e le catene distributive. La globalizzazione, precetto unico di sviluppo negli ultimi trent'anni, è in discussione, come il trionfante galoppo dei principi Esg, nel nome di una sostenibilità più verde. La conversione all'energia verde ha subito un rallentamento e anche i grandi guru del risparmio mondiale hanno fatto marcia indietro (Corriere della Sera)

Since February 24, energy commodity prices have skyrocketed, with surprising effects on the production of intermediate goods and distribution chains. Globalisation, the sole precept of development over the past thirty years, is being questioned, as is the triumphant gallop of ESG principles, in the name of a greener sustainability. The transition to green energy has undergone a slowdown, and even the world's leading gurus of saving have backtracked

The excerpt initially establishes the 'triumphant gallop of ESG principles' (*trionfante galoppo dei principi Esg*), which are presented as having gained ground 'in the name of a greener sustainability' (*nel nome di una sostenibilità più verde*). The comparative adjective suggests that possible degrees of greenness exist, implying that previous implementations had been insufficient and the 'gallop' addressed this issue. The image evoked represents the enthusiastic, accelerated adoption of green sustainability practices, when ESG was racing forward with apparent success and widespread acceptance. A gallop, as the fastest pace of a horse, conveys swift, powerful, and seemingly unstoppable forward momentum, reinforcing the sense that ESG's advance was both rapid and irresistible. However, this 'triumphant' (*trionfante*) narrative is now being disrupted, since ESG principles, previously taken for granted, are suddenly being 'questioned' (*in discussione*). The passage attributes this shift once again to the consequences of the war in Ukraine, with February 24 marking the start of Russia's aggression. This event recurs throughout the corpus as fundamentally altering previous balances and mechanisms, particularly regarding the 'production of intermediate goods and distribution chains' (*produzione di beni intermedi e le catene distributive*). The previously galloping journey has now been impeded by a 'slowdown' (*rallentamento*) in the transition to green energy, denoting a reduction in the momentum of ESG adoption. The metaphor suggests that said adoption has decelerated from its triumphant gallop to a slower, more cautious pace. The Italian verb *subito* ('undergone') emphasises that this slowdown is something the transition has suffered, an affliction imposed by external circumstances. Beyond mere deceleration, the passage introduces an additional, more alarming scenario, echoing example (62): not just slowing down, but actual regression. Major global investment experts are depicted as having 'reversed course' (*fatto marcia indietro*). After the metaphor of the galloping horse, the text shifts to an automotive image, representing the reversal of previous progress through the mechanical act of deliberately putting a car into reverse and driving backwards. Thus, these travellers on the sustainability journey are not merely pausing or slowing; they are actively moving backwards, cancelling the notable progress already achieved. As with COVID-19 in example (62), external factors (the Ukraine war and the consequent skyrocketing energy prices and supply chain disruptions) are assigned responsibility for both the slowdown and the reversal. Energy security and immediate economic concerns are taking precedence over environmental goals, revealing the conditionality of previous efforts. Hence, the complete metaphorical construction presents sustainability as having been on a triumphant galloping journey forward but demonstrates how the Ukraine war and energy crisis have caused this journey to slow down significantly (*rallentamento*), with some key actors even reversing direction (*marcia indietro*). The layering of metaphors, from the triumphant horse to the decelerating traveller to the reversing vehicle, emphasises the fragility of sustainability commitment when confronted with immediate crises.

5.2.6 Turn

Within the JOURNEY source domain, a smaller subset of 28 metaphors depicts scenarios in which the journey to be implemented involves a decisive and defining movement, a concrete rupture that is most frequently realised as a *turn*. Whereas other metaphorical realisations retain varying degrees of continuity and sustained directionality, even when emphasising the need for acceleration or renewed pace, the notion of changing course introduces a distinct element of discontinuity. Acceleration presupposes a pre-existing trajectory and amplifies movement along a path, intensifying rather than interrupting momentum; making a turn, by contrast, suspends motion and redirects it, foregrounding a deliberate choice. Therefore, it functions as the pivot within the broader journey schema, marking a focus on a moment of abrupt change and reorientation rather than on gradual progression or an incremental adaptation. The metaphor compresses transformation into a single act: a company, institution, or collective makes a turn toward sustainability, an intentional and decisive pivot among competing routes. Lexically, *svolta* ('turn') overwhelmingly dominates with 23 occurrences, together with the English equivalents *turn* (1) and *turning point* (1). It is followed by *verso* ('towards', 3), which explicitly adds the element of a defined destination to the scenario. In collocational terms, the noun *svolta* appears with adjectives that specify both its thematic domain and its qualitative force. On the one hand, adjectival modifiers such as *sostenibile* ('sustainable'), *ecologica* ('ecological'), *green*, and *verde* ('green') explicitly connect the turn to environmental discourse. On the other, adjectives like *vincente* ('winning'), *radicale* ('radical'), and *ineluttabile* ('unavoidable') accentuate its perceived magnitude and necessity, conveying a sense of paradigmatic, non-reversible change. The following section examines concordances exemplifying how this scenario is instantiated in context.

5.2.6.1 Taking a turn

This section illustrates the basic realisation of the TURN scenario, focusing on cases where actors are described as reorienting themselves towards sustainability. The examples show how this turn is evaluated in context, from corporate strategy and consumer behaviour to institutional change.

- (64) Covid, con il lancio di collezioni più sportive, che puntano a chi è giovane o vuole sentirsi giovane. «Vincente è anche la svolta verso la sostenibilità, confermata dalla capsula firmata da Paul Surridge [direttore creativo di Corneliani, marchio italiano di abbigliamento maschile di lusso], e dai corner che stiamo aprendo all'interno di multimarca e department store, tutti progettati con materiali sostenibili» (Il Sole 24 Ore)

Covid, with the launch of more sporty collections that target those who are young or want to feel young. "Also winning is the turn toward sustainability, confirmed by the capsule signed by Paul Surridge [creative director of Corneliani, an Italian luxury menswear brand], and by the corners

we are opening inside multibrand and department stores, all designed with sustainable materials”

- (65) Antiques are hot partly because of supply chain delays and higher prices for many custom or mass-market pieces. There’s also the public’s turn toward sustainability: Environmentally-conscious buyers are averse to throwaway furniture, and are trying to reuse and recycle. And as always, pop culture plays a role (The Independent)

In example (64), the managing director of a fashion brand, Giorgio Brandazza, characterises the company’s strategic reorientation as a *turn* (*svolta*), with the preposition *toward* (*verso*) explicitly indicating sustainability as the destination. This directional metaphor constructs a decisive pivot from conventional business practices to sustainability-focused operations. Significantly, Brandazza frames this shift as *vincente* (winning), positioning sustainability as competitive advantage rather than ethical obligation. It is a strategic reorientation that’s proving commercially successful since it allows Cornelianis to intercept younger consumers’ preferences and capitalising on growing demand for sustainable fashion. The sustainability turn is *confirmed* (*confermata*) through tangible manifestations: Paul Surridge’s capsule collection and sustainably-designed retail corners within department stores. Therefore, the scenario invoked of substantial change is substantiated by concrete initiatives adopted by the brand, allowing Brandazza to assert the legitimacy of its claim for attention to an ethically charged theme such as sustainability.

In example (65), *The Independent* adopts the English equivalent of the figurative expression, discussing the *public’s turn*, once again clearly aimed *toward sustainability*, in relation to growing demand for antiques. Where Brandazza’s characterisation of the turn as *winning* indirectly acknowledges market pressure, implying that the brand must taken into account consumer sensibilities to remain competitive, this article explicitly foregrounds consumer orientation. The *turn* describes a broader shift in consumer attitudes and consumption practices: away from disposable, mass-produced goods and toward reusing and valuing existing objects, aligning with circular economy principles. Although partly driven by supply chain disruptions and price increases for *custom or mass-market* alternatives, the turn is also attributed to growing environmental consciousness, with consumers increasingly aware of the inherent unsustainability of throwaway culture. This framing embeds sustainability within consumption practices, effectively delegating responsibility for environmental outcomes to individual choice, at least partially. The turn thus concerns individual and cultural practices, suggesting sustainability transitions require cascading action across multiple scales. The interplay between industry-led initiatives, as exemplified in (64), and consumer requirements they respond to, as described in the dynamics for the antiques market, implicitly invokes the economic dimension of sustainability: corporate survival depends on products being purchased, creating mutual dependency between producer strategies and consumer preferences. Consequently, the turn of the industry toward sustainability is viable only insofar as consumers pursue the same direction of movement. This notion of a cohesive shift across levels of society is not in itself problematic. However, as it has been noted in the past, it becomes so when responsibility for radical systemic change is excessively displaced onto individuals, obscuring the reality that consumers operate within

constrained possibilities determined by corporate and policy decisions. Their agency remains fundamentally limited, since they depend on producers actually providing viable sustainable alternative.

When the metaphor is lexicalised as *punto di svolta* or translated as “turning point,” it becomes explicitly retrospective and evaluative: the turn is now visible as a historical milestone.

(66) The World Trade Organization clinched its first ever agreement on sustainability and trade, limiting subsidies for vessels fishing in unregulated international waters and for overfished stocks. Dombrovskis [Valdis Dombrovskis, EU Trade Commissioner] said the fishing deal marked “a real turning point” after 21 years of talks. “Sustainability has gone from a sideshow to being centre stage when it comes to global trade” (Financial Times)

The expression *turning point* evokes a more specific connotation than turn, denoting not only a decisive moment of redirection, but usually marking the moment when a shift from one trajectory to another, especially one that improves the situation, takes place. When EU Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis describes the recent World Trade Organization agreement on fisheries subsidies as *a real turning point*, the metaphor captures precisely this sense of decisive transformation. After twenty-one years of stalled negotiations, the WTO’s *first ever agreement*, restricting subsidies for vessels fishing in unregulated waters and for overfished stocks, represents a historic breach of a long-standing impasse. It marks the first time that environmental objectives have been explicitly integrated into global trade governance, supporting SDG targets 14 with regard to ending overfishing and protecting marine ecosystems. The extended timescale intensifies the force of the metaphor: reaching this point required a long process of overcoming entrenched resistance and marks the beginning of a qualitatively different phase in international trade policy. Dombrovskis extends this metaphorical framing with a second image, noting how *sustainability has gone from a sideshow to being centre stage when it comes to global trade*. While *sideshow* implies marginality, *centre stage* denotes prominence and visibility, mirroring the movement of environmental topics from fringe to mainstream discussed in example (42). The figurative motion from one to the other encapsulates a structural reordering of priorities: sustainability is no longer a peripheral concern but a central organising principle in global trade discussions. Together, the two metaphors construct a coherent narrative of transformation. The WTO agreement is framed as the moment when sustainability entered the main arena of trade policy, signalling a new collective disposition to address environmental challenges. The *turning point* indicates greater willingness by the global community to address these issues, suggesting that this turning point will lead to greater momentum in terms of multilateral initiatives, guided by a new hierarchy of policy priorities where sustainability is at the centre of the stage.

5.2.6.2 Reorientation: nautical scenarios

In examples (67 -69), the lexical field expands from the immediate image of a turn to the spatial and temporal movement into a sustained, deliberate redirection, conceptualised as a change of course or as a steering motion rather than an instantaneous change in direction.

- (67) Il cambio di rotta, con la centralità affidata a Neb [New European Bauhaus, iniziativa culturale Ue lanciata nel 2021] da von der Leyen [Ursula von der Leyen, presidente della Commissione europea] nella politica culturale Ue, è anzitutto il risultato delle nuove priorità poste dal Green Deal europeo, dall'emergenza pandemica e da Next Generation Eu, e ne diventa stile e identità per caratterizzare quella sostenibilità della vita nell'Unione che implica comunità più coese (Il Sole 24 Ore)

The change of course, with the central role entrusted to the Neb [New European Bauhaus, EU cultural initiative] by von der Leyen [Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission] within EU cultural policy, is primarily the result of the new priorities set by the European Green Deal, the pandemic emergency, and Next Generation EU. It thereby becomes both the style and identity that define a kind of sustainability of life within the Union, one that entails more cohesive communities

The Italian expression *rotta* draws on maritime imagery, as previously encountered in examples (20–21, see Section 5.2.1.5), referring primarily to the course or direction followed by a vessel. Thus, the change in direction is framed as an ongoing process of adjusting the orientation of movement of a ship through shifting conditions. As 'new priorities' (*nuove priorità*) emerge from both legislative initiatives (the European Green Deal and Next Generation EU) and abrupt societal changes (the pandemic emergency), the EU responds with a marked course correction, denoting the initiative to achieve a purpose through a line of action as controlling the route taken by a ship. This shift also refers to a semantic and conceptual change in EU sustainability discourse. Under Ursula von der Leyen's leadership, the New European Bauhaus (NEB) becomes a central instrument of EU cultural policy, redefining sustainability from a primarily technical or economic notion into one encompassing aesthetic, social, and cultural dimensions. The scope of sustainability is thus extended to how Europeans design and inhabit shared spaces. The reference to 'more cohesive communities' (*comunità più coese*) foregrounds a form of social and cultural sustainability emerging in response to the forced isolation caused by the pandemic. Hence, NEB is meant to characterise sustainable living in the Union and help realise the European Green Deal, making environmental sustainability efforts more tangible and accessible to European citizens. This institutional initiative stresses a deliberate, charted reorientation, offering the figurative image of the EU as a vessel being decidedly steered towards a more holistic, more inclusive, and more complete form of sustainability, uniting environmental, cultural, and human dimensions in a coherent trajectory.

- (68) «è importante coordinarsi a livello di territori, perché le Cop 27 non bastano più». Roberto Saccone, presidente della Camera di Commercio, non nasconde le difficoltà: «delle 119 mila imprese bresciane solo 9 oggi hanno presentato un bilancio di sostenibilità». Ma ha fiducia in un cambiamento, che intende velocizzare con il «patto per Brescia»: sarà presentato entro

l'estate e dettaglierà come far sterzare l'economia bresciana verso lidi più green (Corriere della Sera)

"it is important to coordinate at the territorial level, because the Cop 27 are no longer enough," says Roberto Saccone, president of the Chamber of Commerce, not hiding the difficulties: "Of the 119,000 businesses in Brescia, only nine have so far presented a sustainability report." But he remains confident in a change, which he intends to speed up with the "Pact for Brescia": it will be presented before the summer and will detail how to steer Brescia's economy toward greener shores

The notion of a 'change' (*cambiamento*) is evoked by the speaker, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, before being figuratively represented. Similarly to *cambio di rotta*, the notion of changing course is rendered more concrete through a lexical choice that evokes more vividly the tangible notion of driving a vehicle. The Italian *far sterzare* denotes specifically the action of operating the steering wheel to change the direction of a vehicle, whose usage as conventionally representing an abrupt change in behaviour or trend is registered as figurative in the dictionary. Therefore, the scenario constructed here involves identifying a dual inadequacy of current practices: the economy must not only be redirected toward a markedly different course, but this must be done rapidly, with the pace of transformation itself requiring acceleration. The inadequacies are articulated in explicit terms: what is needed is 'coordination at the territorial level' (*a livello di territori*), addressing local specificities and providing tailored support, reaching at the level where the COP 27 cannot arrive. This higher level of structured, shared, institutional coordination is recognised as having conducted a fundamental role in the past, but presently being 'no longer enough' (*non bastano più*). Nevertheless, the kind of territory-specific coordination proposed here is not presented as an unquestionably positive and assured solution, with Saccone 'not hiding the difficulties' (*non nasconde le difficoltà*). The reality at the moment is that, as the speaker ascertains, a small minority of the 119,000 businesses in Brescia have so far presented a sustainability report (*delle 119 mila imprese bresciane solo 9 oggi hanno presentato un bilancio di sostenibilità*), a clear sign of a lack of a coherent, cohesive, and structured orientation toward the issue. In Saccone's intention, the 'Pact for Brescia' (*patto per Brescia*) is intended to address this gap, functioning both as an instrument to speed up the change needed and a detailed plan of the concrete terms of this steering activity meant to reorient the economy of Brescia. The figurative image is completed by the destination toward which the economy is going to be steered: 'toward greener shores' (*verso lidi più green*). The Italian expression *verso lidi più* conventionally denotes a metaphor for an outcome, the aspiration for a better state of affairs towards which to move. In this case, the better place where businesses should arrive is 'greener shores', with the colour adjective functioning, as it often does, as a marker of more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. While the difficulties are described in concrete terms, Saccone expresses confidence that this steering action outlined in the *patto per Brescia* will be successfully implemented, ultimately leading the economy toward those 'greener shores'.

(69) Last year the UK Food Standards Agency chair, Prof Susan Jebb, described lab-grown meat as one of "the new innovations that might help us to change course" away from climate

catastrophe. A “lens of environmental sustainability” might be applied to novel, safe and sustainable foods, she suggested (The Guardian)

Example (69) extends the TURN scenario by explicitly evoking an additional element, inasmuch as referring to a turn implies the existence of two possible trajectories: a preferred one, which here entails consciously redirecting toward a desired outcome, and a dispreferred one, resulting from maintaining the current course and reaching its existing destination. The undesirable endpoint is explicitly described as *climate catastrophe*, adopting a variation of the more widespread “climate crisis” that more forcefully underscores the severity of the situation. In this context, climate catastrophe functions as shorthand for the worsening environmental crisis driven by greenhouse gas emissions, particularly from livestock farming. The core issue is that conventional livestock agriculture represents a major source of global emissions, and retaining current practices would mean remaining on an environmentally destructive trajectory leading to climate catastrophe. Pairing *climate catastrophe* with the TURN scenario enhances the compelling necessity of such a change in course. The speaker, who is a chair of the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA), having outlined the gravity of the situation, expresses a positive stance on a potential innovation in the food system, identifying lab-grown meat as a concrete means of altering course and steering away from the road to climate catastrophe. When Jebb proposes applying a *lens of environmental sustainability*, she introduces a framework for assessing innovation not only in terms of safety and profitability, but also in terms of its environmental impact, considering ecological consequences and evaluating whether a product contributes to long-term environmental goals. This new approach is framed as an imperative: adopting this lens becomes a necessary condition to avert the looming climate catastrophe and abandon the current trajectory toward climate catastrophe, steering the food system onto a more sustainable course.

5.2.7 Concluding observations on the JOURNEY metaphor

The JOURNEY domain is conventionally mapped onto a wide variety of complex experiences (Semino, 2002). Within the context of a complex and multifaceted issue such as sustainability, it functions as a convenient metaphor to reduce the complexity and shift the focus to a schema that organises the process of its implementation. It is predominantly exploited in visualising an abstract, arduous and multifaceted process through the immediate image of moving successfully from a point A to a point B. The fundamental association between movement as progress, and conversely lack of movement as lack of progress (Lakoff 1993), easily confers a strongly positive connotation to any expression of motion of some kind being implemented, conveying a sense of purposefulness. Its effectiveness, grounded in how profoundly entrenched this is in our experiences, significantly contributes to painting an overall positive picture with regard to efforts in the field of sustainability and sustainable development. The broad conceptual space of the basic Source-Path-Goal schema provides a considerable amount of flexibility in the nuances in how the movement can be represented: the direction of the movement, its duration and various stages, its modality, and the participants involved

in it, are all subject to variation, depending on what is meant to be conveyed. When focussing on different stages of a journey, across the corpus numerous metaphorical expressions foreground the start and initial phases of the journey. Although the notion of starting might be perceived as inadequate with regard to the urgency and relevance of the process, the focus throughout these metaphors is on the meaningfulness of taking an initiative in a definite direction, while simultaneously allowing for the possibility of the movement, due to its having just started, to still be tentative and possibly subject to refinement and adjustments. For example, companies are encouraged to take their first steps towards sustainability (see 5.2.1.2), or a country can be presented as placing itself on a path of sustainable development (see 5.2.2.2). The notion of the importance of first steps is in one notable instance purposefully exaggerated, comparing it to the first step of the first man on the moon (see 5.2.2.5), elevating an art installation to raise awareness about the notion of the carbon footprint as akin to a momentous achievement in the history of humankind. Oftentimes, the emphasis is shifted instead on the already ongoing process, whose main quality is often that of being directed towards a clear goal, be it sustainability itself, net zero, or sustainable measures.

Alternatively, sustainability can be defined not as a destination itself, but as a guiding principle providing orientation: the principal aspect of this kind of scenario is ensuring that the direction is the correct one, by relying on, for instance, the social aspect of ESG as the compass (see 5.2.2.4). Though with different level of concreteness, inasmuch as in the first case an arrival of some sort is presupposed, both variations rely on mapping the notion of having a purpose unto that of having a direction (Lakoff, 1993). Therefore, demonstrating that the direction has clearly been set is akin to maintaining that there is a clear purpose that is being pursued efficiently and effectively. When the focus is on the path itself, this can be exploited, for example, to convey the notion of collective effort and collaboration as moving together along a path (cf. Musolff, 2004), which can be manipulated to modulate the distribution of agency. Various participants are travelling together, sharing a path of sustainability (see 5.2.2.3); alternatively, one is cast in a leading role, accompanying or guiding the other(s), or even having a driving role (see 5.2.1.3), implying better knowledge of the path and thus also conveying reassurance. Consumer can be guided towards conscious purchases (see 5.2.1.3) by virtuous retailers, or association can guide businesses, helping them reach greater environmental and economic sustainability (see 5.2.1.3). When the movement is not cooperative, participants are compared by judging their level of progress and commitment as comparable to their position with regard to others, with companies that embrace sustainable practices pulling ahead of the competition (see 5.2.2.3). When representing different participants, the JOURNEY domain also allows for a shared destination, but not a single prescribed trajectory: different means of achieving a result become different paths (Lakoff, 1993; Musolff, 2004). Hence, the EU and its trade partners can have different paths to sustainability on which they should advance (see 5.2.1.1). In this way, concessions are made for the concrete issue of different countries not being uniformly equipped to implement sustainable measures due to significantly different socio-economic conditions. This framing foregrounds the idea that each traveller, that is, each country, will reach the destination of sustainability through their own route. Although the suggestion of different

paths might entail the notion that this could also mean different timeframes, this is backgrounded. The progress can also be measured by pointing to intermediate stages in the journey (see 5.2.2.2), significant milestones (see 5.2.1.1), or points at which you can stop to take stock of your position with respect to the course charted (see 5.2.1.5).

In the CONSTRAINED MOTION scenario, difficulties instead are naturally mapped onto obstacles in the journey, as something that impedes motion, or wrong paths (Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff, 1993; Musolff, 2004; Semino, 2002). They can cast some doubt on the idea of largely steady progress, acknowledging to some extent the idea of obstacles obstructing the passage and thus movement forwards, or related elements that similarly constitute an impediment to the movement proceeding at the desired pace. For instance, sustainability can struggle to make headway in a specific sector (see 5.2.3.); there may be *hurdles* to arrive at specific (see 5.2.5.1); it might be the condition of the terrain that pose a challenge, with the road being truly uphill (see 5.2.5.4), or even a backward movement as a sign of undoing progress (see 5.2.5.4). The difficulties can be depicted in terms of features of how humans move under particular circumstances (cf. Charteris-Black, 2004), by seeing the progress as moving ‘in fits and starts’ and ‘with an uncertain step’ (see 5.2.5.2). The framing might be shifted by presenting the obstacles organically while offering a solution; while there are short-term headwinds against sustainability (see 5.2.5.1), the tailwinds ensure unwavering longer-term support (see 5.2.2.2); while technology and sustainability do not always go together, they can be reconciled due to the rise of the blockchain (see 5.2.3.1); while the path might be arduous, and bends may have to be conceded, it remains set and within the reach of the travellers (see 5.2.5.3 and 5.2.5.4). Hence, although barriers can be present, this is often paired with the notion that such barriers can be removed (see 5.2.5.1), thus facilitating progress (cf. Musolff, 2004). The data also reflect the pattern that Lakoff (1993) defines as duality, with the target domain being presented through two types of metaphors, considering motion from two differing perspectives: one based on the notion of location, the other based on the notion of moving objects. Sustainability here is seen in two manners (cf. Semino, 2002, on the introduction of the euro): while in most cases it is a location on the path of a journey (see 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.4, 5.2.5, 5.2.6), in other cases it is instead a traveller moving, able to arrive or depart (see 5.2.3).

Three concordances challenge the main assumptions in the scenarios, through different lexical means and with different intentions. Two of them directly question the path we are currently on, by painting the destination it reaches with negative connotations, either directly designing it as one leading us towards climate catastrophe (see 5.2.6.2), or painting the outcome of following this route as a bleak future where inequalities are magnified by and in turn foster climate changes, in a vicious cycle (see 5.2.2.7), thus making it evident that we should change course away from them. Alternatively, one example challenges instead the notion of sustainability as a destination. While the previous ones were meant to more radically question current practices and encourage more decisive change, this example questions instead the notion that the transition is a process with an endpoint and sustainability is a destination, rather than a starting point for projecting companies into the future (see 5.2.1.6), with the intention of reinforcing a widespread view of sustainability as

an opportunity for growth. This latter notion is one of the common threads throughout the data, with the process represented as a means of establishing a competitive advantage that will drive forward innovation and technological development, as an opportunity for growth that can be generated by going *hand in hand* with economic, social and environmental sustainability (see 5.2.3.1).

While the overarching trend across the data reinforces numerous observations in the literature on the role of the JOURNEY metaphor in sustaining a business-as-usual approach, reassuring audiences that incremental changes are being implemented and that progress is being made without entailing significant disruptions to the current order (Milne et al., 2006; Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023), a closer examination at the scenario-level has revealed that certain patterns, while remaining within the JOURNEY domain, exploit it to convey more nuanced or even contrary perspectives. On the one hand, several expressions suggest that the current pace of travel is insufficient and that the manner of the journey should be modified. This is particularly evident in the ACCELERATION scenario (see 5.2.4), where calls to accelerate moves toward sustainability or to press on the gas pedal of the ecological transition foreground urgency rather than reassurance, implying that the pace of change remains inadequate. Similarly, forms of intensified motion in the ACTIVE AGENT scenario, such as sustainability climbing the business school curriculum or advancing with such force that one cannot stand in its way attribute a forceful dynamism to the process that exceeds the gradualism typically associated with the JOURNEY framing. On the other hand, a distinct set of expressions suggests that what needs to change is the direction of travel itself, not merely its speed. The TURN scenario (see 5.2.6) is exemplary in this regard: expressions such as the decisive ‘turn towards sustainability’, or the more emphatic *turning point*, reframe the sustainability transition as a fundamental reorientation rather than a continuation along the same trajectory. The nautical reorientation scenarios further develop this pattern, presenting steering and course correction as deliberate acts of navigational reassessment (see 5.2.6.2). Similarly, the critical voices in the PATH scenario that question whether the current trajectory leads to a desirable destination (see 5.2.2.7) challenge the very assumptions upon which the mainstream JOURNEY framing rests. Taken together, these patterns demonstrate that the JOURNEY domain is not monolithically aligned with incremental progress, but rather contains the conceptual resources to articulate both demands for greater urgency and calls for wholesale redirection.

By evoking notions of purposeful motion in a direction, the JOURNEY domain undoubtedly lends itself particularly well to communicating the notion that meaningful, long-term change is underway, while at the same time implying that, precisely because of its long-term nature, the endpoint of the journey might still lie some distance ahead. Although overarching themes have been identified, scenarios vary considerably in the aspects and nuance they convey, the different functions they fulfil, and the frequency with which they occur. Their argumentative value is nevertheless similarly grounded in the effectiveness with which they establish presuppositions that are intuitively perceived as plausible and that, in turn, become instrumental in crafting certain conclusions as self-evident and inevitable, both within the source domain and the target domain (Musolff, 2004).

The next chapter presents the discussion of qualitative results for all other domains, providing a comprehensive overview of the metaphorical framings within the corpus.

Chapter 6

Analysis and Results: Other Source Domains

This chapter completes the qualitative analysis by examining the remaining source domains identified in the corpus. Each of the six major domains is treated in a dedicated section following a consistent structure: a discussion of theoretical features and prior research on the domain, a brief quantitative overview of the distribution of metaphors across newspapers and languages, a qualitative analysis of the identified scenarios and their discursive functions, and concluding observations. Following the primary domain of JOURNEY, the remaining domains are discussed according to their prominence, ranging from the most to the least frequent. The chapter begins with OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE metaphors (Section 6.1), which construe sustainability as a discrete, manipulable entity that can be positioned, connected to other elements, or transformed, and then turns to the COMPETITION domain (Section 6.2), where sustainability is framed through the lens of races, team sports and strategic betting. The PHYSICAL FORCE domain (Section 6.3) examines expressions in which external pressure, momentum or resistance are mapped onto the sustainability process, while the BUILDING domain (Section 6.4) analyses metaphors that construct sustainability as a structure requiring foundations, pillars and architectural planning. The WAR domain (Section 6.5) investigates the combative framing of sustainability through military actions, agents, frontlines and strategic operations, while the PERCEPTION domain (Section 6.6) explores how sight and hearing metaphors position sustainability. The final section (Section 6.7) addresses nine domains that occurred with lower frequency in the corpus (ORGANISM, PERSONIFICATION, EXPLORATION, MYTH AND BELIEF, LANGUAGE, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE, EXAM, FOOD, and MONEY), each discussed through illustrative examples that demonstrate the distinctive cognitive perspective it brings to sustainability discourse. Finally, Section 6.8 discusses the features of metaphorical language emerging from the corpus in broader terms, highlighting the role of topic-triggering, idioms, direct metaphors, and the conventionality-creativity cline.

6.1 OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE

6.1.1 Features of the OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain

OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE metaphors are classified as “ontological metaphors” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 25), representing one of the most fundamental conceptual mechanisms, employed across diverse domains. Their core function is reification, which fundamentally reframes an abstract entity’s status and plays an important role in more complex construals of causation

and mental activity (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). Our shared experiences with physical objects provide the experiential grounding for a remarkably wide range of metaphors enabling us to conceptualise events, activities, emotions and ideas as entities and substances (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They furnish a model for “our (often agentive) interaction with something” (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 64), offering a concrete equivalent to our cognitive manipulations of abstractions. Through metaphors such as ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE PHYSICAL OBJECTS (Kövecses, 2005), abstract notions can be construed as discrete or bounded objects and substances, allowing familiar processes (categorising, grouping, placing them in space or quantifying) to be applied to them, thereby facilitating reasoning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Moreover, adjectives applied to these metaphorical objects indicate features of the abstract entities in terms of physical properties; ideas, for instance, can be *appetising*, *fragile*, *malleable*, *impermeable* or *unwieldy* (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). The primary metaphor MORE IS UP, for instance, derives from the correlation between objects or substances accumulating and their level rising (Grady, 1999), while expressions such as “ripple effect” draw on our knowledge of the impact a solid object has on water to convey notions of causality (Charteris-Black, 2004).

OBJECT metaphors have proven central to various discourse contexts. In Malay women’s cancer narratives, the disease is characterised as a GIFT or a HEAVY OBJECT, providing insights into coping mechanisms (Mohd Jamil et al., 2019). Migration discourse also extensively employs metaphors reifying migrants as OBJECTS or COMMODITIES (Arcimaviciene & Baglama, 2018; Montagut & Moragas-Fernández, 2020), framing migration as the movement (*convey*, *carry*, *removal*) or grouping of objects (*batch*) (Taylor, 2021). SUBSTANCE metaphors often function as foundational structural metaphors, evidenced in patterns like TIME IS A SUBSTANCE and LABOR IS A SUBSTANCE, allowing for the two concepts to be measured, consumed, and assigned monetary values (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The metaphor MONEY IS LIQUID, lexicalised through conventional expressions like *liquidity*, *cash flow*, and *currency*, prominent in economic terminology, contributes to the conceptualisation of cash and financial assets as manipulable substances (Telibaşa, 2015), while in physics education energy is frequently construed as a substance (Dreyfus et al., 2014).

6.1.2 Quantitative results and general patterns

237 metaphors drawing on the OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain were found in the corpus; Table 6.1 presents the number of metaphors found for each newspaper, and the relative percentage that the OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain represents of the total number of metaphors found for each language and overall, considering both languages. The 171 Italian metaphors correspond to 12.3% of the total of metaphors in the Italian corpus, while the 66 English metaphors correspond to 11.2% of the total of metaphors in the English corpus. Thus, Italian newspapers contain more metaphors both in absolute and in relative terms, meaning that OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE metaphors are proportionally more common in the Italian corpus.

Overall, the 237 metaphors relating to the OBJECT and SUBSTANCE domain amount to 12% of the total number of metaphors found in the Italian and English corpora.

Table 6.1

Frequencies for OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE metaphors by newspapers and language

Language	Newspaper	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency/ (sub)corpus
ITA	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	50	12.3%
ITA	<i>Il Giornale</i>	19	
ITA	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	53	
ITA	<i>La Repubblica</i>	49	
Total (ITA)		171	
ENG	<i>Financial Times</i>	16	11.2%
ENG	<i>The Guardian</i>	14	
ENG	<i>The Independent</i>	26	
ENG	<i>The Telegraph</i>	10	
Total (ENG)		66	
Total		237	12%

Note. The relative frequency is calculated as a percentage of the total number of metaphors identified in each (sub)corpus: 1,386 in the ITA subcorpus, 590 in the ENG subcorpus, and 1,976 in the corpus as a whole.

Analysis of vehicle terms and their frequency reveals that OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE metaphors appear frequently in both languages, conferring concreteness to inherently abstract notions. A dominant pattern concerns the concept of centrality, whereby the spatial positioning of objects is mapped onto hierarchies of relevance, consistently suggesting that sustainability occupies a privileged position (see Section 6.1.3.1). Relational connectivity is conveyed through terms denoting physical interaction and connection, positioning sustainability as a component in a wider relational system. This frame can be elaborated through textile imagery, particularly thread metaphors, which exploit the interconnectedness of fabric to construct tangible scenarios of interdependence (see Section 6.1.3.2). In other cases, the focus is on how objects and their surfaces can be manipulated (see Section 6.1.3.3), while Section 6.1.3.4 discusses a markedly creative example, distinguishing itself from general tendencies within the domain. In addition, several expressions evoke a SUBSTANCE scenario, often positioning sustainability as a flexible entity capable of movement and expansion, typically framed as positive development. Within this category, a specific WATER scenario emerges, construing sustainability as a natural and unstoppable force (see Section 6.1.3.5).

6.1.3 Qualitative results

6.1.3.1 CENTRALITY scenarios

This section examines examples in which sustainability is construed through spatial centrality. The analysis shows how being placed “at the centre” or functioning as a core around which other elements revolve contributes to the positive evaluation of sustainability as an organising principle.

- (1) PVC and EVA could take up to 1,000 years to decompose. Doodhmal [Jeroo Doodhmal, founder of children’s footwear brand Pip & Henry] spotted a gap in the market for a children’s footwear brand that made sustainability central to its ethos, and the idea for Pip & Henry was born. The eco-shoe label launched at the end of 2021 and is thriving. (The Guardian)

Example (1) instantiates the well-established mapping whereby central spatial position indexes importance or relevance (Goatly, 2024). In this case, it is Jeroo Doodhmal, the founder of the children’s footwear brand Pip & Henry, that has chosen to make *sustainability central to its ethos*. After becoming aware of the environmental damage caused by plastics and synthetic materials used for children’s shoes, she decided to produce children shoes out of sustainable ones, a concrete action that is metaphorically represented as placing sustainability at the centre of the brand’s mission. The positive framing encompasses two recurring elements consistently found in corporate communication. Firstly, sustainability is portrayed as central to Pip & Henry’s ethos, implicitly establishing the business’s ethical credentials as self-evident due to this sustainability focus. Secondly, while Doodhmal’s initial motivation is presented as stemming from an acquired awareness of traditional footwear’s lasting environmental damage, the narrative equally emphasises the fact that she *spotted a gap in the market*. This dual framing simultaneously construes sustainability as both the obvious ethical choice and a strategic business opportunity promising commercial gains by satisfying previously unmet consumer demand. The assertion that the brand *is thriving* retrospectively validates this positioning, reinforcing the claim that prioritising sustainability leads to commercial success.

- (2) With more than a third of consumers saying they are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products and services, businesses *are wise to centre* their green strategies as part of their brand marketing. Having a clear sustainability mission on your website is a simple way for a small business to make a big statement (The Guardian)
- (3) L’Agenda olimpica 2020 + 5 ha posto al centro la sostenibilità ambientale, sociale ed economica. «È motivo di grande orgoglio che Esselunga abbia scelto di camminare al nostro fianco testimoniando il legame con lo sport e con i valori che Milano-Cortina 2026 vuole rappresentare» (Corriere della Sera)

The 2020+5 Olympic Agenda has placed environmental, social, and economic sustainability at the centre. “We are extremely proud that Esselunga has chosen to walk alongside us, demonstrating its connection to sport and the values that Milan-Cortina 2026 aims to represent”

In example (2), the central framing mirrors the one in the example (1), presenting the adoption of sustainable practices as a means of meeting demand from the market. The article establishes consumer willingness as a premise, since *more than a third of consumers... are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products and services*, and consequently draws the logical conclusion that businesses are *wise to centre their green strategies as part of their brand marketing*, explicitly signalling their sustainability commitment to consumers. The text construes communicating sustainability commitment as *a simple way for a small business to make a big statement*, suggesting that this moderate effort yields considerable impact. Example (3) employs instead the Italian equivalent *ha posto al centro* (‘has placed at the centre’), maintaining the same spatial positioning metaphor while emphasising completed action through the present perfect tense. Here, the agent is the Olympic Agenda 2020+5, which has positioned ‘environmental, social, and economic sustainability’ (*la sostenibilità ambientale, sociale ed economica*) centrally, electing it as the organising principle. The partnership with Esselunga, the first sponsor of the event, is framed through a JOURNEY metaphor, depicting *Esselunga* as a traveller that ‘has chosen to walk alongside’ the organisers (*ha scelto di camminare al nostro fianco*), reinforcing the idea of shared commitment in giving prominence to sustainability.

- (4) La medesima filosofia è al centro di Documenta 15 [quindicesima edizione della rassegna d’arte contemporanea di Kassel, in Germania], che ruota intorno ai concetti di sostenibilità e di condivisione sui quali, da secoli, si basa l’agricoltura indonesiana (Corriere della Sera)

The same philosophy is at the centre of Documenta 15 [the fifteenth edition of the contemporary art exhibition held in Kassel, Germany], which revolves around the concepts of sustainability and sharing on which Indonesian agriculture has been based for centuries

Two interrelated spatial metaphors interact here: firstly, the Indonesian collaborative philosophy promoting ‘the spread of democratic principles such as equality and solidarity’ (*la medesima filosofia*) is presented as being ‘at the centre of’ (*è al centro di*) Documenta 15, an art exhibition, establishing static positioning. Secondly, the art exhibition *ruota intorno ai* (‘revolves around’) the concepts of sustainability and sharing, introducing kinetic motion: the event is construed as orbiting around these principles, which derive from centuries-old Indonesian agricultural practices of collective labour and equitable distribution. Unlike previous examples, where centrality primarily signals importance, this scenario introduces dependency: sustainability and sharing serve as the gravitational core actively determining the organisation and movement of the whole system. The metaphor thus enriches the centrality frame by introducing motion, interrelation, and systemic coherence, suggesting not only prominence but ongoing structuring power. Just as a gravitational core determines the orbit of the bodies around it, sustainability and sharing are presented as the principles that actively shape and organise every aspect of Documenta 15.

6.1.3.2 CONNECTION scenarios

This section turns to metaphors that construe sustainability through connection and integration. The examples show how physical relations such as tying, embedding, linking and weaving are used to represent sustainability as part of wider systems of values, practices and responsibilities.

- (5) Sono indicazioni semplici nate dal fatto che mi sono trovata [Paola Gianotti, ciclista endurance e speaker motivazionale] in sintonia con tutti i valori che ha CNH Industrial: valori legati strettamente alla sostenibilità ambientale al tema dell'inclusività, del raggiungimento degli obiettivi e dei sogni. Credo che anche questo sia importante: sfidare se stessi cercando di essere sostenibili (La Repubblica)

These are simple suggestions born from the fact that I [Paola Gianotti, endurance cyclist and motivational speaker] found myself in tune with all the values that CNH Industrial embodies: values closely tied to environmental sustainability, inclusiveness, and achieving goals and dreams. I believe this is also important: challenging yourself by trying to be sustainable

- (6) Serving nearly five billion people gives P&G and its brands the unique opportunity to deliver not only against strong product performance but also to promote conversations, influence attitudes, inspire behavioural change and drive positive impact on society and the environment. Environmental sustainability has been embedded into how P&G does business for decades: the company has a strong track record in continually working to minimise its environmental impact. (The Independent)

Connection metaphors construe sustainability as a component within a broader relational system, emphasising bonds between elements rather than hierarchical positioning. The focus is on the connection among different entities, its modality and its intensity. In example (5), the cyclist Paola Gianotti attributes her association with CNH Industrial to their 'values closely tied to environmental sustainability' (*valori legati strettamente alla sostenibilità ambientale*). This conventional metaphor draws on our physical experience of rope or cord binding objects together, mapping this tangible connection onto abstract value relationships. The values are 'closely' (*strettamente*) tied to environmental sustainability, inclusiveness, and achieving goals and dreams (*alla sostenibilità ambientale al tema dell'inclusività, del raggiungimento degli obiettivi e dei sogni*), emphasising the relational properties of objects as marking tight conceptual integration. As a tight knot could not be untied without effort, CNH Industrial's values cannot be separated from the notion of sustainability. Notably, Gianotti positions sustainability itself as challenge (*sfidare se stessi cercando di essere sostenibili*), framing sustainability as a test of capability.

In example (6), the metaphor suggests a deeper structural integration of sustainability with the surrounding system. By stating that *environmental sustainability has been embedded into how P&G does business*, the speaker is signalling that sustainability is an object firmly and solidly integrated in the structure that constitutes Procter & Gamble (P&G), a major consumer goods company, practices. Embedding suggests deep-rooted integration into the manner in

which P&G does business. The temporal framing *for decades* overtly lay claims to the longevity of P&G environmental sustainability commitment, a longstanding attitude rather than a response to recent pressure. P&G approach to sustainability allows its engagement to be twofold: on the one hand, it can act directly on its environmental performance by minimising its *environmental impact*, a kind of commitment of which P&G maintains it *has a strong track record*. The statement is constructed through hedging, with the environmental impact being not eliminated, but *minimised*, with no quantification provided, while *continually working* suggest an enduring effort, reinforcing the long temporal framing introduced by *for decades*, rather than completed achievement. On the other hand, P&G assigns itself a supplementary role: it can also *promote conversations, influence attitudes, inspire behavioural change and drive positive impact on society and the environment*. Through its extensive reach on society due to the large number of customers it has, P&G can not only make ethical choices within its organisation, but it can also contribute to spreading this attitude, encouraging dialogue and inspiring changes in behaviour, benefitting both society and the environment.

- (7) [Maurizio Zipponi, presidente di Fondazione Una:] Puntiamo a un riposizionamento della figura del cacciatore, in linea con quanto avviene in altri paesi europei, dove è considerato un paladino del territorio e un fondamentale anello della catena di sostenibilità» (Il Sole 24 Ore)

[Maurizio Zipponi, president of Fondazione Una, an Italian foundation on the relationship between humans, nature and the environment:] We are aiming to reposition the role of the hunter, in line with what happens in other European countries, where he is considered a champion of the territory and a fundamental link in the sustainability chain”

In this example, sustainability is instead depicted as a ‘chain’ (*catena*), with hunters identified as ‘a fundamental link in the sustainability chain’ (*un fondamentale anello della catena di sostenibilità*). The metaphorical term ‘link’ (*anello*) construes sustainability as a composite system in which multiple elements connect sequentially, so that the removal of any single link compromises the integrity of the whole. The intrinsic interconnectedness of a chain frames all links as ‘fundamental’ (*fondamentale*) and equally important to the robustness of the structure overall. The figure of the hunter is thus reconfigured from a potentially controversial actor to an indispensable component of territorial sustainability, further reinforced by the designation of ‘champion of the territory’ (*paladino del territorio*). In this scenario, sustainability is not inserted in a wider system, but it constitutes a system in itself, where all components are equally necessary and rely on the integrity of the others, promoting a vision of sustainability as a network made up of interconnected elements requiring cooperation.

- (8) Una rassegna tra due laghi dove danza, teatro, musica sono accomunati dall’ideale filo verde della sostenibilità e della scoperta dell’ambiente. Cross Festival, giunto alla decima edizione, propone oltre venti eventi con più di settanta artisti italiani e internazionali (Corriere della Sera)

A festival between two lakes where dance, theatre, and music are united by the imaginary green thread of sustainability and the discovery of the environment. Cross Festival, now in its tenth edition, features over twenty events with more than seventy Italian and international artists.

The thematic coherence of the event discussed here, Cross Festival, is a 'green thread of sustainability and the discovery of the environment' (*filo verde della sostenibilità e della scoperta dell'ambiente*) running through it. Similarly to the previous example, the notion of continuity and connection is foregrounded through the metaphor, with the environmental theme binding all performances together and providing an underlying structure. However, while the image of a chain evoked more directly solidity and sequential connection, the focus here is on the continuity woven into the fabric of the event. The modifier *verde* ('green'), operates on two levels. First, it activates the metonymy-based metaphor BEING GREEN IS BEING SUSTAINABLE, with the underlying GREEN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT metonymy (Augé, 2019a). The metonymic association, where the colour *green* stands for ecological concern, instantly endows the textile metaphor with environmental characteristics. Second, the two mappings work together, with the adjective revitalising the noun: although *filo* functions conventionally as a metaphor for thematic connection, its pairing with the adjective not only decidedly foregrounds the connection with nature, evoking a notion of ethicality, but it also foregrounds the physical object. Although what is being conveyed with *verde* is the abstract notion of environmental sustainability, associating the feature of colour with a noun designating in its basic sense an object confers renewed salience to the notion that *filo* does in fact refer to a physical object which can possibly display the feature of being green-coloured. Nonetheless, its communicative function remains discursively unambiguous. The figurative framing is reinforced by both the adjective *ideale* ('imaginary') and the subsequent specification of the nature of the thread as one 'of sustainability and the discovery of the environment'. The expression thus presents sustainability as a unifying principle giving coherence to the Festival's initiatives, structuring their organisation through a shared environmental ethos.

- (9) Oggi, per alzare la qualità della progettazione e delle competenze, occorre intrecciare i fili di architettura, ingegneria, ecologia, botanica e di altre discipline, per tessere un tessuto adatto alle persone e all'ambiente. Spesso sono gli accorgimenti progettuali che rendono sostenibile un edificio: Mario Cucinella [architetto italiano], per esempio, è molto soddisfatto della sua Torre Unipol [grattacielo sede del gruppo assicurativo Unipol] a Milano (La Repubblica)

Today, to raise the quality of design and skills, it is necessary to intertwine the threads of architecture, engineering, ecology, botany, and other disciplines, to weave a fabric suited to people and the environment. It is often the design features that make a building sustainable: Mario Cucinella [Italian architect], for example, is very satisfied with his Unipol Tower [skyscraper headquartering the Unipol insurance group] in Milan.

Example (9) employs a more complex and lexically extended weaving metaphor, constructing a highly articulated scenario of sustainability integration. The varying degrees of complexity available possible in the source domain contribute to different levels of complexity in what is evoked in the target domain. The scenario is extensively articulated by firstly identifying the elements that are different threads, 'architecture, engineering, ecology, botany, and other

disciplines' (*architettura, ingegneria, ecologia, botanica e di altre discipline*), which need to be intertwined (*intrecciare*). The disciplines are mapped onto different single threads that undergo braiding, suggesting that contemporary sustainable building design requires the integration of highly diverse areas of expertise. The metaphor conveys a form of combination that both preserves individual specificity, as each thread retains its identity when weaved into a pattern, and produces an outcome that exceeds the mere sum of the single parts, just as a woven fabric does. The results should in fact be the weaving of a 'fabric suited to people and the environment' (*un tessuto adatto alle persone e all'ambiente*), whose correspondent in the target domain is a sustainable building and, more specifically, the Unipol Tower designed by Mario Cucinella (*Mario Cucinella, per esempio, è molto soddisfatto della sua Torre Unipol*). Interlocking implies strength and interdependence achieved through combination while maintaining each thread's distinct identity, requiring skilled and intentional craftsmanship, with the result possesses properties none of the individual threads hold in isolation.

Framing this novel approach to design as a 'necessity' (*occorre*) underscores the normative force of the metaphor, presenting interdisciplinary integration not as an option but as a requirement for contemporary architectural practice. While *filo verde* ('green thread') employs the image of a thread as a singular connecting element, this passage activates a complete weaving scenario: multiple threads are brought together through a process of weaving that results in a multifaceted yet cohesive fabric. The metaphor's complexity matches the level of complexity attributed to sustainable architecture itself, presenting its achievement, from both a social (*adatto alle persone*, 'suited to people') and an environmental perspective (*all'ambiente*, 'to the environment') as a demanding yet achievable task.

6.1.3.3 SURFACE MANIPULATION scenarios

The following examples share a thematic focus in the target domain, centring on sustainability credentials or claims, and their frequent association in sustainability discourse with the issue of greenwashing.

- (10) Some descriptions might be missing important information about what the fabric is made from, and there is a lack of clarity about whether fabric standards apply to specific products or the firm's wider practices, the CMA [Competition and Markets Authority, the UK's competition regulator] said. The investigation comes as fast-fashion retailers such as Asos and Boohoo try to burnish their sustainability credentials (The Telegraph)
- (11) The ESG sector - an industry that has boomed to just under \$2.8tn in assets since 2019 but has had to contend with suggestions that companies are inflating their sustainability credentials in order to attract capital or customers (Financial Times)

In example (10), *fast-fashion retailers* are being investigated with regard to the *sustainability credentials* they claim for their products. The central issue is the lack of clarity in how the products are described, which omit crucial information about *what the fabric is made from*

and fail to specify whether sustainability standards apply to individual items or to the company's practices more broadly. This opacity makes it difficult to verify the claims being advanced. This process of supposedly presenting products as more sustainable than what they actually are and improving the perception of their sustainability credentials is metaphorically described here as an attempt to *burnish* their credentials. The verb *burnish* literally means to rub or polish metal or other materials in order to make them shine, thus casting sustainability credentials as an object which can be manipulated and whose external appearance can be ameliorated with relatively limited effort. The central feature of the mapping lies in its emphasis on surface treatment: burnishing affects only the outer layer of an object, the most visible part, without altering its internal composition. This encapsulates the sceptical tone conveyed by the metaphor, suggesting these companies are more focused on polishing their public image than on implementing genuine environmental improvements. The interpretation is reinforced by two additional metaphorical expressions in the passage. The first describes the ESG sector as *an industry that has boomed*, pointing to a rapid and rather unexpected expansion, whose legitimacy is immediately undermined by having to contend with suggestions that companies are deceiving investors. The second describes how Boohoo, one of the retailers under investigation, *was engulfed in the £3-an-hour-pay scandal*, with accusations of underpaying its workers and implementing exploitative labour conditions, exposing their approach to social sustainability as deeply questionable. The use of *engulfed* evokes a substance, such as fire or flood, swallowing or surrounding completely its target, suggesting a scandal of such magnitude that the company is unable to contain its effects. The juxtaposition of the burnishing scenario with the scandal and the investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) seems to factually substantiate the accusations, exposing the distance between public-facing sustainability claims and the reality of production practices.

Example (11) similarly endows sustainability *credentials* with physical characteristics, although in this case they are mapped onto objects that *companies are inflating*. The context is the ESG sector, where corporations are accused of claiming sustainability credentials with the aim of profiting from this positioning, *in order to attract capital or customers*. The action of inflating refers to filling something with air or gas so it becomes larger, thus figuratively suggesting the intention of making something appear more substantial or impressive than it really is. This entails several implications: firstly, it refers to an artificial expansion: the apparent growth of the object does not correspond to an increase in substance. Second, inflated objects are inherently fragile, constantly at risk of bursting or deflating. This fragility suggests that under scrutiny, the value attributed to ESG assets may deflate dramatically, foregrounding recurring concerns about the reliability and credibility of ESG metrics and standards.

- (12) Desiree Fixler [DWS's], its former head of sustainability, said DWS [Deutsche Bank's asset management subsidiary] misled investors by claiming that hundreds of billions of its assets under management were "ESG-integrated". The asset manager has since dropped the label and scaled back its sustainability claims (The Telegraph)

Example (12) complements the previous ones on two levels: firstly, the object is not sustainability *credentials* anymore, but rather sustainability *claims*. While *credentials*, although ones that are being questioned and are under investigation, still retain a level of institutional legitimacy, *claims* inherently presuppose that their credibility needs to be proven. This assumption is buttressed by statements by Desiree Fixler, the former head of sustainability at DWS, who accused the asset manager of misleading investors about the extent to which its assets were *ESG-integrated*. Following regulatory scrutiny, DWS *dropped the label and scaled back its sustainability claims*. The verb phrase *scale back* denotes a reduction in size or extent and functions as the conceptual inverse of *inflating*. If misrepresentation operates through enlargement, its corrective counterpart is contraction. Scaling back thus appears as a form of damage control, a retreat to claims that can be substantiated under regulatory examination. The move reinforces the scepticism articulated in the earlier examples, portraying sustainability claims as malleable objects that can be expanded or reduced depending on external pressure. Taken together, these examples counterbalance more celebratory discourses emerging from previous examples that encourage companies to *centre* sustainability within brand marketing, instead exposing the contested nature of sustainability claims and the structural tensions surrounding their credibility and authentication.

6.1.3.4 Creative extension: ‘clonked round the head’

This section discusses a creative extension of the OBJECT domain. The example shows how sustainability-related messaging can be represented not simply as an idea to be communicated, but as a physical object forcefully imposed on an audience.

- (13) This year you could barely move without being clonked round the head by a massively important message. Of the show gardens, I counted 16 with some kind of sustainability or climate change angle. The Still Garden celebrated “re-use, repurposing and heritage crafts” (The Telegraph)

Example (13) constitutes a remarkably creative extension of the entrenched mapping IDEAS ARE OBJECTS. While this domain is commonly exploited in highly conventionalised expressions, where ideas may be positioned in metaphorical space, linked to other entities, or treated as manipulable objects, the scenario constructed here assigns the idea a markedly different role. The *massively important message* is not simply conveyed; it is something with which people can be *clonked round the head*. Through the use of the colloquial verb, sustainability and climate change are reconfigured as blunt objects deployed against attendees of the Chelsea Flower Show. Many of the show gardens are described as having *some kind of sustainability or climate change angle*, a message that they mean to convey in a manner that, as the mapping suggest, is certainly not quite so subtle. The metaphor frames the communicative act as physical assault: designers wield the issues of sustainability or climate change as objects that

strike unsuspecting visitors. The resulting scenario involves an agent (the designers of the gardens) brandishing an instrument (the sustainability or climate change message) and flinging it at the heads of the unsuspecting victims (the attendants at the event), which are subjected to this unexpected aggression. The verb *clonked*, onomatopoeic and associated with dull, heavy impact, suggests forceful, repetitive striking that is inescapable (*could barely move without*), and lacks subtlety, constituting an unwelcome intrusion imposed on visitors rather than being integrated in the show gardens. The perceived heavy-handedness of environmental messages is compared to unexpected physical threat, striking from behind and targeting a vulnerable part of the body. Additionally, the enumeration of 16 show gardens guilty of this aggression intensifies this depiction, suggesting the likelihood of repeated blows. The exasperation with the intensity of messaging relating to sustainability and climate change is conveyed effectively through this scenario, representing a rare display of an overt critique targeted at sustainability communication. The undesirability of being hit on the head with something glaringly depicts sustainability messaging as impinging on the attendants' physical health, forcing them to be subjected to an unwanted lecture, and spoiling their experience. Hence, the author is complaining that the *massively important messages* have become so pervasive that communication achieve the opposite of the intended effect, alienating audiences through aggressive imposition rather than fostering engagement.

6.1.3.5 SUBSTANCE scenarios

This section considers cases in which sustainability is conceptualised not as a bounded object but as a substance capable of movement and diffusion. The examples illustrate how this framing foregrounds dissemination, expansion and the spread of sustainable practices or awareness.

- (14) Nasce il primo prototipo di cucina arredo predefinito realizzato con materiali di riciclo. Il duo di architetture si occupa di sostenere e diffondere la sostenibilità in ambito di design e di arredo domestico, in modo che sia alla portata di tutti! (Corriere della Sera)

The first prototype of a pre-built kitchen made from recycled materials was born. The architectural duo works to support and spread sustainability in design and home furnishings, making it accessible to everyone!

- (15) [Antonio Porro, ad del Gruppo Mondadori]: Stiamo favorendo l'integrazione degli ambiti ESG nei piani aziendali e nel nostro modello operativo, potenziando le attività di stakeholder engagement attraverso momenti di ascolto e survey. Il tutto mantenendo una grande attenzione alla governance aziendale e alle buone pratiche necessarie per perseguire il successo sostenibile del business. In ambito ambientale, invece, crediamo che il nostro ruolo di editori ci dia la responsabilità di dare un contributo nella diffusione di una cultura green (Il Giornale)

[Antonio Porro, CEO of the Mondadori Group:] We are encouraging the integration of ESG issues into our corporate plans and operating model, strengthening stakeholder engagement through

listening sessions and surveys. We are doing all this while maintaining a strong focus on corporate governance and the best practices needed to achieve sustainable business success. In the environmental field, however, we believe our role as publishers gives us a responsibility to contribute to the dissemination of a green culture.

In these examples, sustainability shifts from being construed as an OBJECT to being conceptualised as a SUBSTANCE, acquiring properties associated with liquids, gases, or light such as outward movement, diffusion and permeation. Example (14) describes two architects who ‘work to support and spread sustainability in design and home furnishings’ (*si occupa di sostenere e diffondere la sostenibilità in ambito di design e di arredo domestic*). The verb *diffondere*, which literally means “to diffuse” or “to spread”, as an entity like light or a liquid would, metaphorically depicts wide dissemination and promotion. The verb emphasises dynamic propagation, which spreads out from a central source, gradually expands and distributes itself evenly. The architects function as agents of diffusion, making sustainable practices ‘accessible to everyone’ (*alla portata di tutti*) within the delimited field of domestic design and furnishings, with the aim of achieving a meaningful change in habits.

Example (15) adopts the same framing, expressed here through the noun *diffusione* (“dissemination, spread”) rather than the verb. Antonio Porro, CEO of the leading publisher Mondadori states that the company has a role to play in the ‘dissemination of a green culture’ (*diffusione di una cultura green*). The substance diffusing is thus a green culture, and the mapping remains consistent in depicting outward propagation making environmental awareness more prevalent. Porro lays claim to a dual role for Mondadori: implementing ESG internally, as all companies are able to do, while transmitting sustainability values externally, leveraging their platform as a publishing company. With regard to the former, the company is ‘encouraging the integration of ESG issues into our corporate plans and operating model’ (*favorendo l'integrazione degli ambiti ESG nei piani aziendali e nel nostro modello operativo*), balancing corporate governance and the ‘best practices needed to achieve sustainable business success’ (*buone pratiche necessarie per perseguire il successo sostenibile del business*). As for the latter, Mondadori intends to contribute to the dissemination of a green culture (*dare un contributo nella diffusione di una cultura green*) through the creation of educational materials that promote and divulge an increased environmental awareness. This construes the publisher as an intentional vector of diffusion for environmental sustainability, exerting influence on wider society.

In the following examples, sustainability is conceptualised through WATER scenarios, which foreground different modes of spread, scale, agency, and evaluative stance. While all rely on liquid dynamics, they profile different patterns of movement.

(16) Another significant change is the increasing importance of sustainability to consumers. ESG (environmental, social and governance) credentials are now accepted as being a fundamental part of a company’s ability to attract investors. As a result, sustainability is a rising tide across all sectors of the financial services industry (The Independent)

(17) Accusations of greenwashing plague a number of higher and lower profile brands. And yet behind all this, there’s a reassuring tide of companies and executives taking a more holistic

and meaningful approach to sustainability. An upthrust which puts the simple ambition of “doing better” at the heart of how businesses are run and profits are made (The Independent)

These examples construe sustainability as a *tide*, profiling scale, momentum, and inevitability. A tide is a natural continuous movement of water that cannot be directly controlled, referring here to sustainability inevitably *spreading across all sectors of the financial services industry*. In example (16), the metaphor of a *rising tide* implies this is a powerful, growing force that is difficult to resist or reverse, suggesting unstoppable movement at large scale and thus depicting change across industries. The positive framing is explicit: this is presented as significant beneficial change driven by consumer values and investor priorities. The metaphor suggests that sustainability is lifting all parts of the industry, indicating widespread positive transformation. Once again, the competitive advantage for companies is highlighted: not adhering to sustainability requirements would seriously threaten their survival, inasmuch as they would risk not being able *to attract investors* and thus the funds that they need. The significant change is foregrounded, and it presented as coming from both consumers and investors: on the one hand, consumers increasingly seek sustainability assurances in the products and services they purchase, while investors factor sustainability into their investment decisions.

In example (17), the tide metaphor describes companies and executives genuinely committed to sustainability beyond superficial compliance or greenwashing. Greenwashing is itself metaphorically represented as a plague, something affecting brands as sickness would affect a population, spreading in uncontrolled manner. Both mappings build on the notion of something whose spread is characterised by a feeling of being unstoppable; plague evokes distinctly and markedly unpleasant notions of illness and unavoidable death for large numbers, whereas the *tide* is described as *reassuring*, positioned as solution to the greenwashing issue. The *more holistic and meaningful approach to sustainability* is characterised by going beyond narrow profit motives, motivated by *the simple ambition of “doing better”*. Importantly, the mapping selectively exploits only the features of tides relevant to the argument being presented: through the Invariance Principle, aspects such as ebbing or retreat to the seabed are excluded, with attention focused solely on the rising phase, constructed as leading to permanent rather than temporary effects.

- (18) For years now, every hotel group - particularly at the luxury end - has been falling over itself to beat the competition with claims of being eco-friendly (already a somewhat passé term in the industry), “green” (ditto), or – these days - sustainable. We couldn’t decide whether it was just the travel industry that was tying itself in knots over the issue, or if a sustainable consciousness had truly trickled down to the average holidaymaker. It’s something I hear a lot about at work events, but far less about in my everyday watercooler holiday chat (The Independent)

In this passage, *sustainable consciousness* is construed as something that spreads in a highly specific manner: by trickling. While the verb *to trickle* normally selects liquid entities, its co-occurrence with the preposition *down* activates a fixed expression from economic discourse, the trickle-down theory, which maintains that policies benefiting wealthy individuals or businesses will ultimately transmit advantages to less affluent social groups. Proponents of

the trickle-down theory contend that economic gains at the top will diffuse downward to the lower classes in the form of employment, investment, and economic growth (Koerting, 2023). This metaphor builds on the deeply entrenched vertical representation of stratum of society as hierarchical levels, with economic elites positioned at the top and progressively less affluent groups below. Within this framework, the conceptualisation of money as a liquid that naturally flows downward appears intuitively plausible, since it logically aligns with an already available cognitive model of a stratified society. However, the theory has been widely criticised for exacerbating inequality and for failing to actually deliver meaningful benefits to lower-income groups, rendering its effectiveness a matter of sustained debate among economists and policymakers. The very label of the theory already carries arguably negative connotations, inasmuch as trickling down implies that those at lower levels experience only negligible and delayed effects of actions undertaken higher up. It is frequently used pejoratively to describe government economic policies that disproportionately favour economic elites while leaving others dependent on marginal spillovers.

When the metaphor is transferred to the domain of sustainability, awareness itself is reified as a liquid resource that can trickle down in much the same way as wealth in the economic model. The movement thus retains the defining properties of the source metaphor: vertical, top-to-bottom trajectory combined with an uneven and scant flow. This construal suggests that the spread of sustainability awareness is partial and hesitant rather than widespread or transformative. Sustainability consciousness is framed as a halting stream flowing top-down, from industry professionals and elites to ordinary travellers, rather than emerging from consumer demand or collective grassroots pressure. The author explicitly questions whether such diffusion has genuinely occurred or whether the travel industry is merely *tying itself in knots* in its attempts to signal sustainability credentials. The lexical choice of the verb carries a negative evaluative charge, since trickling implies inefficiency in the redistribution, in all likelihood not leading to a satisfactory redistribution of wealth in the original meaning and by extension, of environmental awareness. Moreover, the metaphor imports the ideological baggage of the economic theory itself. Initiative and agency are at the top, from industry actors, and only as a consequence of this can these concerns eventually be transmitted to travellers, dismissively described as the *average holidaymaker*. Therefore, the negative connotations associated with trickle-down economics are preserved and repurposed in the new discursive context.

The creativity of this metaphor lies in its displacement. While trickle-down is a highly conventionalised metaphor within economic discourse, here it is revitalised both at the lexical and at the discourse level. Lexically, the fixed expression is adapted and inflected, a process which, as Fuoli et al. (2021a) note, can enhance metaphorical creativity. Discursively, its relocation from economic theory to sustainability discourse foregrounds implicit assumptions about hierarchy, agency, and responsibility, making the metaphor salient and more charged evaluatively in a new domain.

- (19) There is an expectation that influential or mandatory ESG disclosure frameworks aimed at public investments, such as the EU's Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation, will begin to filter through to private investments (Financial Times)

In example (19), regulatory frameworks are conceptualised through a liquid percolation metaphor that depicts their gradual transmission across market sectors. The head of agriculture and natural assets at Macquarie Asset Management characterises the current regulatory landscape as confusing and fragmented. Against this backdrop of fragmentation, the text anticipates that *influential or mandatory ESG disclosure frameworks aimed at public investments* could begin to *filter through to private investments*. The verb phrase *filter through* activates a source domain of liquid passing through porous material, where regulations originating in public markets are construed as a fluid that gradually permeates barriers to reach private investment sectors. This mapping profiles several defining features: the movement is directional, flowing from the more heavily regulated public sphere toward the comparatively opaque private markets; it is gradual and continuous, rather than instantaneous; and it carries connotations of inevitability, since once filtering begins, the liquid will continue moving through successive layers until it reaches all domains. The metaphor also evokes notions of purification and refinement inherent to filtering processes, suggesting these standards will improve practices in private markets as a filter clarifies liquid by removing impurities. Importantly, the metaphor frames regulatory diffusion as a natural, quasi-autonomous process rather than requiring explicit enforcement mechanisms, thereby constructing the spread of ESG standards as organic and self-sustaining. This framing resembles the “trickle down” metaphor examined earlier, though with distinct nuances: whereas “trickle down” emphasises hierarchical transmission and carries pejorative connotations of scant, delayed effects, “filter through” foregrounds systematic permeation and implies more thorough transformation. The passage thus positions private markets as inevitably subject to the same regulatory pressures already governing public investments, with the filtering metaphor naturalising this progression as both beneficial and unavoidable.

6.1.4 Concluding observations on the OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain

The analysis of OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE metaphors reveals how sustainability is variously construed across discourse contexts, with metaphorical choices encoding distinct evaluative stances and conceptual frameworks. While the domain provides highly conventionalised resources for reifying abstract notions, enabling ideas to be positioned, connected, modified, and manipulated, the specific OBJECT metaphorical scenarios activated reveal systematic patterns drawing a distinction between authentic integration and superficial performance. Companies and events can be presented as making sustainability central to the ethos or revolving around it (as in examples (1 - 4)), or as embracing values that are closely tied to sustainability (as in examples (5) and (6)). These expressions establish a narrative which positions sustainability as a constitutive element, something that cannot be removed without fundamentally altering the system’s structure or integrity. Conversely, mappings focussing on the exterior appearance of objects ground greenwashing accusations in concrete terms: credentials are burnished, inflated, then scaled back when subjected to closer scrutiny, as in examples (10), (11), and (12) respectively. Therefore, a contrast can be established between

metaphors relying on spatial positioning, connection or integration, meant to convey authentic commitment, and metaphors profiling surface-level modifications, pointing to superficial positioning. SUBSTANCE metaphors foreground instead movement and spread, shifting to dynamic propagation: sustainability diffuses, for instance, due to architects spreading practices in design, or publishers disseminating green culture through educational materials, as in examples (14) and (15). Within SUBSTANCE metaphors, WATER scenarios profile markedly different patterns, with tide metaphors emphasising powerful, collective, unstoppable movement lifting entire sectors.

While the OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain provides highly conventionalised mappings, some examples demonstrate creative extension through displacement, elaboration, or revitalisation. The ‘green thread’ (*filo verde*) in example (8) revitalises the established thread metaphor through colour specification, which simultaneously activates the GREEN FOR ENVIRONMENT metonymy and foregrounds the physical object, while the weaving scenario (*intrecciare i fili / tessere un tessuto*, ‘to intertwine the threads’ / ‘to weave a fabric’) in example (9) extends single-thread connectivity into elaborate interdisciplinary integration. Most strikingly, the *clonked round the head* metaphor in example (9) creatively reconfigures the IDEAS ARE OBJECTS mapping to transform sustainability into a blunt weapon wielded aggressively against unwilling recipients, capturing exasperation with heavy-handed messaging. The *trickle-down* metaphor in example (18) transfers an entrenched economics expression into sustainability discourse, revitalising it lexically and discursively to construe the spread of an increased awareness of sustainability in critical terms. Similarly, the *filter through* metaphor in example (19) construes regulatory diffusion as gradual permeation through porous barriers, sharing the liquid-dynamics source domain with *trickle down* but carrying connotations of purification and systematic transformation rather than scant, hierarchical redistribution. In sum, the OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain provides flexible resources for construing sustainability across diverse contexts; the domain’s versatility enables both conventional reification and creative elaboration, encoding evaluative stances ranging from optimistic transformation to sceptical resistance.

6.2 COMPETITION

6.2.1 Features of the COMPETITION domain

Metaphors of COMPETITION are used across a variety of areas; these schemas frame conflicts in a variety of domains of experience as bounded contests with participants with clear roles, rules and procedures, goals and parameters to establish clearly victory or defeat. For instance, both political activity (Balbus, 1975; Guliashvili, 2021; Stojan & Mijić, 2019) and trade disputes (Tan, 2023) are often presented as a contest between opponents who have to follow certain rules. Oftentimes these mappings rely on lexicon and images from the domain of team sports, involving roles such as teams, coaches, fans, referees, and leagues to portray

participants. Semino and Masci (1996), for example, found that in the Italian context Berlusconi systematically framed Italian politics as football. Another COMPETITION metaphor that is widespread in a variety of discourses is that of a race, drawing on a specific type of competition to convey an idea of progression and development. Charteris-Black (2017) noted its pervasiveness as a manner of framing LIFE, shaping how we conceptualise individual performance, social progress, and economic systems. It has also been studied more specifically as a metaphor for technological development (Gozzi, 1998) or economic competition (Krennmayr et al., 2014). The pervasiveness of sport-based metaphors can be partly attributed to how naturally they allow for a clear picture of winners and losers, endowing factors that make victory more likely with positive associations (Charteris-Black, 2013) and naturalising social and economic inequality as the inevitable outcome of a competitive game played by rules, where individual effort and performance are the sole determinants of success (Charteris-Black, 2017). In sustainability discourse, Duarte Silva and Almeida (2020) proposed a SUSTAINABILITY IS COMPETITION metaphor which has been widely used in green marketing discourses.

The notion of competition has been discussed within broader debates revolving around the appropriate level of abstraction or schematicity required for a metaphor to function as a robust source domain (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). In the present study work, it is meant to comprise all lexical choices signalling a framing of activities related to the implementation of sustainability in competitive terms. While in the case of an election, the target itself already contains an inherent element of competitive activity, when talking about sustainability, this feature is instead selected and mapped from the source domain in question. Specific scenarios within this domain serve to highlight the features of the metaphorical framing at a more precise level of specificity and complexity, as it will become evident in the discussion below. Additionally, although metaphors of COMPETITION share common traits with WAR metaphors, I chose to keep the vehicle terms contained in this section separate from those pertaining to the WAR domain (see section 6.5). Those in the latter domain refer more overtly to conflict and struggle between opponents in a military setting, foregrounding connotations of ruthlessness, aggression, and the existential threat of physical struggle and death (Koller, 2004; Charteris-Black, 2004). Conversely, COMPETITION metaphors suggest fair play and the chance for peaceful resolution (Howe, 1988), framing conflict as rule-based and bounded. A study on climate discourse comparing the effects of the RACE metaphor, for instance, to those of the WAR metaphor, due to the relevance of both framings in climate discourse, concluded that the latter made people perceive more urgency and risk surrounding climate change and thus lead to the expression of a greater willingness to increase conservation behaviour (Flusberg et al., 2017).

6.2.2 Quantitative results and general patterns

225 metaphors drawing on the COMPETITION domain were found in the corpus; Table 6.2 shows the number of metaphors found for each newspaper, and the relative percentage that

the COMPETITION domain represents of the total number of metaphors found for each language and overall, considering both languages. The 156 Italian metaphors correspond to 11.3% of the total of metaphors in the Italian corpus, while the 69 English metaphors correspond to 11.7% of the total of metaphors in the English corpus. Thus, Italian newspapers contain more metaphors in absolute terms, while English newspapers show a higher relative frequency, meaning COMPETITION metaphors are proportionally more common in the English corpus. Overall, the 225 metaphors relating to the COMPETITION domain amount to 11.4% of the total numbers of metaphors found in the Italian and the English corpus.

Table 6.2

Frequencies for COMPETITION metaphors by newspapers and language

Language	Newspaper	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency/ (sub)corpus
ITA	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	42	11.3%
ITA	<i>Il Giornale</i>	17	
ITA	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	54	
ITA	<i>La Repubblica</i>	43	
Total (ITA)		156	
ENG	<i>Financial Times</i>	18	11.7%
ENG	<i>The Guardian</i>	12	
ENG	<i>The Independent</i>	35	
ENG	<i>The Telegraph</i>	4	
Total (ENG)		69	
Total		225	11.4%

Note. The relative frequency is calculated as a percentage of the total number of metaphors identified in each (sub)corpus: 1,386 in the ITA subcorpus, 590 in the ENG subcorpus, and 1,976 in the corpus as a whole.

In terms of frequency, conventional metaphors occur more often in both languages: *sfida* ('challenge') is the single most common vehicle term counts 31 occurrences, occurring in its plural form *sfide* (18), as well, while their English equivalents *challenge* and *challenges* occur 12 and 19 times respectively. A specific group of terms evokes more directly a scenario of team sports and matches, comprising *partita* ('match', 8), *gioco* (6) and the English equivalent *game* (2), *giocare* (6) and *gioca* ('to play', 3), *campo* ('field', 5). A racing frame emerges through the vehicle terms *racing* (3, verb), *race* (3) and the Italian equivalent *corsa* (2), *traguardo* ('finish line', 7) and the plural form *traguardi* (7). Examples illustrating the use of these terms in context are discussed in more detail below. Lastly, a betting frame emerges through *puntare su* ('to bet on', 16 occurrences) and conjugated variants (totalling 26 occurrences), and *scommettere* ('to bet', 2) and *scommessa* ('bet', 2), suggesting a scenario of wagering and risk-taking.

6.2.3 Qualitative results

As noted in the previous paragraph, *sfida* ('challenge') is the most frequent lexical item in this domain and, if all occurrences in both singular and plural form in English and Italian are considered, these amount to 81 linguistic instantiations. The implementation of sustainability is thus often framed in these terms, as a difficult activity requiring a great deal of effort to be faced. The challenge(s) are qualified through adjectives denoting their novelty, such as *nuove* ('new'), or often with adjectives that highlight their relevance: *critiche* ('critical'), *decisiva* ('decisive'), *principali* ('main'), *cruciali* ('crucial'), *cruciale* ('crucial'), *big* or *huge*, *global* and *considerable*. When a specific action with regard to the challenge is evoked, it usually refers either to the manner of approaching it, such as *facing*, *addressing*, *working on*, *standing up to*, *rising to*, or *tackling* it or, in more agentive formulations, to suggesting a certain outcome in terms of *winning*, *successfully overcoming*, *developing solutions*, or *solving* it.

- (20) He [Csaba Korosi, incoming president of the UN General Assembly] called for the same resolve today that the U.N.'s founding nations had "to stand up to the challenges that threaten international peace and security as well as our sustainable future on this planet." Korosi, a diplomat for nearly 40 years previously served in Libya, United Arab Emirates, Israel, Greece and the United Nations in New York. (The Independent)

Example (20) exemplifies the former category of possible actions to approach the issue. It shows how the challenges connected to this topic can be manifold, with the speaker, a diplomat, grouping together *challenges that threaten international peace and security* (social) *as well as our sustainable future on this planet* (environmental). The conventional metaphorisation of complex issues to be faced as challenges is paired with a deontic framing (*had to*), reinforcing the sense of obligation and commitment placed on the U.N. The action profiled here is that of standing up to the challenges, through a metaphor that relies on the embodied association between having an upright posture and signalling readiness to confront danger. Korosi evokes the commitment, and collective willpower demonstrated by the UN's founding nations at the end of World War II as necessary in order to take decisive action to address the current pressing problems of climate crisis, economic instability, food, energy, water supply crises, and conflicts.

- (21) «Gli imprenditori e le aziende sono al centro del nostro operato» ricorda il leader di Confindustria Brescia Franco Gussalli Beretta. Convinto che la sfida della sostenibilità si vince facendo leva su tre punti-chiave: «People, planet, prosperity» (Corriere della Sera)

"Entrepreneurs and companies are at the heart of our work," recalls Franco Gussalli Beretta, leader of Confindustria Brescia. He is convinced that the sustainability challenge can be won by leveraging three key points: "People, planet, prosperity"

Example (21) focusses instead on the predicted outcome of the challenge, which is considered to be victory. Franco Gussalli Beretta, president of Confindustria Brescia, similarly to example

(20), frames sustainability as a challenge that entrepreneurs and companies must face, requiring effort across what he identifies as three key points: “People, planet, prosperity”. By stating that the challenge ‘can be won’ (*si vince*), the speaker immediately foregrounds the preferred outcome, implicitly evoking the opposite outcome of losing as the unspoken dispreferred alternative. This evaluative connotation lends normative force to the PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor of ‘leveraging’ (*facendo leva su*) the three elements, casting the three Ps as tools required to secure victory. The triad reproduces, in a different but established format, the widespread three-pillar model of sustainability: people (social), planet (environmental), and prosperity (economic), here arranged with a notable emphasis on the social dimension first. The social component concerns improving working conditions (welfare programmes, bonuses, additional leave, insurance policies); the environmental one relates to reducing emissions and adopting renewable energy; and the economic one reframes continued prosperity as acceptable when pursued sustainably and with benefits for the territory. Thus, Gussalli Beretta advocates a holistic approach that integrates these dimensions as the most suitable means of winning this challenge at the level of firms and entrepreneurs.

(22) “We just implemented [a new screen] in the last two months,” Reid Steadman, global head of ESG and innovation, noted. “Views of sustainability are evolving.” The challenge is magnified by the incoherence of weighing so many disparate qualitative factors against each other. There is simply no objective way to balance an exemplary record on labour relations or gender pay equity against a high carbon footprint (Financial Times)

Example (22) treats the difficulty of assessing companies’ sustainability performance in itself as a challenge. After noting that a new screening criterion to evaluate companies has recently been implemented and that conceptions of sustainability are continually evolving, the text maintains that *the challenge is magnified by the incoherence of weighing so many disparate qualitative factors against each other*. This statement thus suggests that an activity that would already be challenging is rendered even more complicated by a structural incoherence within ESG evaluation. The challenge *is magnified* not because additional obstacles emerge, but because the attempt to compare fundamentally heterogeneous ethical dimensions lacks any stable or objective metric. As the article argues, there is no coherent way to weigh, for example, excellent labour relations or gender pay equity against a high carbon footprint. The impossibility of aligning such qualitatively distinct indicators exposes the contradiction inherent in treating ESG indices as objective measures of “goodness”. In this instance, *challenge* functions not only as a marker of effortful activity but as a device used to foreground the tensions and limitations of the evaluative framework developed in the name of ensuring greater sustainability. It differs from cases where the term is mobilised to advocate action or to legitimise particular corporate strategies, framing the implementation of sustainability as an activity where victory can be achieved. Instead, the challenge appears to be insurmountable, as the supposed improvements do not help to overcome it, but instead make it even more difficult: the more factors are incorporated, the less stable the overall assessment becomes. The figurative image thus conveys a critique, certainly not the only one found within the corpus, of ESG criteria, describing them as inherently subjective, malleable, and shaped by human judgement, regardless of attempts to formalise them. The metaphor places the burden on the incoherence of the system rather than on the agents acting within

it, thereby shifting attention away from corporate shortcomings and towards the structural futility of any holistic measure purporting to balance disparate ethical concerns.

- (23) Se per gli ottomila partecipanti [della Maratona dles Dolomites, granfondo ciclistica amatoriale che si svolge sulle Dolomiti] [...] la sfida è concludere la corsa cercando di battere qualche amico e migliorare il proprio tempo, per il comitato organizzatore la competizione è quella di aggiudicarsi la vittoria della sostenibilità e creare un evento sempre più ecologico (Corriere della Sera)

If for the eight thousand participants [in the Maratona dles Dolomites, an amateur road cycling race held in the Dolomites] [...] the challenge is to finish the race trying to beat some friends and improve their own time, for the organizing committee the competition is to win the victory of sustainability and create an increasingly eco-friendly event

Due to the contextual situation that is being discussed in example (23), a topic-triggered metaphor is drawn, working at two different levels and activating both the basic meaning and the figurative meaning. The topic is a marathon, thus, an actual competition. Therefore, in its more basic sense, it represents a ‘challenge’ (*sfida*) for the participants in terms of the effort required to finish the race while at the same time competing against friends (‘trying to beat some friends’, *cercando di battere qualche amico*) and against themselves by improving their time (‘improve their own time’, *migliorare il proprio tempo*). Once the concrete competition and its objective have been established, the writer introduces the second layer of meaning, the figurative one: the competition, for the organising committee, consists instead in claiming a different kind of achievement, in ‘winning the victory of sustainability’ (*aggiudicarsi la vittoria della sostenibilità*). This sets up a series of mappings aided by the background knowledge already established with regard to how a race functions. Firstly, due to the effort involved in running a marathon having been foregrounded by discussing it, such notion of effortful resolution can be transferred to the parallel competition that the organising committee is running in planning the event. With regard to the final goal, the victory for the participants consists primarily in arriving at the finish line, a concrete goal that is realised in the limited timeframe of the marathon itself. However, the additional and possibly incremental achievements of doing so with a better time than a friend or than the one achieved in a previous race are also taken into consideration. Similarly, the ‘victory of sustainability’ with regard to the current event is articulated in ‘creating an increasingly eco-friendly event’ (*creare un evento sempre più ecologico*), an aim that has been achieved for the current edition by taking measures such as reducing participants, providing eco-textile jerseys, and creating medals from natural materials. However, while this can be considered as the metaphorical “crossing the finish line” for this edition of the marathon, just as a runner can continuously strive to improve their time, so can the committee attempt to organise an event that is more and more ecological each year, suggesting an ongoing effort.

- (24) According to its [the Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030’s] founders, the initiative is open to brands from across all groups and price segments - as long as they satisfy membership criteria. “We are competitors outside sustainability but we are not in competition for sustainability,” argues Marie-Claire Daveu, chief sustainability officer at Kering [French luxury group]. The collaboration will have several benefits, she says (Financial Times)

In example (24) instead, the domain of COMPETITION is used to frame market dynamics between brands, while being negated as a valid frame for the implementation of sustainability. The initiative that is being discussed is the Watch & Jewellery Initiative 2030, which is meant to help the watch and jewellery industry meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by laying out objectives for environmental protection, resource management, diversity and inclusion. The classical entrenched metaphor of business as a competition is established: the speaker Marie-Claire Daveu, Chief Sustainability Officer at the watch and jewellery brand Kering, clearly states that the brands that have joined the initiative *are competitors outside sustainability*. The brands operate as rivals for shares of the watch and jewellery market, with consumers weighing their products against each other within the same sector. However, the speaker maintains that such a framing cannot be extended to sustainability: Daveu explicitly rejects the metaphor and maintains that Kering and the other brands *are not in competition for sustainability*. The scale of the challenge is portrayed as requiring cooperation, since none of the brands would be able to change the paradigm on their own. Thus, a collective approach is presented as more effective for reducing emissions, protecting nature and biodiversity, and improving conditions for workers. Explicitly recalling the logic of business competition serves to emphasise the value of stepping outside it, underscoring an industry-wide commitment to addressing the urgency of the situation. In doing so, the text positions cooperation on sustainability as taking precedence over the interests of individual brands.

(25) The biggest mistake investors make is to try to boil down ESG to a checklist or an index. "That checklist is a blunt instrument that doesn't reflect the challenges, subtleties and trade-offs of ESG," he [David Blood, co-founder of Generation Investment Management] says. "People say sustainability or ESG is always a win-win - of course it isn't. There are trade-offs" (Financial Times)

Example (25) expose another critique to ESG principles. The speaker is David Blood, the co-founder of Generation Investment Management, who is challenging a common representation of ESG investing. There is a general tendency, reflected within the corpus examined here, to present the implementation of ESG as an opportunity for everybody, a *win-win* that is going to generate advantages both in terms of growth and in terms of bettering environmental and social conditions, with no relevant downsides or difficult choices. Blood directly contradicts this view, bluntly negating the metaphor by stating that *of course it isn't*. He challenges the overarching framing of sustainability and ESG as simply an opportunity, introducing nuance and negative aspects. Implementing sustainability does not always represent a victory on all fronts, and ESG investing involves difficult decisions where different goals conflict with each other. Every objective cannot always be achieved simultaneously, "winning" in every aspect. ESG investing should be seen instead as a complex balancing act where *trade-offs* need to be carefully considered. Due to the nature of ESG as pertaining to different areas of intervention, with disparate necessities and priorities that need to be taken into consideration, in many cases implementing ESG means sacrificing something else. For instance, to reduce dependence on Russian gas, European governments abandoned environmental goals by returning to fossil fuels, thus choosing energy security over climate commitments. Relatedly, oil and gas investments became lucrative after the invasion of

Ukraine, since they satisfy short-term energy needs but supporting them contradicts climate goals of decarbonisation. ESG cannot be boiled down to a *checklist* of measure to implement to fulfil requirements. Such an approach constitutes a *blunt instrument* that does not reflect the subtleties of such a multifaceted notion. Thus, depicting it as a *win-win*, a situation where only positive outcomes and advantages are foregrounded, has the effect of overlooking the difficult but important notion that sacrifices will need to be made, in order to achieve a reasonable balance among a variety of factors.

6.2.3.1 TEAM SPORTS scenario

The metaphors grouped under this scenario evoke more directly features of team sports and matches being played. As will be shown, examples (26 - 29) are exclusively from the Italian data. The relevance of a specific team sport, football, which was already found to be pervasive in Italian discourse (Semino & Masci, 1996) appears to still be quite productive in terms of a series of expressions that are quite entrenched as manners of discussing the process of dealing with an issue.

- (26) Ogni passaggio di filiera è una lotta di spinte e contropinte sui rincari, su dove scaricarli, in uno scenario fatto anche di sfide a “lungo raggio”, indipendenti dalla congiuntura economica e geopolitica, come la sfida sulla sostenibilità, sull’etica, sulla valorizzazione del territorio. In questa partita giocano tutti un ruolo fondamentale, ma la palla parte “dal basso”, dai consumatori (Sole 24 Ore)

Every step in the supply chain is a fight of pushes and counter-pushes over price increases, over where to pass them on, in a scenario also marked by long-term challenges, independent of the economic and geopolitical situation, such as the challenge of sustainability, ethics, and the valorisation of the territory. Everyone plays a fundamental role in this match, but the ball starts “at the bottom”, from consumers

Example (26) contains a metaphor lexicalised through a variety of terms: firstly, a ‘challenge’ (*sfida*) is established as pertaining to ‘sustainability, ethics, and the valorisation of the territory’ (*sostenibilità, sull’etica, sulla valorizzazione del territorio*). This refers to the supply chain for food and the significant inflation affecting prices in Italy, already framed in quite contentious WAR and PHYSICAL FORCE terms as a ‘fight of pushes and counter-pushes over price increases’ (*lotta di spinte e contropinte sui rincari*). This suggests that each stage of the supply chain has become a battleground where different actors struggle over who absorbs these cost increases. However, while short-term struggles hold great influence, what is foregrounded here is ‘long-term challenges’ (*sfide a “lungo raggio”*), that which will remain so even when the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and drought conditions will no longer be felt throughout the food supply chain. These long-term challenges transcend current crises, and they comprise sustainability. This situation, in which ongoing economic pressures and sustainability issues must be managed across food supply chains, is defined as a ‘match’ (*partita*). The notion of a match naturally evokes multiple players, and this is immediately

exploited by stating that ‘everyone plays a fundamental role’ (*giocano tutti un ruolo fondamentale*). All entities involved, from producers and distributors to retailers and consumers, are directly involved in the effort of facing these challenges, and balancing costs, sustainability, ethics, and the valorisation of the territory. However, the last figurative expression building this scenario provides a nuance that is licensed by the structure of the source domain: in a team, while every player participates in the communal effort of winning the game, the tasks are not distributed uniformly. The expression ‘but the ball starts “at the bottom”’ (*ma la palla parte “dal basso”*) draws on a tactical technique in football describing how a team initiates play from the goalkeeper, passing the ball through nearby players in their own half of the field, requiring all of them to coordinate to progressively move the ball forward to advance up the pitch. This feature is proposed to explain the thesis expounded here: in order for action to start, the first impulse has to come from consumers. Just as the goalkeeper is the one that sets the ball in motion, prompting the other players to coordinate and collaborate to advance the action, consumers are positioned as the starting point. Their purchasing choices drive the entire system, and thus they need to start modifying their habits, buying seasonal, zero-kilometre products, directly influencing the market and supporting shorter supply chains. Only then can other players in the team, that is, other agents in the supply chain, make meaningful changes to face the challenges established, once they are justified by the initiative coming from consumers. The metaphor clearly conveys the allocation of responsibility established here: just as a team needs all players in a game, all stakeholders have essential roles in this match. However, just as the action in football would not start at all if the goalkeeper did not kick the ball first, so would changes with regard to long-term sustainability values not materialise without consumers taking the initiative, since purchasing decisions have significant power to influence the entire food system.

(27) Del resto, oltre ad essere un’occasione unica per rendere le nostre città più vivibili, digitali e sostenibili, la partita delle smart city è già e sarà sempre più anche una sfida di mercato. Una competizione all’ultimo bit sostenuta dal Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza (sono previsti oltre 10 miliardi di euro di finanziamenti per la digitalizzazione dei comuni Italiani tra le varie missioni), che Tim [Telecom Italia, principale operatore italiano di telecomunicazioni] intende giocare in prima linea, facendo leva sulle esperienze già consolidate e sulle nuove progettualità (La Repubblica)

Moreover, beyond being a unique opportunity to make our cities more liveable, digital and sustainable, the smart city match is already and will increasingly be a market challenge as well. A competition to the last bit, supported by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (over €10 billion in funding is earmarked for the digitalisation of Italian municipalities across various missions), which TIM [Telecom Italia, Italy’s main telecommunications operator] intends to play at the forefront.

The *match* (‘partita’) referred to in example (27) is the competitive market opportunity surrounding the digital transformation of Italian cities, which will need digital transformation services. Multiple companies are competing in this *sfida di mercato* (‘market challenge’) to provide smart city technologies and services to Italian municipalities. This market *competition* (‘competizione’) thus has digital companies as participants, and the lucrative opportunity of digitalisation of municipalities as the final prize, considering the funds from

the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) allocated for this. It is qualified as *to the last bit* ('all'ultimo bit'), which is a play on words combining the digital "bits", which evoke the nature of the specific competition in question, with the Italian expression "all'ultimo sangue". This expression can be rendered in English as "to the bitter end" but translates more literally as "to the last drop of blood". While its original violent connotation is notably mitigated by substituting "blood" with "bit", it nevertheless contributes to depicting the competition amongst technology companies as fierce and antagonistic. Having established how competitive this match will be, TIM is presented as one of the main competitors, intending to play the said game *at the forefront* ('intende giocare in prima linea'). This conveys that TIM intends to be a major, leading competitor in the smart city market and not a peripheral player watching from the sidelines. Interestingly, the extract's dominant framing is one of fierce corporate rivalry: the language of matches, challenges, and competitions foregrounds private actors vying for market share. Yet this commercial narrative is prefaced by an appeal to civic benefit, presenting smart city development as 'a unique opportunity to make our cities more liveable, digital and sustainable' (*un'occasione unica per rendere le nostre città più vivibili, digitali e sostenibili*). The public-interest dimension thus functions as a legitimising preamble to what is fundamentally a discourse of corporate competition, positioning the pursuit of profit as naturally aligned with the collective good.

- (28) «L'altro [secondo fattore di crescita, dopo l'export, secondo Pietro Geremia, ad di San Marco Group] è la sostenibilità, elemento ormai fondamentale anche per il business». Ambientale, sociale e di governance. Da 15 anni il gruppo [San Marco Group] mette in campo una serie di soluzioni per rendere sostenibile l'intera filiera. «Il progetto Life cycle assessment ci permette di calcolare la quantità di Co2 che il nostro ciclo produttivo emette» (Corriere della Sera)

"The other [the second driver of growth, after exports, according to Pietro Geremia, CEO of San Marco Group] is sustainability, which is now also a fundamental element for business." Environmental, social, and governance. For 15 years, the group [San Marco Group] has been fielding a series of solutions to make the entire supply chain sustainable. "The Life Cycle Assessment project allows us to calculate the amount of CO2 our production cycle emits"

- (29) In un contesto in cui comunque il food&beverage resisterà meglio di altri settori, un ruolo da protagonista continueranno a ricoprirlo le imprese a guida familiare. E sulla sostenibilità non si torna indietro, con la quasi totalità delle aziende che sta mettendo in campo azioni concrete per l'ambiente. Sono i punti fermi che emergono dall'ottavo Food Industry Monitor (Sole 24 Ore)

In a context where food & beverage will nonetheless resist better than other sectors, family-run businesses will continue to play a leading role. And there's no turning back on sustainability, with almost all companies fielding concrete environmental measures. These are the key points that emerge from the eighth Food Industry Monitor

Both examples show the use of another conventional expression in Italian that can be traced back to the context of a football competition: 'has been fielding' (*mette in campo*). While this expression can be rendered more clearly in English in this context as "putting into play" or "implementing", the original Italian draws on the literal notion of putting players on the field during a match. It is habitually employed to refer to the implementation of measures in a field,

which in example (28) means implementing ‘solutions to make the entire supply chain sustainable’ (*soluzioni per rendere sostenibile l’intera filiera*). Sustainability initiatives are thus mapped onto players on the field, contributing to the overall effort in the match. In the first example it is used to highlight the long-standing nature of the company’s sustainability efforts. San Marco Group is presented as having implemented sustainability-oriented solutions across its entire supply chain for 15 years. This implicitly positions the company as acting well before sustainability became a fashionable business trend. The measures described here by the company’s CEO illustrate this continuity: the Life Cycle Assessment programme, which tracks CO2 emissions across the production cycle, sustainable packaging, transparency practices, and a range of employee welfare initiatives. The expression signals an ongoing, structured effort and frames sustainability as an embedded, operational reality rather than a reactive move.

In example (29) the same metaphor is used in the food and beverage context, where the importance of family-run businesses is established by saying that they will continue to ‘play a leading role’ (*un ruolo da protagonista continueranno a ricoprirlo le imprese a guida familiare*). Firstly, a JOURNEY metaphor suggests that, as in example (27), measures geared towards sustainability have already been implemented, and businesses will continue to do so, keeping the motion on the established trajectory going: ‘there’s no turning back on sustainability’ (*sulla sostenibilità non si torna indietro*). This forward motion is elaborated as almost all companies ‘fielding concrete environmental measures’ (*la quasi totalità delle aziende che sta mettendo in campo azioni concrete per l’ambiente*). The adjective ‘concrete’ (*concrete*) and the figurative expression both work to establish the concreteness of said action, introduced as a decisive initiative and one of the ‘fixed points’ (*punti fermi*) from the Food Industry Monitor research.

6.2.3.2 RACE scenario

By virtue of the nature of racing, these metaphors are necessarily grounded in the more fundamental PATH schema. Central to this framing is the notion of a race, which provides an adequate framework for understanding the inferences regarding the notion of competition transferred in this metaphor (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). The PATH schema is a necessary component of the RACE scenario in these domains, but it does not suffice as an interpretive lens to understand what evoking the notion of a race conveys.

(30) Formula One said it was “racing towards” its target of making the sport net-zero carbon by 2030, which also includes a plan to have a 100 per cent sustainable fuel by 2026 when the next era of hybrid engines will be introduced. A statement detailed: “With eight years to go, we are racing towards our target” (The Independent)

(31) From an idea in 2011 to a concept vehicle a year later, FE [Formula E, the all-electric motor racing championship] finally achieved lights out for the first time in September 2014 and has been racing towards improved efficiency, sustainability and awareness ever since. Naturally,

the founding cornerstone was not only competition, but to show exactly what all-electric vehicles could be capable of (The Independent)

In both examples, the two figurative expressions exploit a race metaphor which contextually becomes particularly relevant and impactful, considering that it is triggered by the topic of discussion, which is, respectively, Formula One and Formula E. Thus, the topic is racing, in its concrete, basic sense, represented in the first example by the most famous racing competition for formula racing cars. When mapped onto sustainability, the metaphor of *racing towards* a target conveys urgency, time pressure, and the need for continuous, concentrated effort. Movement within a driving scenario also imports connotations of determination and momentum, suggesting purposeful progress rather than tentative steps. In example (30), the finish line is explicitly defined: achieving net-zero carbon emissions in Formula One by 2030. The temporal constraint is foregrounded by attaching sustainability goals to a fixed date, framing environmental action as a timed race rather than an open-ended aspiration. The concrete step highlighted is the plan to introduce sustainable fuel by 2026, which is presented as the technological shift that will enable F1 to eliminate emissions and reach carbon neutrality. The same racing metaphor appears in example (31) when discussing Formula E, another motorsport championship, which is instead exclusively for electric cars. The motor racing terminology “lights out” indicates the start of a race; when the starting lights go out, this signals to drivers that they should begin racing. Thus, it means that Formula E held its first-ever race in September 2014, after going from an idea in 2011 to a concept vehicle in 2012. Formula E was created with the *founding cornerstone* of not only constituting a competition, like other motorsport championships, but specifically to demonstrate what all-electric vehicles could be capable of. The intention was to showcase EVs’ potential at a time when they were regarded with scepticism, raising awareness with regard to their potential, and pushing technological boundaries to continuously improve them. The championship’s drive to influence the wider electric vehicle market and advance EV technology is depicted as a continuous race toward the target of *improved efficiency, sustainability and awareness*, achieved through continuous adjustments.

Therefore, the same metaphor takes on different contextual connotations, due to the nature of F1 and FE. On the one hand, F1 obviously produces a considerable amount of carbon emissions, inasmuch as F1 racing cars use traditional combustion-based engines. Consequently, its movement racing towards net zero encapsulates a shift in its practices. On the other hand, Formula E is explicitly framed as being built around sustainability as a founding principle; it is, as the article states, a no-emissions competition. Therefore, its motion is implied to have been directed towards efficiency, sustainability and awareness since it first started. Its features also justify the different finish lines that are selected in the two concordances: while F1 claims a specific goal to be reached, FE, since it is already presented as sustainable, can justifiably state that what it aims to reach is an improved level of sustainability, which becomes here a process of virtuous and continuous improvement rather than adopting a new initiative. The metaphor in these cases becomes particularly impactful due to its placing: although the two racing events lend slightly different nuances to the same expression, in both cases the impact derives from the alignment between the

figurative and the literal. Describing Formula One and Formula E as *racing* towards sustainability objectives draws directly on what these championships actually do. The metaphor therefore produces a strong parallel between their sporting identity and their environmental ambitions. They are not only racing on the track; they are also racing, that is, moving with urgency and purpose, towards their sustainability targets. In this way, the sport itself becomes the vehicle through which these environmental goals are pursued.

- (32) Esselunga [Esselunga, gruppo italiano della grande distribuzione] batte i tempi nella corsa verso gli obiettivi di sostenibilità. Con quattro anni d'anticipo il gruppo della grande distribuzione ha raggiunto il traguardo riducendo del 30% le emissioni. È uno dei risultati sul fronte della tutela dell'ambiente resi noti nel terzo bilancio di sostenibilità «Abbiamo a cuore il futuro» (Corriere della Sera)

Esselunga [Esselunga, an Italian large-scale retail/supermarket group] is beating the clock in its race toward sustainability goals. Four years ahead of schedule, the large-scale retail group has reached the finish line by reducing emissions by 30%. This is one of the environmental protection achievements announced in the third sustainability report, "We care about the future"

In example (32), the race metaphor evokes a more general racing scenario. Although in the previous examples the topic of discussion (F1 and FE) functioned to prime readers to imagine a racing cars scenario when the scenario builder was used, the metaphor employed here can be more readily associated with a scenario of runners than one of racing cars. This is due to the fact that the Italian word *corsa*, used here to define a race, is also used to refer specifically to the action of running, thus foregrounding this specific instantiation of the RACE scenario. Nonetheless, the basic relevant features mapped are shared in both cases, being an integral part of any race. Esselunga becomes a runner participating in a 'race toward sustainability goals' (*nella corsa verso gli obiettivi di sostenibilità*) and, more importantly, 'beating the clock' (*batte i tempi*). Not only is the supermarket chain engaged in this race, it is also performing better than initially expected. The ultimate goal of the race, the 'finish line' (*traguardo*) of reducing emissions by 30%, has been reached four years ahead of schedule. The company is thus evaluating positively its sustainability efforts, since depicting them as a race carries by default the usual connotations of urgent and sustained efforts. However, the extract constructs a more detailed scenario that celebrates a specific achievement, since the company's progress towards reducing emissions and environmental impact is being framed as not only victory in a race by crossing the finish line, but an even more impressive achievement since the end is reached by beating the time that was initially expected to be needed to finish the race. This racing metaphor emphasises the company's speed, efficiency, and success in achieving environmental goals ahead of the original deadline.

6.2.3.3 BETTING scenario

This scenario introduces a frame that emphasises risk and wagering within competitive scenarios. The BETTING scenario typically conveys the idea of wagering on competitive

outcomes (races, games, matches), foregrounding the idea that there is something at stake and adding a more overt dimension of risk-taking and potential gain or loss. The idea of undertaking an activity that is perceived as being risky and with an uncertain outcome, in the hope of success, is conveyed by comparing it to the activity of gambling, as in example (33–34) below.

- (33) La società [Kerakoll, gruppo modenese specializzato nell'edilizia sostenibile], che prevede una crescita del 20% nel 2022 continua a scommettere sulla visione green. Secondo Sghedoni [Fabio Sghedoni, vicepresidente del gruppo] la sostenibilità deve essere infatti «trasversale a tutte le filiere del made in Italy» che devono lavorare insieme, in ottica di sistema (Corriere della Sera)

The company [Kerakoll, a Modena-based group specialising in sustainable building], which forecasts 20% growth in 2022, continues to bet on a green vision. According to Sghedoni Fabio Sghedoni, the group's vice-president], sustainability must in fact be "cross-cutting across all Made in Italy supply chains", which must work together with a system-wide perspective

In example (33), the company in question is Kerakoll, a green building materials company, which is presented as 'continuing to bet on a green vision' (*continua a scommettere sulla visione green*). The use of 'continues' frames the effort as already underway rather than newly initiated, a framing justified by Kerakoll's established identity as a green building materials company. The company thus keeps wagering on its green vision, making the strategic bet that sustainability and green building will be the future, while backing this belief with concrete investments and commitment. This vision, metaphorically qualified as green, refers to Kerakoll's comprehensive approach to sustainable construction. The validity of this choice is demonstrated by the forecast of 20% growth, which supports the general framing of sustainability as a business opportunity that is advantageous for companies. Having a perspective that takes environmental issues and sustainability into consideration is figuratively represented as betting on it, profiling the idea that it is not a safe choice but rather requires a certain amount of risk. This framing emphasises the merits of companies choosing to do so, thereby placing more value on the ethically correct choice (which also reveals itself to be profitable) that is more uncertain, rather than choosing an easier and less uncertain option that would not place the same emphasis on sustainability. While Kerakoll's bet translates directly into its own effort, Fabio Sghedoni, the executive vice president, expresses a broader vision of sustainability becoming integrated into all supply chains of Italian manufacturing, not just the construction sector. This functions as an implicit invitation to others to similarly stake their resources on sustainability with a 'system-wide perspective' (*ottica di sistema*), making individual efforts part of a collective transformation. By suggesting that sustainability must become an integral part of all Made in Italy supply chains, Sghedoni highlights the difference between his own company, which has already chosen to bet on its green vision and confirms this choice, and other companies that should adopt a similar perspective, making the approach more systemic.

- (34) Boeing has also carried out tests on storing hydrogen safely in flight, and it has a stake in an electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) start-up, but it is otherwise betting the farm on

“sustainable aviation fuel”, or SAF. Chemically near-identical to the standard kerosene used in planes, SAF comes from non-oil sources (The Guardian)

Example (34) resembles the previous one in explicitly evoking the notion of betting, through the idiomatic expression *betting the farm on something*. The element of risk inherently central to the notion of a bet is further enhanced in the figurative expression, where “the farm” represents “everything one has”. Boeing, which is one of the main producers of commercial planes, is therefore, according to the article, putting all its resources into one strategy, that of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). The idiom suggests a high-stakes gamble where Boeing is committing its future primarily to one approach to solve the considerable problem of emissions originating from airplanes. The commitment is mitigated by the information that the company is also considering two other approaches, carrying out tests on storing hydrogen safely in flight, and investing in a start-up developing electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) methods. The latter investment also evokes a BETTING scenario, since Boeing is presented, with a more conventionalised expression than the one in the idiom, as having a stake in a start-up. While this means that Boeing owns shares in this company as a consequence of having invested in it, the term also denotes “money that you risk as the result of a horse race, card game etc.”. The apparent contradiction between Boeing having allocated some resources to alternative projects and the total commitment implied by the idiom *betting the farm on* is resolved in the wider context of the article, where Boeing’s strategy is contrasted with the approach adopted by the rival company Airbus. Airbus has announced several projects looking at alternative fuels, including electric/gas hybrids and hydrogen. By comparison, Boeing’s approach appears less committed to revolutionary alternatives, exploring them only minimally while primarily betting on SAF, which works with existing aircraft technology. The representation of Boeing’s approach as betting the farm on one solution suggests that it is a risky choice, relying primarily on a single solution that is not guaranteed to be the most effective one, but merely the safer one, since SAF requires fewer changes to existing planes. The previous expression suggested that the risk evoked in the BETTING scenario derived from the uncertainty that characterises sustainable choices, generally representing a marked change from previous practices that, having been implemented for a long time, are guaranteed to work. Thus, accepting such a risk in the name of implementing sustainability could be seen as an ethical, positive choice. By contrast, the depiction of Boeing’s as betting all its chips on one solution to the industry emission problem suggests that this might entail running into a different kind of risk, that of not finding an adequate solution to the current challenge. SAF represents, in fact, a safer choice from the point of view of the aircraft producer, since it requires fewer radical changes to current practices. It therefore indicates that Boeing is not actually willing to bet on sustainability, but prefers betting on sustainable solutions that might prove less effective although less onerous for the company.

6.2.4 Concluding observations on the COMPETITION domain

All of the examples in Section 6.2 frame the implementation of sustainability through the lens of a competitive activity, with different degrees of conventionalisation and different scenarios. The usage of *sfida/challenge* primarily highlights the various difficulties of implementing sustainability in general terms, as in examples (20) and (22). It also served to convey more specifically a critique of ESG principles and their role as facilitators in the ongoing process of the transition, as exemplified in example (22), where the challenge is magnified by the incoherence of ESG evaluation criteria. A similar critique resonated in other concordances negating the framing of sustainability as a win-win situation, judged as too simplistic when dealing with such a complicated issue as in example (25), where the speaker directly contradicts this representation, insisting on trade-offs. The general competition framing was also exploited through another negated metaphor which foregrounded the cooperative aspect of embracing sustainability throughout a sector, uniting competitors in striving, rather than competing towards a common goal. The more specific scenario of TEAM SPORTS as in examples (26 – 29), where the football-derived expressions profile specific roles and team dynamics, was found to be typical of Italian data, mirroring previous studies (Semino & Masci, 1996) and emphasising the role of team-playing and cooperation. Various features were selected in the mappings discussed, from the overarching notion of matches being played to more specific scenario exploiting the role of players in a team, the arrangement of the team on the field at the beginning of the game or possible courses of action on the field.

The RACE scenario foregrounds instead different features in a competition, with a strong emphasis on timing, that is, the urgency of action. It offers a “clear-cut criterion for winning” (Gozzi, 1998, p. 91) often simplifying reality, providing clear landmarks in terms of start, speed and pacing, and finish line, and giving prominence to the desire to get there first (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). Two of the uses discussed (example 30 – 31) were triggered by the topic of the article, Formula 1 and Formula E, enhancing the relevance of the metaphor and making it more noticeable, notwithstanding its conventionality. This scenario allows both for representations of sustainability as an ongoing race demanding sustained effort from participants, and sustainable results as finish-line crossings representing considerable achievements to celebrate. Sustainability becomes an active competition where companies are racing against time, against competitors, and towards ambitious targets, creating urgency and emphasising the dynamic, goal-oriented nature of environmental action. Lastly, the BETTING scenario, as in example (33), where Kerakoll’s continued bet on its green vision is presented as an ethically laudable risk, places the spotlight on the risk that sustainability action can involve, thus framing whoever chooses to bet on it as ethically laudable for making such a choice. However, the importance of looking in more detail at actual usage in context emerges from example (34), which shows how the scenario can be exploited in context. The Boeing case reveals a crucial distinction between taking risks on sustainability itself (committing to uncertain but transformative solutions) versus taking risks by not betting sufficiently on sustainability (relying on safer but potentially inadequate approaches). This

duality exemplifies how COMPETITION can fulfil different communicative functions: while it can valorise communal effort through TEAM SPORTS metaphors or sustainable choices as courageous wagers, it can equally critique superficial framings of ESG principles as deceptively presenting them as *win-win* situations, or insufficient commitment as a dangerous gamble that risks instead future viability by avoiding necessary transformation.

6.3 PHYSICAL FORCE

6.3.1 Features of the PHYSICAL FORCE domain

The PHYSICAL FORCE domain is grounded in a fundamental image schema arising from everyday bodily interaction with the environment, since such interaction invariably involves the exertion of force (Johnson, 1987). This image schema provides coherence and structure to physical experience and plays a central role in the conceptualisation of abstract domains. As Johnson (1987, p. 42) observes, experience is “held together by forceful activity”, and it is through this activity that meaning is constructed. Because the application of force necessarily produces an effect on the entity to which it is applied, there is a pervasive experiential correlation between force and causation. This correlation motivates the widespread mapping CAUSES ARE FORCES, which is part of the Event structure metaphor, mapping the logic of force dynamics onto the logic of causation (Lakoff, 1993), and underlies the structuring of numerous abstract concepts. As Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) note, the fact that force reliably brings about change in the physical world provides the experiential basis for understanding causal relations in more abstract terms.

Johnson (1987) identifies several core features which together characterise the PHYSICAL FORCE domain. First, force is inherently relational and presupposes interaction. It is never experienced in isolation, but always involves at least two participants. Second, force entails directionality, since it is exerted along a vector that moves from an origin towards a target. This vectorial quality implies the presence of a source, typically conceptualised as an agent, and a recipient or affected entity. The agent may be an animate, intentional being, but it may also be an inanimate object, natural phenomenon, or event. Third, force varies in intensity, ranging from weak to strong, and this degree of power may be more or less explicitly specified. Finally, force presupposes a causal sequence in which an agent initiates an action, exerts force, and brings about a resulting change. In this sense, “forces are the means by which we achieve causal interactions” (Johnson, 1987, p. 43). From repeated embodied experiences of forceful interaction, a set of more specific image schemata emerges. These include compulsion, in which an entity is moved by an external force; blockage, where force encounters resistance from an obstacle; counterforce, involving the direct opposition of two forces; or enablement, which foregrounds the internal capacity to act and presupposes the absence of barriers (Johnson, 1987). These schemata can be applied to a wide range of causal relations, allowing the force domain to structure diverse patterns of interaction and change.

Because the experience of physical force is so deeply embedded in basic perceptual and bodily activity, metaphors drawing on the PHYSICAL FORCE domain are highly pervasive across different types of discourse and play a crucial role in the conceptualisation of abstract phenomena.

6.3.2 Quantitative results and general patterns

163 metaphors drawing on the PHYSICAL FORCE domain were found in the corpus; Table 6.3 presents the number of metaphors found for each newspaper, and the relative percentage that the PHYSICAL FORCE domain represents of the total number of metaphors found for each language and overall, considering both languages. The 97 Italian metaphors correspond to 7% of the total of metaphors in the Italian corpus, while the 66 English metaphors correspond to 11.2% of the total of metaphors in the English corpus. Thus, Italian newspapers contain more metaphors in absolute terms, while English newspapers show a higher relative frequency, meaning PHYSICAL FORCE metaphors are proportionally more common in the English corpus. Overall, the 163 metaphors relating to the PHYSICAL FORCE domain amount to 8.2% of the total numbers of metaphors found in the Italian and the English corpus.

Table 6.3

Frequencies for PHYSICAL FORCE metaphors by newspapers and language

Language	Newspaper	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency/ (sub-)corpus
ITA	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	29	7%
ITA	<i>Il Giornale</i>	13	
ITA	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	29	
ITA	<i>La Repubblica</i>	26	
Total (ITA)		97	
ENG	<i>Financial Times</i>	16	11.2%
ENG	<i>The Guardian</i>	20	
ENG	<i>The Independent</i>	24	
ENG	<i>The Telegraph</i>	6	
Total (ENG)		66	
Total		163	8.2%

Note. The relative frequency is calculated as a percentage of the total number of metaphors identified in each (sub)corpus: 1,386 in the ITA subcorpus, 590 in the ENG subcorpus, and 1,976 in the corpus as a whole.

The majority of vehicle terms in this domain refer directly to the exertion of force, with the lexeme *(to) push* in English, used both as a verb and as a noun, (15 occurrences), and the Italian equivalent noun *spinta* ('push', 21 occurrences), together with several inflected forms of the verb *spingere* ('to push', 12). The Italian noun *impulso* ('impulse', 2 occurrences) can be

grouped with these items, as the English *upthrust*, which occurs once. In several cases, the vectorial directionality of force is made explicit. This is reflected in the use of prepositions such as *verso* ('towards'), which occurs 15 times in the Italian corpus, and the English *towards* and *to*, each of which occurs once, together with the noun *trajectory*. These forms foreground one of the core features of the PHYSICAL FORCE schema, namely the directional transfer of force from an origin to a target. The notion of *pressure* is explicitly lexicalised in 8 occurrences. While the Italian equivalent *pressione* does not occur in the corpus, Italian instead utilises both the noun *leva* ('lever') and the expression *fare leva* ('to leverage'), both of which evoke the exertion of force through mechanical advantage. The more general notion of force or strength is explicitly encoded in Italian through the noun *forza* ('strength'), which appears twice. Other expressions refer to forceful interaction, for example *assesta un colpo* ('deliver a blow'), *ha travolto* ('has swept through') and *contraccolpi* ('recoils'), all of which profile the impact or aftermath of forceful action rather than force itself. References to opposing or resisting force are comparatively rare within this domain. Nevertheless, they do occur in a limited number of cases, notably through the Italian *freno* ('brake') and the verb *oppongono* ('oppose'), which instantiate scenarios of resistance and counterforce. The relative marginality of these expressions suggests that the PHYSICAL FORCE metaphors in the corpus predominantly foreground force as an initiating and driving mechanism, rather than as something that is resisted or neutralised.

6.3.3 Qualitative results

The following examples show how sustainability-related change is conceptualised through force dynamics. The analysis focuses on where the force originates, the direction in which it is exerted, and the consequences it produces within particular sectors or institutions.

(35) Hydrogen tests aid the push to clean aviation; Sustainability. Fuel technology will be critical to achieving zero emissions by 2050, writes Sylvia Pfeifer [FT journalist who authored the article]. Parked in a corner of the sprawling site in Toulouse that is home to Airbus, Europe's aerospace champion, is the first A380 (Financial Times)

(36) Green options transforming a wedding industry prone to waste. The wedding industry remains fraught with waste, but a growing contingent of brides and grooms is pushing for more sustainable changes, from the way they invite guests to the food they serve and the clothes they wear (The Independent)

In example (35) and (36), the implementation of change is conceptualised through the metaphor of a *push* being exerted within a given sector towards modifications in established practices. Change is thus framed as the outcome of conscious initiative and agency, rather than as a spontaneous or emergent process. In example (35), the source of the force is not a human agent but a technological factor, namely the development of hydrogen-based technologies, with *hydrogen tests* construed as actively contributing to *the push to clean aviation*, positioning technological innovation as the causal driver of change. Clean aviation

is thus clearly identified as the target of the vectorial movement instantiated by the push, while the means through which the force is being exerted is the adoption of hydrogen fuel as a source of energy for flights. The solution to the issue of pollution caused by the aviation sector thus does not entail questioning the scale of air travel, but rather mitigating environmental impact through technological substitution transforming the way in which that activity is fuelled. This logic is reinforced by the assertion that *fuel technology will be critical to achieving zero emissions by 2050*, which explicitly outlines a clearly defined goal, a fixed timeframe, and the central role attributed to technological development in reaching that goal. Moreover, hydrogen-based innovation is represented as part of an ongoing process: hydrogen tests are said to *aid the push*, implying that the force is already in motion and that this particular technology constitutes one of several factors through which it is being sustained.

Example (36) exploits the same push metaphor, in a markedly different domain, namely the wedding industry. Agency is explicitly attributed not to a technological development, but rather to a specific group of people, identified as *a growing contingent of brides and grooms*, who are actively *pushing for more sustainable changes*. Couples planning their wedding are framed as demanding that the wedding industry on which they rely provide sustainable options for all organisational aspects, from the way they invite guests to the food they serve and the clothes they wear. The industry, characterised as being prone to waste, is being transformed by *green options*. The change is therefore construed as originating from consumer pressure, with the industry positioned as the target of this force. The expression *growing contingent of brides and grooms* further intensifies this scenario by adding both numerical strength and collective organisation to the agents involved. The term contingent draws on the WAR domain, where it originally designates a group of soldiers dispatched in support of a larger force, and has subsequently been extended to refer to groups of people united by a shared characteristic or objective. In this context, the shared characteristics is the desire for an environmentally sustainable wedding. Thus, the image of an advancing contingent of bride and grooms, with its slightly menacing connotations of coordinated movement and pressure, combines with the action attributed to them of pushing, to present sustainability-oriented consumer demands as an effective driver of positive change.

(37) Pressure from investors is the biggest factor pushing ESG uptake across private assets, according to Preqin's survey of over 350 groups. Increased interest in sustainable and private investing have risen in tandem, as investors chase diversification and higher returns. For fund managers, the lack of clear best practices lies at the root of some of the confusion (Financial Times)

In the scenario in example (37), the origin of the push is explicitly identified as *pressure from investors*, who are identified as the primary force driving *ESG uptake across private assets*. Investors are agents exerting the force through their interest in sustainability-focussed assets, that becomes a directional push. As in examples (35) and (36), the FORCE schema is elaborated by specifying both the source of the force and its orientation. While in example (36) it was the growing contingent of brides and grooms exerting force, here investors are the agents applying pressure, and increased ESG uptake is construed as the intended

direction of movement within the financial sector. The scenario is conferred greater concreteness due to *interest in sustainable and private investing* being reified through the description as *increased* and as having *risen*. Nevertheless, the problematic nature of ESG adoption is highlighted by recognising that it is characterised by *confusion*, attributed to *the lack of clear best practices*. A nuanced perspective on ESG implementation is presented here: on the one hand investors are portrayed as using their “weight” to push in a well-defined direction, through capital allocation choices, applying a level of pressure that companies perceived as sufficiently consequential to motivate increased attention to ESG disclosure and commitments. On the other hand, the absence of shared standards and metrics creates conditions under which this pressure may fail to produce the intended effects. Although greenwashing is not explicitly named, it is implicitly evoked as a consequence of this uncertainty. The lack of clarity surrounding ESG criteria risks frustrating or undermining the positive impact that investor pressure is meant to achieve, as firms respond to the push without a stable framework for defining or evaluating sustainability.

(38) «Questo connubio [tra gomma riciclata da pneumatici fuori uso, moda e arte] dimostra come la gomma riciclata sia una autentica risorsa che, se affidata all'estro creativo di grandi designer, può divenire un elemento di bellezza, eleganza – commenta ancora il direttore - e può accompagnare la spinta creativa che muove la moda verso un approccio più sostenibile e attento all'ambiente». (Sole 24 Ore)

«This combination [of recycled end-of-life tyre rubber with fashion and art] demonstrates how recycled rubber is an authentic resource that, if entrusted to the creative flair of great designers, can become an element of beauty and elegance – comments the director – and can accompany the creative push that is moving fashion towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly approach».

In example (38), ‘recycled rubber’ (*la gomma riciclata*) is characterised as an ‘authentic resource’ (*autentica risorsa*) that, when combined with the ‘creative flair’ (*estro creativo*) of designers, can become an element of beauty and elegance. Change within the fashion industry is framed through the metaphor of a ‘creative push’ (*spinta creativa*) that propels the sector ‘towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly approach’ (*verso un approccio più sostenibile e attento all'ambiente*). The Italian noun *spinta* thus functions here similarly to *push*, as the figurative designation of stimulus and motivation. As in example (35) discussing the aviation industry, a specific material resource is foregrounded as contributing to this push. This framing again implies that change is already underway: the push is an ongoing process, signalling marked change in practices in the fashion industry that are already underway, and recycled rubber is one of the factors accompanying (*può accompagnare*) this movement, sustaining a trajectory that has already been set in motion. Recycled rubber functions as concrete evidence of circular economy principles, demonstrating that waste can be transformed into high-value aesthetic and artistic products. Fashion is construed as the entity being acted upon, the creative push as the force exerted, and the sustainable and environmentally friendly approach as the endpoint of the vectorial movement, with the directional trajectory, explicitly marked by the preposition *verso* (‘towards’). The PHYSICAL

FORCE metaphor supports a narrative in which environmental responsibility does not require a renunciation of beauty or innovation, but is instead propelled by them.

- (39) Non è più rinviabile una politica attendista sul mettere in atto risorse e investimenti che consentano la trasformazione industriale del settore e, soprattutto, la sua sostenibilità sociale. Se vogliamo evitare contraccolpi gravissimi, in termini di licenziamenti e la distruzione di un settore industriale fondamentale per il nostro Paese, il governo deve rendere disponibile per le imprese del settore, da subito, gli investimenti previsti (Il Giornale)

A wait-and-see policy for implementing resources and investments that will enable the industrial transformation of the sector and, above all, its social sustainability can no longer be postponed. If we want to avoid severe blowback in terms of layoffs and the destruction of a crucial industrial sector for our country, the government must make the planned investments available to companies in the sector immediately

In example (39), a critique to the transition to electric mobility is expressed by framing its consequences as ‘severe blowback’ (*gravissimi contraccolpi*). The Italian expression literally denotes a recoil or return shock transmitted by a body struck with force, and is conventionally extended in figurative usage to refer to negative repercussions or backlash. The notion of recoil necessarily presupposes an initial blow: a force must first be exerted in order for a counter-effect to occur. In this case, that initial force is implicitly attributed to the European Union and its unilateral decision to phase out combustion engines, a policy choice construed as striking the automotive sector with considerable force. Within this framing, the EU is the agent that delivers the blow, and the Italian automotive industry is positioned as the entity that absorbs the impact of this decision and subsequently experiences its return shock. The article foregrounds the anticipated consequences of this intervention as possible mass ‘job losses’ (*licenziamenti*) and the ‘destruction of a fundamental industrial sector’ (*distruzione di un settore industriale fondamentale*). The situation is still presented as a hypothetical, pointing to a solution to be implemented in order to avoid the blowback scenario drawn and ‘enable the industrial transformation of the sector and, above all, its social sustainability’ (*consentano la trasformazione industriale del settore e, soprattutto, la sua sostenibilità sociale*). It is this pillar of sustainability that constitutes the central issue: the metaphor allows the text to shift attention from the intended forward momentum of environmental policy to the unintended damaging rebound effects in terms of social sustainability. The transition is construed not as a progressive journey, but as a violent shock that rebounds onto the most exposed actors in the production chain. This scenario represents the tension between the pursuit of long-term environmental advantages and the preservation of short-term social stability in terms of opposing force, problematising the assumption that sustainability necessarily unfolds as a coherent and uniformly positive process.

- (40) Consumatori sempre più attenti negli acquisti a packaging e tracciabilità. Tra i trend che fanno da traino ai consumi alimentari continuano a distinguersi quelli legati alla sostenibilità dei prodotti (anche in riferimento a filiera controllata e certificazioni “anti- sfruttamento”) e del packaging. Buone performance poi per i cosiddetti cibi salutistici (Sole 24 Ore)

Consumers increasingly mindful of packaging and traceability when making purchases. Among the trends acting as the driving force behind food consumption, those linked to product

sustainability (including controlled supply chains and “anti-exploitation” certifications) and packaging continue to stand out. Furthermore, so-called health foods are performing well.

In example (40), the expression ‘acting as the driving force’ (*che fanno da traino*) construes specific trends as generating forward movement within the domain of food consumption. Literally derived from *trainare*, “to tow” or “to pull”, describing a forward movement generated by traction, with an implicit direction and a mass being dragged along, the expression metaphorically extends in Italian to conventionally denote the capacity to provide a positive impulse, to stimulate growth, or to function as the element that propels a broader process. The English rendering ‘acting as the driving force’ constitutes the closest functional equivalent. While English lacks a direct figurative extension of *to tow* comparable to Italian *trainare*, expressions such as *driving force* or *drive*, preserve the core metaphorical features of causation, directionality, and positive momentum. In this excerpt, it is the behaviours that ‘consumers increasingly mindful’ (*consumatori sempre più attenti*) are adopting, and more responsible consumption practices in terms of ‘product sustainability’ (*sostenibilità dei prodotti*) and *packaging* that function as the tow, with ‘food consumption’ (*consumi alimentari*) acting as the mass being dragged along. Hence, sustainability-oriented trends are represented as the primary force sustaining and advancing consumption patterns through mindful purchasing choices. The statement that they ‘continue to stand out’ (*continuano a distinguersi*) further reinforces this framing by signalling consolidation: these trends are not emergent, but already established and effective. This scenario functions within the wider narrative in which sustainability is construed as advantageous for business, inasmuch as it responds to growing consumers demands.

- (41) «I nuovi costumi sono pensati per conformarsi alle varie silhouette, età e situazioni, grazie a tessuti sempre più performanti che vedono l'Italia leader indiscussa - sottolinea Umberto Amato, consulente del settore -. La tecnologia è alla base del confort e aiuta la sostenibilità, che sembrava utopia e invece ha travolto il beachwear» (Corriere della Sera)

“The new swimsuits are designed to fit different body types, ages, and situations, thanks to increasingly high-performance fabrics, with Italy as the undisputed leader,” emphasises Umberto Amato, an industry consultant. “Technology is the foundation of comfort and aids sustainability, which seemed like a utopia but has instead swept through the beachwear industry”

In example (41), developments in the swimwear sector are framed as having ‘swept through beachwear’ (*ha travolto il beachwear*). The verb *travolgere* literally denotes overwhelming or overturning motion, often associated with powerful natural forces such as waves or floods, and evokes a scenario of radical transformation of the landscape through which the force passes. Central to this image is a sense of ineluctability: once the force is in motion, it cannot be resisted, and its effects are extensive and irreversible. Although the literal source domain carries strong negative connotations, including destruction and loss, these aspects are not activated in the metaphorical mapping but backgrounded. What is instead foregrounded is the magnitude and agentive strength of the movement. Sustainability is thus construed as an overpowering force that spreads rapidly and thoroughly yet is evaluated positively. The metaphor retains the sense of domination and takeover implicit in *travolgere*, but reorients it towards a narrative of progress and innovation rather than damage. The speaker Umberto

Amato, a consultant in the sector, explicitly contrasts past and present perceptions of sustainability. Once regarded as a *utopia*, an unrealistic or unattainable ideal, sustainability is now represented as having materialised with unexpected intensity. Sustainability is no longer an aspirational discourse but a concrete and dominant principle that has radically overhauled the production of swimwear. As in several other examples in the corpus, technology is presented as the enabling condition of this transformation (*la tecnologia [...] aiuta la sostenibilità*), with sustainability emerging as the outcome of innovation. The development of ‘increasingly high-performance fabrics’ (*tessuti sempre più sempre più performanti*) is identified as the basis of both comfort and sustainability, allowing environmentally responsible practices to be integrated without sacrificing functionality or aesthetics. This scenario foregrounds the intensity and irresistibility of the transformation, construing the shift towards sustainable practices as an established reality rather than an ongoing process still subject to debate or resistance.

- (42) ESG ratings face examination in fight against greenwashing; Asset management. Sustainability
Regulators aim to focus on transparency, conflicts of interest and validity of metrics. Global
regulators are taking aim at sustainable investing ratings as officials work to stamp out
greenwashing in the fast-growing environmental, social and governance investment sector.
(Financial Times)

In example (42), regulatory intervention is constructed as a decisive and violent suppression meant to *stamp out* the adversary that is greenwashing. The antagonistic role of greenwashing is already constructed in the title, when examination of greenwashing from official authorities is presented within a WAR frame as a *fight*, positioning regulators as combatants and greenwashing as an enemy to be defeated. This militarised framing is reinforced by the description of regulators *taking aim at sustainable investing ratings*, that is, the evaluations given by rating agencies’ providing sustainability assessments, which evokes the targeted attention of a marksman and casts rating agencies as being in the “gunsight” of regulatory scrutiny. The purpose of such interventions is to avoid investors being misled due to a company earning a favourable ESG rating that does not in fact correspond to genuine ESG performance. Within this already established scenario of hostile opposition to the threat of greenwashing, the verb *to stamp out* substantially intensifies the forcefulness of the scenario. In its literal sense, the verb refers to the action of bringing the sole of one’s foot suddenly and forcibly down, with the objective of crushing or beating down something. In its figurative extensions, it conventionally denotes the eradication of undesirable phenomena through the use of vigorous or coercive measures. Applied to greenwashing, this metaphor constructs the phenomenon as an issue that must be forcefully eliminated. Within the *fast-growing environmental, social and governance investment sector*, positively representing the ESG sector as expanding and developing, greenwashing represents a corrupting element that threatens this growth. The PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor thus legitimises strong intervention by regulatory authorities. Regulators are endowed with the capacity and the authority for decisive, forceful action, and their intervention is framed as necessary to protect the integrity and continued expansion of the ESG investment sector.

(43) Oggi ridurre le emissioni è un impegno prioritario che riguarda tutti, l'elettrificazione è una risposta sostanziale e il mercato business può dare la spallata decisiva verso la sostenibilità. Il nostro obiettivo è guidare la transizione energetica non solo grazie a una gamma completa, ma anche grazie ai valori che riusciamo a esprimere (La Repubblica)

Today, reducing emissions is a priority for everyone; electrification is a key response, and the business market can deliver a decisive shove toward sustainability. Our goal is to lead the energy transition not only through a comprehensive range, but also through the values we embody

In example (43), the contribution of the business market to sustainability is framed through a remarkably vivid instantiation of the PHYSICAL FORCE domain. Literally, the noun *spallata* denotes a shove or blow delivered with the shoulder, typically involving a run-up and a concentrated impact with a door or a similar obstacle, with the aim of removing said obstacle. Unlike more generic expressions of pushing, where the amount of strength is not necessarily specified, this action presupposes resistance and implies a deliberate, forceful attempt to break through a barrier rather than merely setting something in motion. The figurative extension in Italian is exploited to convey the notion of decisive, force-laden intervention to overcome resistance. The scenario builder establishes a vivid image wherein an agent, 'the business market' (*il mercato business*) deliberately delivers a 'decisive shove toward sustainability' (*dare la spallata decisiva verso la sostenibilità*), thus construing the exertion of force as being directed in a specific direction. The adjective 'decisive' (*decisiva*) further reinforces these connotations by emphasising the finality and transformative potential of this action. This mapping forms part of a broader discursive scenario where the stated objective is 'reducing emissions' (*ridurre le emissioni*), qualified as 'a priority commitment that concerns everyone' (*un impegno prioritario che riguarda tutti*), with 'electrification' (l'elettrificazione) presented as 'a substantial response' (*una risposta sostanziale*). The passage also deploys the complementary metaphor of 'leading the energy transition' (*guidare la transizione energetica*), through which the speaker, a manager of the carmaker Stellantis Italy, claims leadership in this journey for his company. The framing emphasises that the B2B (business to business) market will be fundamental in decarbonisation, adopting innovations more rapidly than individual consumers and creating market momentum that will deliver the final impulse tipping the entire automotive sector irreversibly towards electrification.

6.3.4 Concluding observations on the PHYSICAL FORCE domain

The PHYSICAL FORCE domain construes the implementation of sustainability as the outcome of deliberate exertion, grounding abstract processes of change in the embodied experience of forceful interaction. The dominant pattern is that of a push directed towards sustainability, with the source, intensity, and target of the force varying across examples. In examples (35) and (36), the push metaphor operates in markedly different domains, respectively aviation and the wedding industry, yet shares a common structure: an agent exerts directional force upon a sector, with sustainability positioned as the intended endpoint of the vectorial movement. The agents identified range from technological developments, as in example (35),

where hydrogen tests *aid the push to clean aviation*, to consumer groups, as in example (36), where *a growing contingent of brides and grooms is pushing for more sustainable changes*, to investors, as in example (37), where *pressure from investors is the biggest factor pushing ESG uptake*. Example (38) similarly depicts a *creative push* propelling the fashion industry towards a more sustainable approach, identifying recycled rubber as evidence of circular economy principles accompanying this ongoing movement. The PHYSICAL FORCE domain thus accommodates a variety of causal agents while preserving a consistent directional structure: all these forces move from a source towards an identifiable target.

Several examples extend the domain beyond the conventional push scenario. The Italian expression *fanno da traino* ('acting as the driving force') in example (40) shifts the mode of force from pushing to towing, construing sustainability-oriented consumer trends as the element generating forward traction in food consumption. Example (41) radically intensifies the force through the verb *ha travolto* ('has swept through'), depicting sustainability as an overwhelming and inescapable force that has thoroughly transformed the beachwear industry, reorienting the typically negative connotations of destructive impact towards a narrative of positive and irreversible change. This intensification reaches its peak in example (43), where the Italian noun *spallata*, denoting a shoulder-driven shove aimed at breaking through an obstacle, construes the business market as the agent capable of delivering the *decisive shove toward sustainability*, presupposing resistance and implying a concentrated impact intended to overcome a barrier rather than merely sustain momentum.

This predominantly forward-directed construal of force is qualified by two examples that foreground resistance and suppression. Example (39) introduces a counterforce scenario through *contraccolpi* ('blowback'), where the anticipated consequences of the EU decision to phase out combustion engines are framed as a recoil striking the Italian automotive sector. Here, the PHYSICAL FORCE domain is mobilised not to advocate for sustainability but to problematise its implementation, highlighting the tension between environmental policy and social sustainability. Example (42) deploys the PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor for a different purpose: the violent suppression of greenwashing through the expression *stamp out*, which intensifies the forcefulness attributed to regulatory intervention, legitimising aggressive action against deceptive sustainability claims. Together, these examples demonstrate the versatility of the domain: while the majority of instances construe force as a positive driver of change towards sustainability, the schematic structure can be mobilised instead to critique the unintended consequences of sustainability policies or to legitimise forceful corrective intervention against fraudulent practices.

6.4 BUILDING

6.4.1 Features of the BUILDING domain

Building metaphors constitute a prolific source domain for conceptualising abstract ideas across diverse fields. This domain relies on a schematic framework of architectural knowledge and is characterised by a wide scope, applicable to a variety of complex abstract systems (Kövecses, 2020). Such mappings are exemplified by conceptualisations like ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING, THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS, SOCIETY IS A BUILDING, COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE BUILDINGS, CAREERS ARE BUILDINGS, CREATION IS BUILDING, RELATIONSHIPS ARE BUILDINGS (Charteris-Black, 2004; Goatly, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Within this domain, two overarching frames are typically exploited: the BUILDING (as process) frame, mapping the act of building onto the process of creation and construction, and the (PHYSICAL) SUPPORT frame, mapping the resulting physical structure and its attributes onto abstract systems. The metaphors select the aspect that are conducive to these mappings, with the “used part” of the metaphor comprising the foundation and outer shell, while the “unused part” comprises internal elements such as rooms and staircases (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 52), usually absent in the mappings. However, these latent elements can be invoked to extend a metaphor when specific components of the target domain require a corresponding source element (Kövecses, 2020). For instance, in the phrase, “These facts are the bricks and mortar of my theory,” the “bricks and mortar” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 53) represent the usually unused frame element of building materials. BUILDING metaphors frequently carry strongly positive connotation, symbolising constructive human activity and the aspiration toward desired social goals with the underlying mapping that “A WORTH WHILE ACTIVITY IS A BUILDING” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 73). By profiling the “stability of structure” (Kövecses, 2020, p. 125), the domain conveys that the solidity of a building represents the reliability of the target system (Goatly, 2024). Moreover, the metaphor highlights the long-term nature of such activities; they are framed as endeavours requiring patience, sustained effort, and occasionally sacrifice, rather than yielding immediate results.

6.4.2 Quantitative results and general patterns

155 metaphors drawing on the BUILDING domain were found in the corpus; Table 6.4 presents the number of metaphors found for each newspaper, and the relative percentage that the BUILDING domain represents of the total number of metaphors found for each language and overall, considering both languages. The 106 Italian metaphors correspond to 7.6% of the total of metaphors in the Italian corpus, while the 49 English metaphors correspond to 8.3% of the total of metaphors in the English corpus. Thus, Italian newspapers contain more metaphors in absolute terms, while English newspapers show a higher relative frequency, meaning BUILDING metaphors are proportionally more common in the English corpus. Overall, the 155 metaphors relating to the BUILDING domain amount to 7.8% of the total numbers of metaphors found in the Italian and the English corpus.

Table 6.4

Frequencies for BUILDING metaphors by newspapers and language

Language	Newspaper	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency/ (sub)corpus
ITA	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	19	7.6%
ITA	<i>Il Giornale</i>	14	
ITA	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	42	
ITA	<i>La Repubblica</i>	31	
Total (ITA)		106	
ENG	<i>Financial Times</i>	14	8.3%
ENG	<i>The Guardian</i>	14	
ENG	<i>The Independent</i>	19	
ENG	<i>The Telegraph</i>	2	
Total (ENG)		49	
Total		155	7.8%

Note. The relative frequency is calculated as a percentage of the total number of metaphors identified in each (sub)corpus: 1,386 in the ITA subcorpus, 590 in the ENG subcorpus, and 1,976 in the corpus as a whole.

Different levels of specificity can be identified by looking at general trends for vehicle terms in the BUILDING domain. At the most fundamental level, the action of building itself is foregrounded through the use of verbs and nouns referring directly to the process; in English, *to build* and its morphologically related forms occur 17 times (including *build*, *building*, *built*, and *rebuilding*), while the Italian equivalent *costruire* appears 14 times (comprising *costruire*, *costruzione*, *costruirsi*, and *costruita*). A significant concentration of vehicle terms refers to a specific element for vertical support, notably the Italian singular and plural forms *pilastra* and *pilastri* (30 occurrences combined) and the English equivalent *pillar* and *pillars* (6 occurrences). These forms foreground a core feature of the BUILDING domain: the necessity of vertical stability to maintain the integrity of a complex abstract system. The notion of support is explicitly lexicalised through a high frequency of foundational terms. This is reflected in the use of the English *based* and *basis* (9 occurrences combined) and a range of Italian equivalents such as *base*, *basata*, and *basato* (22), alongside mentions of *foundation* (1) and *fondamenta* (1), and *cornerstone(s)* (2 occurrences). Other expressions refer to specific architectural components that provide completion or essential material support. For example, *tetto* ('roof', 1) and *mattoni* ('bricks', 1) profile the constituent parts or the protective limit of the structure. References to the internal "unused parts" of a building are entirely absent here. BUILDING metaphors in this corpus predominantly foreground the domain as a mechanism for structural stability and foundational strength.

6.4.3 Qualitative results

This section examines how the BUILDING domain is used to construe sustainability in terms of construction, support and structural stability. The examples move from general acts of building to more specific architectural elements such as pillars, foundations, cornerstones and blueprints, with each element foregrounding a different aspect of sustainability's role within a wider structure..

- (44) “Il governo farà la sua parte continuando a sostenere il sistema produttivo verso l'adozione delle nuove tecnologie per una sostenibilità ambientale, sociale ed economica, il vero pilastro per la costruzione del nostro futuro”. “In Fiera Milano, grazie a più di 1600 aziende, avremo il meglio di un settore, la meccanica strumentale, da cui nasce l'innovazione per l'intera industria” (Il Giornale)

“The government will do its part by continuing to support the production system in the adoption new technologies for environmental, social, and economic sustainability, the true pillar for building our future”. “At Fiera Milano, thanks to more than 1,600 companies, we will have the best of a sector, industrial machinery, which generates innovation for the entire industry”

In example (44) The Minister for Economic Development, speaking here at The Innovation Alliance exhibition, firstly establishes the role of the government as contributing to significant change by ‘continuing to support the production system’ (*continuando a sostenere il sistema produttivo*), framing their role as that of an ongoing effort of partially bearing the weight of the transition towards new technologies. The government's ongoing effort is an essential part of ‘building our future’ (*la costruzione del nostro futuro*), depicting it as lending fundamental reinforcement to the national production system. The notion of building a better future is conventionally employed to indicate the adoption of measures meant to improve general conditions. The Minister extends it to endow the scenario with more accuracy: by adding the notion that the construction activity includes a ‘pillar’ (*pilastro*), he evokes more directly the notion of a building with single components. Therefore sustainability, explicitly defined in terms of its three main aspects, becomes the fundamental building block, the ‘true pillar’ (*vero pilastro*) ensuring the actual accomplishment of a future worth building in this process of construction, conveying the notion of solidity and reliability. How this can be achieved is directly outlined here: what is needed is, once again, innovation, with ‘the adoption of new technologies’ (*l'adozione delle nuove tecnologie per una sostenibilità ambientale*) hailed as the key in ensuring that the pillar of sustainability is built. This statement is being uttered within the context of The Innovation Alliance exhibition, which lends concreteness to the attribution of the role of decisive factor to ‘new technologies’ (*nuove tecnologie*): it is the sector of ‘industrial machinery’ (*la meccanica strumentale*) that ‘generates innovation for the entire industry’ (*da cui nasce l'innovazione per l'intera industria*). Once again, it is technology that acts as the deciding force in enabling the enactment of positive change towards sustainability.

- (45) At Procter & Gamble [multinational consumer-goods company] such efforts are delivered through the umbrella of Citizenship, building this into how they do business every day.

Comprising three pillars – environmental sustainability, community impact and equality and inclusion – all underpinned by a strong foundation of ethics and corporate responsibility, this approach enables the company to be a force for good and a force for growth in society (The Independent)

Procter & Gamble (P&G) is a major consumer goods company, whose efforts in implementing ESG initiatives into their practices are presented in example (45) as the activity of *building them into how they do business every day*. Thus, firstly, integrating ESG organically into business practices is depicted as a building activity, suggesting a thorough process, whose effects are meant to bring about definite change and last for a considerable amount of time. This building activity is then further articulated by directly establishing single elements constituting an integral part of the structure: the Citizenship approach of P&G is a comprehensive *umbrella articulated into three pillars – environmental sustainability, community impact and equality and inclusion*. By framing all three elements as pillar, the metaphor establishes all three as equally important, contributing to the structural stability of the building to the same extent. Furthermore, the stability of the construction is ensured not only by the pillars, but by the other architectural element of *a strong foundation of ethics and corporate responsibility that underpins the three-pillar structure*. Using a *foundation* metaphor invariably implies a positive evaluation of the structure being constructed on them, which stems from our understanding that the durability of any physical building is primarily guaranteed by the solidity of its foundations (Charteris-Black, 2004). On its own, the foundation metaphor entails notions of temporal extension, suggesting that a considerable amount of time will be needed to construct the structure above the foundation, as well as uncertainty regarding the final outcome. The act of laying foundations does not necessarily guarantee the eventual completion of a building, making it difficult to predict the successful completion of a construction (Charteris-Black, 2004). However, in this specific context, the usage of the *foundation* metaphor is embedded within a more extended metaphor, profiling the *foundation, pillars*, and the process of *building* ESG efforts into daily business operation. Consequently, the implications of uncertainty or incompleteness are not evoked; because these elements are framed as part of an already established structure, only the connotations of a strong, reliable, and permanent basis remain.

Additionally, mapping different features of the company onto specific sections of a building enables the metaphor to establish a clear temporal dimension. Inasmuch as, architecturally, the foundations necessarily precede the addition of parts such as the pillars, what is being conveyed is the notion that, within P&G, ethics and corporate responsibility were already firmly established, effortlessly serving as the pre-existing basis for a durable construction. The stability established through this extended BUILDING metaphor serves to legitimise the ESG efforts of P&G. This framing provides the necessary premise to present the final assertion, that the company can be *a force for good and a force for growth in society*, as an almost foregone conclusion. By framing their operations as an orderly, stable, and long-term constructive process, P&G suggests that the integration of sustainable practices into their core business is the natural extension of an already well-planned edifice.

- (46) Including the heaviest emitters in the solution can ensure they do not use any net zero loophole to justify oil projects and instead share this responsibility of rebuilding a sustainable economy. Trevor Allen Head of Sustainability Research, BNP Paribas Markets 360, London NW1, UK (Financial Times)

In example (46), the BUILDING metaphor is modified through the iterative prefix in the lexeme *rebuilding*, shifting the focus from initial construction to systemic regeneration. The notion of a *sustainable economy* refers to an economically viable system that reduces reliance on fossil fuels and transitions toward renewable energy sources, ensuring its long-term endurance without depleting resources or causing environmental collapse. The choice of the verb *rebuild* carries a significant presupposition: it implies that the current economic edifice cannot simply be modified. It is fundamentally flawed and unsustainable, and necessitates a radical action of dismantling and reconstruction from the ground up. The transition to sustainability is thus framed not as a mere modification of the current structure, but as a radical overhaul. The process is communal; the writer, Trevor Allen, identifies *the heaviest emitters*, oil and gas companies, as essential participants in this reconstructive effort. By stating that these companies should be included *in the solution*, he positions their active participation not as optional but as structurally necessary for the rebuilding to succeed. This framing carries an implicit logical corollary: if the major carbon emitters continue their current practices or exploit *net zero loopholes to justify ongoing oil projects*, they effectively undermine the foundational work required for reconstruction. Thus, ensuring that these actors share this responsibility becomes integral to the viability of the entire rebuilding endeavour, a considerable effort sanctioned due to its outcome being valuable.

- (47) “Mentre i Paesi accelerano i loro sforzi per ridurre le emissioni, devono assicurarsi che la loro transizione verso un sistema energetico sostenibile sia costruita su basi sicure”, ha dichiarato Birol [Fatih Birol, direttore esecutivo dell’Agenzia internazionale per l’energia, IEA]. “Le catene di fornitura globali del solare fotovoltaico dovranno essere scalate in modo da garantire la loro resilienza, il loro costo e la loro sostenibilità” (La Repubblica)

“As countries accelerate their efforts to reduce emissions, they must ensure their transition to a sustainable energy system is built on secure foundations”, Birol [Fatih Birol, Executive Director of the International Energy Agency, IEA] said. “Global solar photovoltaic (PV) supply chains will need to be scaled to ensure their resilience, affordability, and sustainability”

In example (47), the discourse employs a dual metaphorical mapping to conceptualise the shift toward renewable energy. The JOURNEY metaphor foregrounds the acceleration of countries (*i paesi accelerano*, ‘countries accelerate’) in the transition towards ‘a sustainable energy system’ (*verso un sistema energetico sostenibile*), profiling the urgency of the movement and its clearly defined goal. The BUILDING metaphor reinforces this framing and adds a crucial structural modality by specifying that the “building” of the ‘transition to a sustainable energy system’ (*transizione verso un sistema energetico sostenibile*) needs to be ‘built on secure foundations’ (*costruita su basi sicure*). The integration of these two domains suggests that speed (acceleration) is insufficient without structural integrity (solidity). Similarly to the P&G example, the success of the building activity is predicated upon the necessary condition of the stability of its lowermost components, acting as the bedrock. In

this context, the 'secure foundations' (*basi sicure*) are explicitly identified as an energy system based on solar photovoltaic production with 'global supply chains' (*catene di fornitura globali*) that are resilient, able to withstand disruptions, affordable and, most importantly, sustainable, reducing the environmental impact of manufacturing. A hierarchy of elements in the target is constructed through the lens of the components constituting a building: just as the foundations are the indispensable component without which a building would crumble to the ground, a resilient, affordable, and sustainable supply chain for solar photovoltaic energy is a binding necessity for the transition. The metaphor thus conveys that these supply chain characteristics are fundamental prerequisites, the bedrock upon which the entire energy transition depends. By invoking the (PHYSICAL) SUPPORT frame, the physical solidity and load-bearing capacity of a foundation are mapped onto the perceived reliability and structural necessity of establishing robust solar photovoltaic supply chains.

- (48) Another was Sky using its broadcast of the north London derby between Arsenal and Spurs - watched by 2.6 million fans - to hold a "sustainability-themed quiz" between two footballers. The Duke has made the environment one of the cornerstones of his work, creating the Earthshot Prize to encourage the public to find solutions to the most critical challenges facing the planet over a decade (The Telegraph)

Example (48) employs the BUILDING metaphor through the architectural term *cornerstone*, which refers to a stone that forms the base of a corner of a building, traditionally the first stone set in the construction. Historically, the cornerstone served both a practical function, establishing the orientation and alignment of the entire structure, and a symbolic one, marking the formal commencement of construction. Figuratively, a cornerstone denotes a fundamental element or principle upon which something is based, conveying indispensability and foundational importance. The temporal dimension inherent in cornerstone metaphors further reinforces this prioritisation. Because cornerstones are by definition laid at the earliest stage of construction, establishing them as *one of the cornerstones of his work* suggests that environmental commitment was not a later addition to the Duke's public role but rather a foundational principle present from the outset, determining the orientation and trajectory of subsequent initiatives. The metaphor is substantiated by reference to *the Earthshot Prize*, which functions as the tangible manifestation built upon this cornerstone, demonstrating that the foundational principle has generated concrete programmatic outcomes. Additionally, the use of *cornerstones* conveys the implications already discussed with regard to *foundation*: on the one hand, the solidity and reliability of the Duke's commitment to the environment, profiling a stable base and directional orientation for environmental action. On the other hand, however, it also conveys the notion that laying a cornerstone constitutes the starting point of the construction process; although such a process has already yielded the establishment of the Earthshot Prize, its completion is temporally positioned as an undefined future.

- (49) L' agrifoodtech [settore che applica innovazione tecnologica e investimenti alle filiere agricole e alimentari], decollato con la pandemia, è ancora oggi la categoria di investimenti più in voga. È un trend globale che non accenna ad arrestarsi perché in fondo la sicurezza alimentare è una delle chiavi di volta per raggiungere gli obiettivi di sostenibilità al 2050 (Sole 24 Ore)

Agrifoodtech [the sector applying technological innovation and investment to agriculture and food supply chains], which took off during the pandemic, remains the most popular investment category today. It is a global trend that shows no signs of stopping because, ultimately, food security is one of the keystones for achieving sustainability goals by 2050

Example (49) employs the BUILDING metaphor through the architectural term *chiave di volta* ('keystone'), which denotes the central stone at the summit of an arch or vault. In architectural terms, the keystone maintains the balance of the arch and locks all other stones together, functioning as the structural element without which the entire arch would collapse. Figuratively, the keystone conveys centrality and indispensability, referring to the central principle or element of a system on which all other components depend. Though qualifying a different architectural component with a distinct position and function, functionally in discourse it is almost specular to *cornerstone*, with both terms operating metaphorically as shorthand for structural importance and foundational necessity. The connotations of 'keystone' include, as with all building components, stability and structural integrity, but additionally foreground the notion of spatial positioning, since a keystone by definition occupies the central position within the arch and thus constitutes the organizing centre of the structure. In this excerpt, 'food security' (*sicurezza alimentare*) is established not as the sole keystone but rather as 'one of the keystones' (*una delle chiavi di volta*) necessary 'for achieving sustainability goals by 2050' (*per raggiungere gli obiettivi di sostenibilità al 2050*). This plurality is architecturally consistent: buildings may contain multiple arches, each requiring its own keystone to maintain structural integrity. This feature maps effectively onto the target domain, since the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals comprise 17 equally important objectives, with multiple interdependent goals collectively supporting the overarching edifice of sustainable development. Among these 17 goals, food security is prioritised by Goal 2, Zero Hunger. Each goal functions as a keystone within its respective domain, suggesting that the removal or neglect of any single goal would compromise the structural integrity of the entire sustainability agenda. The BUILDING metaphor is combined with a JOURNEY metaphor, since the construction process and securing the keystone that is food security will ensure that we 'reach sustainability goals by 2050' (*per raggiungere gli obiettivi di sostenibilità al 2050*). This dual framing suggests that ensuring food security is both a structural prerequisite for the edifice of sustainability and a necessary step along the path toward reaching future goals. The metaphor therefore constructs food security not merely as an abstract aspiration but as a concrete architectural element whose proper installation is essential for the continued advancement and ultimate completion of the sustainability project.

- (50) Tutelare la biodiversità, ridurre le emissioni, restituire spazio alla natura, contribuire alla conversione in senso sostenibile delle attività economiche, informare e sensibilizzare le persone su stili di vita più responsabili sono i mattoni fondamentali sui quali costruire una società più sostenibile e inclusiva (La Repubblica)

Protecting biodiversity, reducing emissions, giving space back to nature, contributing to the sustainable conversion of economic activities, informing and raising awareness among people about more responsible lifestyles are the fundamental building blocks on which to build a more sustainable and inclusive society

Example (50) profiles a distinct element within the BUILDING domain by foregrounding building materials, ‘building blocks’ (*mattoni*). The building that must be constructed is ‘a more sustainable and inclusive society’ (*una società più sostenibile e inclusiva*), with the Italian noun *mattoni* (“bricks”) designating the constituent materials required for this construction. The expression is not rendered through the literal translation, but rather through ‘fundamental building blocks’ (*mattoni fondamentali*), conveying the same connotations of necessary components used to assemble a larger, more complex structure through a more natural English expression. This usage constitutes an extension of more conventional BUILDING metaphors to include the frame element of building materials. While such extensions may not be as frequent as conventional metaphors referring to structural elements and stability, they can be utilised to complete the frame (Kövecses, 2020) and further delineate the conceptual topology of the target domain. The plurality of elements designated as the *building blocks* fundamentally represents the multifaceted complexity of sustainability and its implementation in society. These range from ‘protecting biodiversity’ (*tutelare la biodiversità*) to contributing to the sustainable conversion of economic activities (*contribuire alla conversione in senso sostenibile delle attività economiche*). Each of these elements is characterised as a fundamental brick, suggesting that all are equally necessary and that the absence of any single component would compromise the structural integrity of the societal construction. By framing diverse actions, spanning environmental protection, emissions reduction, spatial restoration, economic transformation, and public education, as individual bricks, the metaphor conveys that building a sustainable society requires the integration of multiple discrete efforts into a cohesive whole. Notably, this metaphorical extension to building materials suppresses certain aspects of the source domain that would be salient in actual construction contexts. As Charteris-Black (2004) observes, we know that buildings require materials and labour and that both are usually expensive, yet this negative dimension remains unhighlighted in the metaphor. In the present example, there is no explicit acknowledgment of the economic costs and resource demands associated with implementing the enumerated sustainability measures. By profiling exclusively the necessity and foundational character of these interdependent components to be assembled, the metaphor foregrounds their indispensability while backgrounding the practical challenges and expenditures involved in obtaining and assembling them.

- (51) Un fabbricato in cui le forme, fluide, servono a dare vita a spazi più vivibili, che dialogano fra indoor e outdoor. Il tema della sostenibilità Esg, economica, sociale e ambientale, è il perno del nuovo complesso, pensato per essere affordable sotto l’aspetto economico senza incidere sulla qualità (Sole 24 Ore)

A building whose fluid forms create more livable spaces, seamlessly blending indoor and outdoor spaces. The theme of ESG sustainability, economic, social, and environmental, is the linchpin of the new complex, designed to be affordable without compromising quality.

Example (51) demonstrates a shift from the static imagery of foundations and pillars to a more mechanical mapping within the BUILDING domain, specifically through the vehicle term *perno*, translated in English as ‘linchpin’. The term literally denotes a pin or pivot that holds various parts of a mechanical or architectural structure together, ensuring their coordinated

function. In its figurative sense, it refers to a person or element that is vital to a system or plan, serving as the reference point without which the entire activity would collapse or fail to cohere. This metaphorical usage instantiates the structural centrality and load-bearing function of key architectural or mechanical components, mapping their indispensability onto the perceived necessity of sustainability within these projects. In the discussion of a residential complex, ESG sustainability, explicitly articulated in its economic, social, and environmental dimensions, is established as ‘the linchpin of the new complex’ (*il perno del nuovo complesso*). The metaphor conveys that sustainability is not a supplementary feature added to an already-designed structure, but rather the core organisational principle around which the entire building concept was conceived and developed. Notably, the discursive context renders this conventional metaphor topic-triggered: because the statement concerns an actual physical building, the figurative *linchpin* acquires a double semantic resonance. While the primary figurative meaning unquestionably positions sustainability as the guiding principle in the planning process, the fact that this principle is being attributed to a literal architectural structure simultaneously evokes the image of a concrete mechanical element within that building. This layered meaning lends additional credibility to the assertion that sustainability was structurally integrated from the outset, suggesting that it functions both as an abstract organizing concept and as a tangible structural necessity embedded within the building’s design.

(52) Without urgent action the UK will break its global commitments to help deliver the UN’s 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030. The goals, agreed by 193 countries in 2015, provide a blueprint to end poverty, protect the planet and address inequalities (The Guardian)

Example (52) foregrounds a distinct element within the BUILDING domain: rather than profiling the construction process itself, structural components, or completed edifices, it focuses on the architectural planning document that precedes physical construction. A *blueprint* refers to design or technical drawing meant to convey the instructions to build a building, a machine or similar. In its literal architectural sense, a blueprint serves as the early schematic representation that guides subsequent construction work, establishing the intended form and function of the eventual structure. When used figuratively, the term maps planning an activity onto designing a building, positioning abstract goals or frameworks as architectural specifications that determine how a desired outcome should be achieved. In this extract, the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals are characterised as providing *a blueprint to end poverty, protect the planet and address inequalities*. The three stated objectives profile both social sustainability (*end poverty, address inequalities*) and environmental sustainability (*protect the planet*), with the former given greater prominence through its articulation into two distinct aims. By framing the SDGs as a *blueprint*, the metaphor positions them not as constituting the construction activity itself, nor as the completed building of a sustainable world, but rather as the preliminary design that specifies what must be built and provides guidance on how to proceed.

Importantly, when an architectural blueprint is presented, it is understood that the actual building lies far in the future, as construction processes may extend over years or even decades. Additionally, the blueprint constitutes an early plan or preliminary sketch rather

than a detailed, exhaustive set of instructions to be followed mechanically. Blueprints provide a schematic representation that establishes the intended final form and key structural features, but they do not specify every procedural detail of the construction process. This connotation applies effectively to the target domain: while the SDGs articulate 17 goals and their associated targets in considerable detail, they do not provide an exhaustive procedural roadmap dictating precisely how each nation must implement them. Instead, they function as a guiding framework that establishes desired outcomes while leaving room for implementation strategies to be determined contextually. The article's warning that *without urgent action the UK will break its global commitments* underscores a critical limitation inherent in blueprint metaphors: a blueprint alone is insufficient to produce a building. If construction is not actually undertaken, the blueprint remains merely a document on paper, never materialising into physical reality. The metaphor thus highlights the gap between planning and execution, suggesting that the SDGs, however well-designed as a blueprint, cannot ensure the achievement of sustainability goals unless concrete construction work, in the form of policy implementation and resource allocation, is actively pursued. By framing the UK's potential failure to meet its commitments as breaking global obligations, the extract positions adherence to the blueprint as a binding contract, the violation of which would constitute abandoning one's role in the collective construction project.

6.4.4 Concluding observations on the BUILDING domain

The BUILDING domain construes sustainability through two complementary frames: the process of construction and the resulting physical structure providing support. The majority of instances foreground the (PHYSICAL) SUPPORT frame, mapping specific architectural components onto elements of sustainability to convey structural necessity and stability. Pillars emerge as the most frequent vehicle term, appearing in examples (44) and (45), where sustainability is established as a fundamental vertical support in both governmental and corporate discourse. In example (44), the Italian Minister for Economic Development identifies sustainability as the 'true pillar for building our future', endowing it with connotations of solidity and load-bearing capacity, while in example (45) Procter & Gamble articulates its ESG efforts through *three pillars* of environmental sustainability, community impact, and equality and inclusion, establishing all three as equally necessary to the structural integrity of the edifice. Foundations complement this imagery: the same P&G example (45) positions ethics and corporate responsibility as the strong foundation underpinning the three-pillar structure, while example (47) specifies that the transition to a sustainable energy system must be built on secure foundations, identifying resilient and affordable supply chains as the necessary bedrock. This emphasis on foundational stability naturalises sustainability as a prerequisite for the durability of whatever is being constructed, whether corporate practices, energy systems, or societal structures.

Other architectural components enrich this structural mapping. Example (48) deploys the *cornerstone* metaphor, positioning environmental commitment as the first stone laid in the

Duke of Cambridge's public work, thereby conveying foundational importance and directional orientation. Example (49) employs the Italian *chiave di volta* ('keystone'), establishing food security as one of the keystones necessary for the achievement of the SDGs by 2050, while the architectural plurality of multiple arches, each requiring its own keystone, effectively maps onto the 17 interdependent goals collectively supporting the sustainability agenda. Example (50) extends the domain to include building materials, framing diverse sustainability actions as *fundamental building blocks* required for constructing a more sustainable and inclusive society, while notably suppressing the negative dimension of cost that actual construction materials would entail, as Charteris-Black (2004) observes. The *linchpin* metaphor in example (51) introduces a mechanical dimension, positioning ESG sustainability as the central organising element of a residential complex, while also becoming topic-triggered due to the object being discussed being an actual building, thus lending dual semantic resonance. The BUILDING (as process) frame is foregrounded in example (46), where the iterative prefix in *rebuilding* signals that the current economic system cannot merely be renovated but requires dismantling and reconstruction from the ground up, a considerably more radical construal than the conventional building metaphor would suggest.

A distinct extension of the domain is represented by example (52), which focuses on the architectural planning document rather than the construction itself. By framing the UN Sustainable Development Goals as *a blueprint*, the metaphor positions them as the preliminary schematic representation guiding subsequent construction, with the inherent implication that a blueprint alone cannot produce a building and that concrete implementation is required for the design to materialise. This gap between planning and execution is directly exploited in the article's warning that without urgent action the UK will fail to honour its commitments. In sum, the BUILDING domain provides a cohesive and predominantly positive set of mappings that naturalise sustainability as structurally necessary, emphasising stability, long-term durability, and the interdependence of constituent elements, while occasionally revealing tensions between ambitious architectural plans and the practical effort required to realise them.

6.5 WAR

6.5.1 Features of the WAR domain

WAR metaphors are well documented across public discourse, touching on issues such as politics, health or the environment (Benzi & Novarese, 2022; Flusberg et al., 2018). They draw on widely shared schematic knowledge involving key elements. First, there is a conflict between opposing forces, a clear distinction between the in-group ("us," perceived as "good") and the out-group ("the enemy," perceived as "evil"), and a struggle to achieve goals through strategic decisions regarding attack and defence. The domain also involves designated roles and resources, evoking the notion of an army and a hierarchy in military forces, including

leaders like generals, lower-level fighters such as ground troops, and support personnel like medics (Flusberg et al., 2018). In addition, evoking the context of a war implies the presence of individuals who have a stake in the outcome, even if they are not actively involved in combat, such as civilians. In chronological terms, the notion of WAR implies a succession of events, usually battles, unfolding throughout a certain period of time, with the ultimate aim of inflicting lasting harm on the enemy (Flusberg et al., 2018). Due to the domain being so innately articulated in our minds, a variety of scenarios within it can be easily evoked, from situationally placing the conflict to highlighting who fulfils the role of attacker and defender and suggesting the need for strategic planning to be executed. WAR metaphors are generally characterised by a negatively valenced tone (Flusberg et al., 2018) which proves to be effective in conveying the severity of a threat and communicating urgency (Semino, 2021). These frames can mobilise public efforts (Benzi & Novarese, 2022) and increase the perceived seriousness of a problem, boosting willingness to modify behaviours (Flusberg et al., 2017). Within climate discourse, WAR emerged as the most frequent domain for metaphors in articles from the Guardian Online (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2015), and was used to figuratively represent plastic pollution as a war on nature (O'Dowd, 2025) and in news coverage of COP27, often depicting climate change as a violent actor (Iori, 2024).

WAR metaphors are argued to be constructive in some cases, mobilising, for instance, public health efforts (Jaworska, 2020). Although the exact effects of its usage are at least partly dependent on political orientation and information sources (Panzeri et al., 2021), Flusberg et al. (2017) found that exposing readers to WAR metaphors leads them to report a greater sense of urgency regarding the issue of climate change, and a consequent greater willingness to engage in conservation behaviour, than readers who were exposed to a RACE metaphor. In general terms, they effectively capture people's attention and trigger emotional responses, drawing into detailed representations of shared knowledge and inviting the formulation of opinions, as Flusberg et al. (2018) maintain in another study. However, various drawbacks in adopting them have been identified. Firstly, WAR metaphors can be seen as limiting, reducing complex issues to black-and-white representations of 'us-against-them' (Flusberg et al., 2018). More practically, they have been found to cause potentially counterproductive framing effects by increasing fatalism and a sense of defeat, when used in the context of cancer prevention (Hauser & Schwarz, 2015). Furthermore, they can function as a way to mask social inequalities. For instance, during COVID-19, when low-wage workers were designated as essential workers and celebrated as "frontline heroes," the military metaphor obscured material realities of exploitation and unequal risk distribution (Chapman & Miller, 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2018). This metaphor of heroic frontline service obscures structural inequalities that force certain populations into high-risk situations while others shelter safely (Ray & Rojas, 2020), and attention is directed toward individual courage while systematically deflecting scrutiny from political-economic conditions that created differential risk exposure. Thus, while WAR metaphors are undeniably effective in conveying urgency, scholars have highlighted the risks inherent in their use: they may oversimplify complex issues, reinforce fatalism, and obscure structural inequalities, potentially undermining the very goals they are employed to advance.

6.5.2 Quantitative results and general patterns

129 metaphors drawing on the WAR domain were found overall; Table 6.5 below shows the number of metaphors found for each newspaper, and the relative percentage that the WAR domain represents of the total number of metaphors found for each language and in total, considering both languages. The 88 Italian metaphors correspond to 6.4% of the total of metaphors in the Italian corpus, while the 41 English metaphors correspond to 6.9% of the total of metaphors in the English corpus. Thus, Italian newspapers contain more metaphors in absolute terms, while English newspapers show a slightly higher relative frequency, meaning WAR metaphors are proportionally more common in the English corpus. Overall, the total 129 metaphors relating to the WAR domain amount to 6.5% of the total number of metaphors of both the Italian and the English corpus.

Table 6.5

Frequencies for WAR metaphors by newspapers and language

Language	Newspaper	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency/ (sub)corpus
ITA	<i>La Repubblica</i>	28	6.4%
ITA	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	24	
ITA	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	23	
ITA	<i>Il Giornale</i>	13	
Total (ITA)		88	
ENG	<i>The Independent</i>	20	6.9%
ENG	<i>Financial Times</i>	9	
ENG	<i>The Guardian</i>	9	
ENG	<i>The Telegraph</i>	3	
Total (ENG)		41	
Total		129	6.5%

Note. The relative frequency is calculated as a percentage of the total number of metaphors identified in each (sub)corpus: 1,386 in the ITA subcorpus, 590 in the ENG subcorpus, and 1,976 in the corpus as a whole.

In terms of frequency, the analysis of the metaphors in the corpora shows the predominance of conventional metaphors in both languages and that the single most common vehicle term is *fronte* ('front') with 25 occurrences, also occurring in its plural form *fronti* ('fronts', 3 occurrences) and in the English equivalent *front* (1). Similarly, the second most frequent is *strategia* ('strategy', 20 occurrences), also occurring in its plural version *strategie* ('strategies', 5) and the English equivalent *strategy* (3). Several other vehicle terms express a more overtly aggressive stance, with nouns and verbs referring more directly to violent actions: *lotta* (12 occurrences) and the English equivalent *fight* (5), *combattere* (3) and *combat* (4), *battaglia* and *battle* (1 occurrence each), *attacco* (1) and *attack* (2). The parallel

use of *against* (3 occurrences) and *contro* (2) further indicates that, in some cases, the enemies in question are directly designated. Interestingly, while many vehicle terms are mirrored in the English and Italian lexicons, some are language-specific: on the one hand, *champion* (5 occurrences) and *war* (4) have no direct counterpart in Italian, whereas *offensiva* ('offensive', 2) is only used in the Italian set. Other less frequent outliers are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

6.5.2.1 Antagonists

As already mentioned, a defining feature of the WAR domain is that it necessarily frames the issue in contentious terms: a scenario with opposing sides in which one party wins, and the other one loses. Given this framing, the 'side' presented as "ours" is, by implication, the one that triumphs in the preferred outcome, while the opposing side is consequently defeated. Therefore, who or what is constructed as the enemy in the corpus, when explicitly discussed? Table 6.6 below summarises the results of this analysis, showing the cases in which an enemy is explicitly established within the scenario. Six overarching categories are identified, along with their frequencies and the expressions from the data that fall under each.

Table 6.6

Antagonists in the WAR domain

Category	Frequency	Expressions
Climate change	17	climate change(s), climate emergency, global warming, climate crisis
Climate-related	6	harmful impact fast fashion has on the environment, air pollution, hydrogeological instability, cigarette butt pollution, water waste, tourism and sustainability, warming waters
Greenwashing	3	hoteliers accused of greenwashing, greenwashing, green scams
Social issues	3	national and international modern slavery problem, hunger, social inequalities
The government	1	the central government planners (<i>betraying SDGs</i>)
Outliers	4	the Amazon, green investing craze, subjects attacking organic agriculture, subjects attacking stakeholder capitalism and the ESG investing trend

The topic that receives the highest number of comments and direct references is climate change, including its variations: *climate change* and the Italian equivalent *cambiamento/i climatico/i* (with the plural form) account for 14 mentions within this category. This term represents the officially recognised issue of human influence on adverse changes to the planet's climate (understood as the totality of conditions sustaining ecosystems) and its

frequent mention is therefore unsurprising. The distribution of other terms aligns with previous research on nomenclature choices in climate issue representation (see Section 4.10.1.1), with each appearing only once: *global warming*, *emergenza climatica* ('climate emergency'), and *crisi climatica* ('climate crisis'). Within the broader "Climate-related" category, some comments target more specific concerns, including the *harmful impact fast fashion has on the environment*, *air pollution*, or *dissesto idrogeologico* ('hydrogeological instability'). Greenwashing, alternatively referred to as *truffe verdi* ('green scams'), is explicitly criticised in three instances, while three others highlight social issues such as *slavery*. In one case, the UK government is called out for failing to meet its environmental sustainability commitments through a housing development project. Finally, some comments focus on outliers in the data: entities generally seen positively in environmental discourse, such as the *Amazon rainforest* or the so-called *green investing craze*, otherwise known, in less critical terms, as *the ESG investing trend*.

6.5.3 Qualitative results

6.5.3.1 Actions and processes

This section focuses on WAR metaphors that foreground actions and processes of conflict. The examples show how sustainability-related problems are framed as enemies to be fought, attacked, suppressed or resisted.

- (53) ESG ratings face examination in fight against greenwashing [...]Global regulators are taking aim at sustainable investing ratings as officials work to stamp out greenwashing in the fast-growing environmental, social and governance investment sector (Financial Times)

In example (53) greenwashing is directly identified as the enemy to be opposed and defeated, with the title denouncing a *fight against* it. Due to its strongly negative connotations as a fraudulent practice combining environmental concern with deceptive surface treatment, greenwashing is a well-defined antagonist and it is immediately clear which side of the fight is the one to support. The preposition *against* explicitly positions it as an adversarial force, and regulatory activity becomes active combat with the enemy of corporate deception. The notion of a physical collision is rendered more concrete by depicting the "side" of the regulators as undertaking a specific action, *taking aim at* sustainable investing. What is meant to be conveyed is that ESG ratings are facing detailed scrutiny to ensure their accuracy and reliability but, since greenwashing is an enemy to be fought, this is presented as the institutional authority side pointing a weapon at the target of sustainable investing and preparing to fire. The violence of the WAR metaphor is maintained and reinforced by the PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor *to stamp out*, (discussed in Section 6.3.3, example (42)) which heightens the sense of urgency by depicting greenwashing as a concrete issue that needs to be extinguished, through decisive action that can extirpate or suppress a problem.

The metaphor suggests the fight has not yet fully commenced; forces are still positioning themselves, and the decisive action of stamping out the enemies identified through this process is merely being announced. Actual combat, enforcing environmental accountability, remains deferred as regulators focus on preparatory examination. This framing may rationalise regulatory caution or delay while maintaining urgency through combat language, asking us to view technical scrutiny of rating methodologies as frontline combat against corporate environmental fraud.

- (54) Failing to conserve the carbon-rich forests of the Congo Basin would mean the world loses the fight against climate change, officials in Gabon have warned. The central African country's sustainable forestry and rainforest conservation are storing carbon, helping wildlife and providing jobs - and should be supported as part of global efforts to address the climate and nature crises (The Independent)

In example (54) the complex NP *carbon-rich forests of the Congo Basin* functions as both a literal territory where decisive action for sustainable development can be undertaken, and the figurative battleground where the fight against climate change takes place. The fundamentally collective nature of the issue is established by designating *the world* as the opponent of climate change, thus involving the global community in the conservation effort. Climate action is constructed as a combat with a definitive victory or defeat, and the threat of the obviously dispreferred later outcome is directly evoked. This single battle for the conservation of the Congo Basin is framed as the decisive clash determining the war's outcome, and inadequate action in that regard equals military defeat rather than merely insufficient progress. The appeal is reinforced by the VP *they urge*, adding emphasis to the deontic demand, and the lexical choices of *crises*. The combination of the war-metaphor urgency and explicit deontic marking creates strong pressure for action framing the situation as one in which the fight will be lost unless adequate resources are committed, and support should therefore be provided. The conditional threat (*failing to conserve would mean world loses*) adopted by officials in Gabon foregrounds the necessity of immediate action while maintaining hope for the preferred outcome and delineating a clear set of action to accomplish said result. The *carbon-rich forests* are thus introduced in this scenario as resources in combat, with *sustainable forestry and rainforest conservation* functioning as strategies to preserve this weapon. The material actions processes attributed to conservation address both environmental challenges (*storing carbon, helping wildlife*) and social needs (*providing jobs*).

The complex VP *should be supported as part of global efforts* encodes obligation, with the modal *should* signalling that supporting Gabon's conservation is presented as the necessary course of action. The passive VP *should be supported* leaves unstated who must provide this support, though the implication is that wealthy nations benefiting from Gabon's carbon storage should bear responsibility. This directly addresses the notion of unequal distribution of the burden of contrasting climate change: Global South countries like Gabon face disproportionate climate impacts despite minimal historical emissions. They are positioned on the frontlines not by choice but by structural vulnerability. The central African country finds itself, willingly or unwillingly, on this frontline, and thus is directly engaged in the fight.

The military metaphor frames Gabon as holding strategic territory in a collective war while obscuring the colonial and economic histories that created these asymmetries.

- (55) Si analizzeranno la forza della digitalizzazione - centrale l'intervento di Vittorio Colao, ministro per l'innovazione tecnologica -, ma anche la consapevolezza delle interconnessioni tra economia e società, l'urgenza del contrasto al cambiamento climatico e alle diseguaglianze sociali. Che si possono combattere con l'arma della sostenibilità e con le nuove strade della fiducia (Corriere della Sera)

The power of digitalization - central to this is the address by Vittorio Colao, Minister for Technological Innovation - as well as the awareness of the interconnections between economy and society, and the urgency of combating climate change and social inequalities will be analysed. These can be fought with the weapon of sustainability and through the new paths of trust

Example (55) combines WAR and JOURNEY domain metaphors to frame responses to climate change and inequality as both armed combat and path-finding. Two of the elements of sustainability, the environmental and social one, are addressed here by establishing as enemies, abstract but threatening, the following issues: 'climate change' (*cambiamento climatico*), and 'social inequalities' (*diseguaglianze sociali*). While, as it is often the case, the economic aspect is not foregrounded, it is mentioned by recognising 'the interconnections between economy and society' (*interconnessioni tra economia e società*). Once the two adversaries are identified, engaging with and responding to these issues is framed as military engagement with the verb 'to fight' (*combattere*), according to an established pattern. Nonetheless, within this scenario an additional element is added, clearly suggesting with which tools these enemies can be fought: 'with the weapon of sustainability and through the new paths of trust' (*con l'arma della sostenibilità e con le nuove strade della fiducia*). The former militarises environmental action, requiring aggressive action and weaponry, while the latter presents social relationships as routes requiring discovery and navigation. Sustainability itself is reified and weaponised, transformed from practice or principle into a tool of combat, granted instrumental agency, transforming environmental and social practices into armaments for battle.

Trust is similarly positioned as navigable territory rather than interpersonal quality by being represented through the JOURNEY metaphor 'the new roads of trust' (*le nuove strade della fiducia*), presenting relationship-building as pathfinding through unmapped territory, with new ('nuove') emphasising innovation and discovery rather than following established routes. These metaphorical processes heighten the sense of both urgent confrontation and exploratory possibility, suggesting that addressing global challenges requires both military initiative and willingness to traverse unfamiliar paths. The underlying recurrence of urgency that is inherent to framing something in terms of WAR is explicitly brought up, qualifying the need to contrast the two enemies identified and establishing temporal pressure. The action of combating is here presented as a possibility rather than a certainty: the VP *can be fought* ('si possono combattere') presents successful combat as achievable and that the battle must be joined. The possibility of engaging in conflict is left open and not given for certain, but considering the mention of urgency that precedes it, it is implicit that it would be the

preferred option. Together, the metaphors frame sustainability and trust as both weapons for righteous combat and uncharted paths toward better futures, suggesting heroic confrontation and pioneering exploration.

- (56) Unfortunately, and quite rightly, many hoteliers have come under fire for “greenwashing” - adding nice-sounding but vague or flimsy details to their hotels as a shiny distraction to wave in front of prospective guests, while refusing to confront the deeper issues around the environmental impact of travel accommodation. (Read sustainability champion Juliet Kinsman’s story on how to spot the real deal amid the posers) (The Independent)

The practice of greenwashing is targeted in example (56) within the context of the tourism industry. While in other examples greenwashing itself functions as the enemy, partly obscuring the subjects actually implementing these practices, in this case it is the hoteliers that have come under fire for it. The use of the indefinite quantified NP *Many hoteliers* generalises the actor as a social group, diffusing responsibility by identifying greenwashing as a systemic problem across the industry rather than an isolated practice. At the same time, the choice to name the agents explicitly, rather than foregrounding greenwashing as an abstract phenomenon, preserves the attribution of human agency and accountability. The WAR metaphor positions hoteliers as targets receiving criticism, conceptualised as weaponised assault. *Fire* suggests sustained, dangerous attack from adversaries seeking to damage or destroy targets, with violent connotations foregrounded.

Notably, any potential sympathy for the besieged hoteliers is undermined from the outset through the second stance adverbial, *quite rightly*, which applies to the sentence as a whole and signals the explicit sanction of the author. The metaphors that follow serve less to reinforce this critical stance than to elaborate on and unpack the meaning of greenwashing itself. Greenwashing is defined as using *a shiny distraction to wave in front of prospective guests*, depicting superficial environmental claims as glittering items deliberately brandished to divert attention. The verb *wave* foregrounds the intentionality of this behaviour: it denotes a deliberate, attention-seeking movement designed to catch the eye and direct the gaze away from uncomfortable truths. Prospective guests are thus constructed as potential victims of a calculated act of misdirection, and hoteliers’ behaviour is rendered all the more reproachable by the observation that they actively *refuse to confront the deeper issues*. These deeper issues are presented through the PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor of *environmental impact*, which intensifies the negative evaluation by emphasising the concrete, forceful harm that hoteliers’ distractions attempt to obscure. As in the earlier example where businesses were encouraged to be wise and centre their green strategies as part of their brand marketing, sustainability is here reduced to *nice-sounding but vague or flimsy details* rather than substantive change. This is contrasted with the figure of a *sustainability champion*, Juliet Kinsman. The term *champion* recurs a few times throughout the corpus to qualify either an agent, as in this case, or the action itself, evoking medieval trial by combat where warriors fought on behalf of causes or defendants, extended figuratively to mean one who vigorously defends or supports a cause against hostile opposition. This is one of the few cases in the corpus in which a literal-metaphorical contrast can be established only by crossing a word-class boundary (see Section 4.4.1.2 on the methodological treatment of such cases). Kinsman is thus positioned as

a warrior fighting for genuine environmental principles, able to offer guidance to disoriented customers in distinguishing *the real deal amid the posers*.

- (57) La missione [l'offensiva regolatoria della SEC contro il greenwashing nei fondi ESG] è ambiziosa, tanto che potrebbe meritare un nome in codice: Operazione Greenswashing. La Securities and Exchange Commission è partita lancia in resta all'offensiva sul «fenomeno Esg». O meglio contro il rischio che gli investitori vengano tratti in inganno da fondi che rivendicano patenti ambientale, di responsabilità sociale e governance senza averle conquistate. Fuorviati da protagonisti dell'alta finanza che, per cavalcare trend e rastrellare commissioni, si danno appunto ad una pratica apostrofata come greenwashing – che dà una patina di valori “verdi” a mix di asset e strategie men che tali (Il Sole 24 Ore)

The mission [the SEC's regulatory offensive against ESG greenwashing] is ambitious, much so that it could deserve a codename: Operation Greenwashing. The Securities and Exchange Commission has charged into the offensive with lance at the ready against the “ESG phenomenon.” Or rather, against the risk that investors might be misled by funds claiming environmental, social responsibility, and governance credentials they have not actually conquered. Misled by leading figures in high finance who, in order to ride trends and rake in commissions, engage in a practice that is denounced as greenwashing - giving a veneer of “green” values to combinations of assets and strategies that are anything but [genuinely aligned with those criteria]

In example (57), once again, the terrain for the battle is the ESG investing landscape, where growing demand for environmentally and socially responsible investment products has created fertile ground for misrepresentation. The WAR metaphor establishes the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the US federal agency that regulates securities markets and protects investors, as a crusading force. The SEC ‘has charged into the offensive with lance at the ready’ (*è partita lancia in resta all'offensiva*) against greenwashing practices. The idiomatic expression *lancia in resta* means “to prepare for a fight” and figuratively, “to face a situation with energy and determination” (De Mauro, 2016), thus evoking a medieval knight charging into battle with determined readiness. The term ‘offensive’ (*offensiva*) is extended here by evoking more vividly the image of a knight. The chivalric imagery positions the SEC not merely as a regulator but as a noble champion defending hapless investors against predatory forces, echoing the usage of *champion* in other instances. This military metaphor is reinforced by the article's framing of the initiative as ‘Operation Greenwashing’ (*Operazione Greenwashing*), suggesting a coordinated strategic campaign.

Investors, conversely, are cast as potential victims who ‘might be deceived’ (*vengano tratti in inganno*), a passive construction that emphasises their vulnerability and removes their agency, framing them primarily as requiring protection, in parallel with potential guests in the context of the tourism industry. At the same time, just like hoteliers, funds are the deceivers who are being attacked. Their fault is that of ‘claiming environmental, social responsibility, and governance credentials they have not actually earned’ (*che rivendicano patenti ambientale, di responsabilità sociale e governance senza averle conquistate*). Notably, while ‘earned’ would have been a more natural translation in English, the term ‘conquered’ has been chosen instead as directly mirroring the Italian version and more faithfully

preserving its military connotations. ESG credentials are painted as a territory to be conquered, and must be won through genuine effort rather than mere assertion. In another parallel with the hoteliers example, the enemy that is being subjected to this attack from the SEC is characterised as engaging in questionable practices with unambiguously negative language. The ‘leading figures in high finance’ (*protagonisti dell’alta finanza*) ‘ride trends and rake in commissions’ (*cavalcare trend e rastrellare commissioni*), engaging in a ‘practice that is denounced as greenwashing’ (*pratica apostrofata come greenwashing*). The SEC’s offensive action is thus, by contrast, presented as reactive but decisive, a necessary counterforce to ongoing deception. The context is one where the gap between claimed and actual environmental credentials provides opportunity for the finance actors to apply what the article dismissively terms a ‘veneer’ (*patina*) of green values to asset portfolios that lack substantive ESG characteristics. The contrast between the chivalric framing of the SEC charging and the mercenary portrayal of finance actors creates a stark moral opposition between righteous regulator and venal industry.

- (58) “I have lived in Kent for 40-odd years and to see what amounts to a full-scale attack on the county and its people by the central government planners gives a lie to this government’s binding commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, of which former prime minister David Cameron was co-chair, its own agreements under Cop26 and Boris Johnson’s promise that they ‘would not build on green fields’ from the Conservative Party conference in October,” he said recently (The Telegraph)

In example (58) it is the speaker discussing the situation that identifies himself as part of the group being attacked and clearly identifies an enemy in *central government planners*. The government housing development plans are framed as military aggression against local communities and environmental values, a *full-scale attack*, with Kent residents as victims of hostile military action. The modifier *full-scale* intensifies the metaphor beyond simple *attack* to suggest total war, maximum commitment of forces, comprehensive assault on multiple fronts, coordinated campaign of destruction, enhancing the perceived violence of the initiative being taken. The attacked are represented by the speakers, who characterises himself (“*I have lived in Kent for 40-odd years*”), establishing local rootedness and moral authority, while also speaking on behalf of *the county and its people*, thereby representing an entire community under siege. The intensity of *full-scale* leaves no room for nuance: this is not partial development or compromised planning but total war against *the county and its people*, framing any construction as complete devastation of community and landscape. The periphrastic construction *what amounts to* can be classified as a metaphor signal, explicitly noting the comparison that is being drawn between the actions undertaken by the government and their characterisation as an attack.

Historical political figures (David Cameron, Boris Johnson) are invoked as witnesses to broken promises whose past commitments now serve as evidence of governmental betrayal. The reference to binding commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and promises by Boris Johnson creates a context where the *attack* violates not merely local preferences but international obligations and governmental pledges championing environmental principles. The specific mention of *green fields* evokes pastoral imagery and

environmental protection discourse. All of these elements, from the figurative comparison to the characterisation of the attacked and the attacker, concur in definitively characterising the governmental plans as detrimental. The government is perceived as an invader whose actions constitute assault rather than governance, against local communities that are portrayed as innocent victims of unprovoked aggression and defenders of threatened territory.

- (59) The war on 'woke capitalism' [...] he [Paul Polman, the former Unilever chief] added that this time the "woke" insults felt different. "The knives are out," he wrote. For all their suspicions about their critics' motivations, several advocates of more sustainable ways of doing business acknowledge the limitations of ESG, which is as ambitious in scope as it is ambiguously defined (Financial Times)

Example (59) centres once again on the contested terrain of sustainable investing and corporate governance debates. The speaker is one of the most prominent advocates for sustainable and stakeholder-oriented business practices, meant to serve all constituents (employees, customers, communities, environment) rather than focusing solely on shareholder returns. Opposition to ESG investing is framed as a violent threat, constructing ideological disagreement as military assault framing disagreement as violent assault requiring defensive mobilization. The expression *the knives are out* evokes a scenario of close quarters combat where concealed weapons have been drawn for assassination or street fighting, suggesting attackers are poised for lethal action. This extends and reinforces the looming threat established by the title *war on 'woke capitalism'*. He acts as a warning forecaster, alerting others to the imminent danger perceived but with limited power to change outcomes. *Critics* appear as collective antagonists whose *motivations* are suspect, and their hostile intent is conveyed through the *knives* metaphor, creating a threatening presence and intensifying the perception of danger by suggesting intimate violence, such as assault, backstabbing or assassination. The notion of the knives now being *out* suggests the weapons were previously concealed, hidden until the moment of assault, adding connotations of betrayal and sudden vulnerability.

However, this strongly negative evaluation of its critics coexists with significant negative evaluation of ESG principles themselves from within its advocate community. The nuance in the debate is on display here; on the one hand, the WAR metaphors used highlight an unnecessarily violent rejection of these principles. On the other hand, echoing earlier references to industry insiders 'breaking ranks' to denounce the acronym has having become "meaningless", there is room for substantive criticism. The *advocates of more sustainable ways of doing business* are portrayed as self-aware defenders, acknowledging ESG's failings even while under attack. Although ESG's characterisation as a hapless victim elicits sympathy, its problematic nature as often a hollow "check-the-box" construct is noted. The passage implies that ESG may deserve criticism, even if the motives, and the knives of these particular critics, might constitute a questionable approach. Unlike clearer combat metaphors where righteous defenders face obvious villains, here the knives are out against a target that even its champions concede may not merit unconditional defence. Although outright refusal is portrayed as threatening and counterproductive, it can open the door to founded criticism of

ESG and improvement in current practices, introducing a more ambivalent evaluative landscape despite the violent metaphorical framing.

6.5.3.2 Agents

This section considers the agents who are assigned roles within WAR scenarios. The examples show how sustainability advocates, regulators and corporate figures are metaphorically cast as warriors, champions, standard-bearers or other military actors.

- (60) This is quite the turnaround for a firm [BlackRock, an investment company] that has been criticised - by the opposite camp [critics who accuse BlackRock of excessive stakeholder-capitalist or pro-ESG interventionism] - for its meddling stakeholder capitalism. Boss Larry Fink, a besuited eco-warrior, has long beat the drum for sustainability. This, he explained in his annual letter to chief executives, is “not because we are environmentalists, but because we are capitalists and fiduciaries to our clients” (Financial Times)

Example (60) highlights the climate of debate around ESG, similarly to example (59). BlackRock’s corporate environmental advocacy is presented as military engagement and labelled by critics as *meddling stakeholder capitalism*, suggesting that BlackRock’s sustainability advocacy was seen as inappropriate interference. This establishes a background where the asset manager has faced attack from the *opposite camp*, presumably representing those opposing ESG investing, echoing the *knives are out* threatening posture and *war on ‘woke capitalism’* combat framing from example (59). Blackrock’s position is embodied by its CEO Larry Fink, characterised as *a besuited eco-warrior*, juxtaposing corporate attire with militant environmental activism. This designation positions him as a fighter engaged in combat for ecological causes, paralleling earlier examples of the SEC charging, *lance at the ready*, against corporate malfeasance, or a *sustainability champion* defending consumers from frauds. However, the adjective *besuited* introduces a certain ironic distance, reminding the reader that the battleground where this warrior fights is made up of boardrooms rather than barricades and grounding the image in the finance world. Larry Fink’s advocacy for ESG action is compared to the action of drumming to military mobilization and sustained advocacy. The idiomatic expression *beat the drum for sustainability* frames Fink’s advocacy as rhythmic signalling that historically rallied soldiers, coordinated troop movements, and commanded battlefield. Its prolonged dedication to the cause is emphasised both through the modifier *long* and the present perfect construction, signalling persistent, public, mobilizing advocacy.; he does not limit himself to single acts in favour of sustainability but actively rallies others to the cause.

Nevertheless, these positive connotations are tempered by Fink’s own explanation, which denies the warrior identity’s ideological implications: he advocates sustainability not because of commitments towards the environment, but because, as he puts it, *we are capitalists and fiduciaries to our client*. This transforms the eco-warrior from idealistic combatant into calculating investor who has determined sustainability serves financial returns, a position

that echoes suggesting having a green strategy to attract customers or riding the ESG wave. Fink's argument in favour of his position explicitly hinges on framing Blackrock's past choices not as those of someone preoccupied with the state of the environment, but rather someone evaluating and selecting the financially optimal investment choices. Those ideologically opposed to ESG oftentimes argue that adopting them damages the fundamental function of the finance market of creating more value and rewarding shareholders. This positioning thus becomes a deconstruction of such an argument: it is and remains, Fink is saying, not a matter of stakeholders, but of shareholders. This creates tension between the metaphor characterising his actions and his self-presentation as pragmatic capitalist rather than crusading warrior.

Against this backdrop, the JOURNEY metaphor of *quite the turnround* is introduced. The term *turnround* (or turnaround) signifies a complete reversal in direction or a total shift in policy, suggesting that the subject has turned back on the path previously travelled. In this context, it refers to the apparent reversal of the position of BlackRock regarding climate-related shareholder resolutions. In 2022, the firm announced that it would not support most of them, arguing that many are too extreme and prescriptive, thereby embracing, at least partly, the position of the *opposite camp*. BlackRock is seen as going back on its commitment to ESG, thus voiding the value of past choices and reinforcing the idea that profit and competitive advantage always remained the primary considerations.

- (61) Ma soprattutto abbiamo capito che la sostenibilità non è un settore, una nicchia, ma un nuovo modo di vivere e guardare al mondo. Qualcosa che attraversa ogni aspetto della nostra vita per arrivare anche alla moda, al cibo, al calcio, all'arte. Editoriale. Il ministro Enrico Giovannini, che della sostenibilità è da tempo un alfiere, ha citato uno studio pubblicato con altri scienziati (La Repubblica)

But above all, we have understood that sustainability is not a sector, not a niche, but a new way of living and looking at the world. Something that crosses every aspect of our lives, reaching even fashion, food, football, and art. Editorial. Minister Enrico Giovannini, who has long been a standard-bearer of sustainability, cited a study published with other scientists

The article employs a WAR metaphor to characterise Minister Enrico Giovannini's advocacy for sustainability. The complex VP *della sostenibilità è da tempo un alfiere* ('has long been a standard-bearer for sustainability') casts him as a military officer who carries the army's banner into battle. This, similarly to examples (57) and (60), it casts the participant in a specific role within an army, a tendency that is realised across languages: while the SEC was a knight charging ahead and Larry Fink was depicted as a field drummer, Giovannini is a standard-bearer. Where Fink is depicted as beating drums to coordinate troops, Giovannini carries the banner that identifies the army and its cause, complementary roles in a sustained campaign. The minister is cast as the one in the army who traditionally marches at the front of the formation bearing the regiment's colours, marking troop location on the battlefield and serving as a visible rallying point during fighting. The banner-bearer thus becomes a conspicuous target for the enemy, in its function of providing visual focus for fellow soldiers. This connotation of the role thus suggests a visible leadership position and symbolic

importance, conveying the idea of someone ahead showing the way to those following. This interpretation clearly emerges from the contextual meaning in De Mauro (2016), recognised as figurative, “forerunner or greatest exponent of a doctrine, an ideology and the like”¹⁸, whose entrenchment in language is also suggested by the literal meaning being marked as TS, technical-specialist. The temporal marker ‘long’ (*da tempo*) emphasises a protracted commitment: as Fink had *long been beating the drum* for sustainability, Giovannini has long been a standard-bearer for it.

Sustainability appears as a transformative, all-embracing force, depicted as something that ‘crosses every aspect of our life’ (*attraversa ogni aspetto della nostra vita*), personified through its capacity to traverse domains and ‘reach’ (*arrivare*) all sectors of experience. It is intended as totalising, a comprehensive transformation of existence and perception; it is ‘not a sector, not a niche, but a new way of living and looking at the world’ (*non è un settore, una nicchia, ma un nuovo modo di vivere e guardare al mondo*). Such a radical representation thus calls for a figure such as that of an *alfiere*, someone marching ahead, providing a guiding figure for others that will necessarily follow. Giovannini’s ministerial position situates his advocacy within state power rather than activist organising or corporate boardrooms, distinguishing this from Fink’s besuited corporate drumming or the SEC’s regulatory combative approach. The figurative representation ennobles him as a courageous leader advancing at the front of forces for righteous transformation, rallying others to the cause. Unlike the ironic *besuited eco-warrior* whose corporate costume and profit motivation undercut his militant framing, Giovannini’s ministerial authority can lend more credibility to his standard-bearing role. The positive evaluation of his militant advocacy thus extends beyond individual fighter to encompass comprehensive transformation of social and economic systems, with the standard-bearer leading forces that will reach and transform all aspects of existence.

6.5.3.3 Front/fronte

This section examines the recurrent use of the lexical items *front* and *fronte*. These metaphors spatialise sustainability-related conflict by locating actors and issues on a specific line or theatre of confrontation.

- (62) [Katia Riva, chief sustainability officer di Atlantia:] “Non siamo di fronte a un tema di costo della sostenibilità, ma di sviluppo strategico del business. Intendo dire che [Atlantia] non abbiamo preso questi impegni solo per contribuire alla lotta ai cambiamenti climatici, fronte sul quale siamo ovviamente impegnati. Le strategie messe a punto sono a nostro avviso la strada maestra per restare competitivi” (La Repubblica)

“This isn’t a matter of the cost of sustainability, but of strategic business development. I [Katia Riva, chief sustainability officer of Atlantia] mean to say that we [Atlantia] have not undertaken these commitments solely to contribute to the fight against climate change, a front on which we

¹⁸ 2. CO fig., antesignano o maggiore esponente di una dottrina, di un’ideologia e sim

are obviously engaged. In our view, the strategies we have developed are the main path to remaining competitive”

In example (62), when asked about the costs of sustainability commitments, the speaker (who is the chief sustainability officer of Atlantia, the company discussed here) immediately establishes that the issue is not one of the cost of implementing sustainability, but rather of ‘strategic business development’ (*sviluppo strategico del business*). This move fundamentally denies the premise of the question posed, presenting sustainability in terms of the financial burden it might constitute, reidentifying it as an opportunity. The metaphorical framing through ‘fight’ (*lotta*) depicts environmental action as combative engagement with the enemy that is ‘climate change’ (*cambiamenti climatici*), taking place on this ‘front on which we are obviously committed’ (*fronte sul quale siamo ovviamente impegnati*). The adverb ‘obviously’ (*ovviamente*) functions to acknowledge effort without emphasising it, presenting this engagement as self-evident and requiring minimal elaboration. The company positions itself as climate-conscious due to market logics; its commitment on this front of the ‘fight against climate change’ (*lotta ai cambiamenti climatici*) is qualified through a JOURNEY metaphor as the ‘main path’ (*strada maestra*) to remain competitive, an opportunity for further development and growth. Sustainability is evaluated positively not as intrinsically good, but as an instrumental means to competitive advantage. This extract exemplifies the approach in corporate discourse of acknowledging sustainability challenges while fundamentally reframing them within business-as-usual logic. The speaker denies that sustainability represents a cost or burden, reidentifies it as a strategic business development opportunity, subordinates climate action to market competition as the primary objective, and asserts the compatibility of environmental action and profit maximisation.

The recurrence of *front* and *fronte* represents a systematic discursive convention generally accepted as signalling serious commitment on the issue that constitutes the front. Crucially, this front is presented as being already opened, and companies are active agents operating to advance or hold them without this process requiring fundamental restructuring of priorities. Sustainability becomes a terrain for dispute, a theatre of operations where corporate actors deploy resources and capabilities.

- (63) In a country [Brazil] the size of Brazil, which contains about 60% of the Amazon rainforest, state environmental organisations are on the frontlines of the war against climate change. In addition to the environmental ministry and Funai, there’s Ibama, the ministry’s conservation and sustainable development arm; Inpe, the body that monitors deforestation (The Guardian)

The *frontlines* metaphor in (63) significantly exploits the conventional WAR frame by evoking more vividly the spatial arrangement of opposing forces in military conflict. Where the use of the more established *front* metaphor tends to go unnoticed, and remains somewhat more abstract, *frontlines* conjures more strikingly the specific image of two armies deployed against each other, with fighters facing their enemy across a contested boundary. Moreover, the frontlines evoked here can be directly mapped onto the concrete terrain that is *about 60% of the Amazon rainforest*. While the front metaphor generally spatialises an ongoing effort by

situating it at the utmost edge of a conflict, in this instance there is a literal space, that of the rainforest, that becomes the figurative front in this conflict, a critical battleground territory. Environmental policy is transformed into concrete military engagement, with climate change as an explicit enemy ("*against*"), while state environmental organisations (Ibama, Inpe, the Chico Mendes Institute, Funai, and the environmental ministry) are the combatants deployed in this ongoing battle.

Nonetheless, this example directly demonstrates one of the effects of the WAR domain framings that has been criticised in the past (Chapman & Miller, 2020; Ray & Rojas, 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2018). While the *frontline* elaboration of the climate war scenario makes abstract environmental challenges concrete and urgent, it simultaneously obscures the structural inequalities that determine who fights and who is protected. Developed countries had contributed significantly more than developing countries to CO₂ emissions (Wei et al., 2012); however, this framing hides how the *frontlines* were established through historical processes of unequal development rather than strategic military necessity, and the countries, indigenous peoples, and local communities who bear disproportionate climate burdens are entirely absent from the narrative. While Global North countries responsible for historical emissions are excluded, it is countries of the Global South that face severe climate impacts despite contributing minimally to historical emissions.

- (64) Even some former industry insiders have broken ranks to paint ESG as mere "greenwashing". Tariq Fancy, Black-Rock's former chief investment officer for sustainable investing, now calls sustainable investing "a dangerous placebo". Desiree Fixler, former head of ESG for the Deutsche Bank-backed asset manager DWS [DWS, the Deutsche Bank-backed asset manager], says the acronym has become meaningless (Financial Times)

In example (64), a different army is being metaphorically constructed, shifting the battlefield from environmental defence to corporate finance. Through the VP *have broken ranks*, subjects embracing ESG principles are presented as a unified military force standing in disciplined formation, with some soldiers abandoning their assigned positions in formation. The conflict is not against the external enemy that is climate change, but against ESG initiatives, as in example (59), revealing internal fractures within what appeared to be allied forces. While the ESG industry should theoretically represent a part of the climate solution, it is in fact exposed as being engaged in its own form of warfare. The *former industry insiders* are thus positioned not merely as critics but as defectors or deserters who have abandoned their posts. Traditionally, the metaphor carries a negative connotation, inasmuch as in a military context breaking ranks suggests betrayal and cowardice. Yet here the evaluation is inverted, since those who "break ranks" expose that they were fighting on the wrong side, or, more precisely, that their army was engaged in theatrical performance rather than genuine combat. Tariq Fancy and Desiree Fixler are constructed as whistleblowers abandoning the corporate formation and revealing its deceptions. Their criticism is reinforced by immediately identifying both through their prestigious credentials as, respectively, former chief investment officer and former head of ESG for two important asset managers, suggesting that they are not marginal critics but former commanders abandoning their posts. The use of *even* suggests that such defection is surprising or noteworthy, implying that industry solidarity,

here figuratively constructed as maintaining formation, is the expected norm. The deceptive nature of what is presented as ESG becomes a coat of paint is identified as a greenwashing practice, “painted” on the financial products, a fraudulent coating to misrepresent the underlying actions. ESG is not merely inadequate or ineffective, but rather it is decorated or disguised to appear sustainable when it is not, resulting in an effective and hollow performance of sustainability rather than substantive environmental action. The criticism is further compounded by Tariq Fancy’s figurative characterisation of sustainable investing as *a dangerous placebo* and Desiree Fixler unequivocal judgement of its meaninglessness. Thus, the implication is that embracing the position of the “deserters” and abandoning current practices would be advisable, inasmuch as they are not merely pointless, but, as it is heavily implied and also conveyed by evoking greenwashing, detrimental in their pretence of environmentally effective action that does not in fact bear any significant result. They simply function, the former industry insiders argue, to cosmetically reassure outsiders that meaningful initiatives are underway, while under the surface the acronym has become *meaningless*.

6.5.3.4 Strategy/strategia

This section discusses the recurrent use of *strategy* and *strategia* as conventional WAR metaphors. The examples show how sustainability action is framed as planned, tactical and goal-oriented, especially in corporate discourse.

- (65) Tra le sfide invece la capacità di curvare le strategie industriali sui principi della sostenibilità Esg. Su questo fronte l’innovazione è la chiave principale come spiega Marco Gay, presidente e ceo di Digital Magics [società italiana che investe in startup innovative e le accompagna nella crescita] e a capo degli industriali del Piemonte [sistema confindustriale del Piemonte rappresentato da Gay] (Il Sole 24 Ore)

Among the challenges, however, is the ability to bend industrial strategies onto the principles of ESG sustainability. On this front, innovation represents the main key, as noted by Marco Gay, president and CEO of Digital Magics [Italian company that invests in and supports the growth of innovative start-ups] and head of the Piedmont industrialists [regional Confindustria/industrial association network represented by Gay]

Example (65) deploys conventional WAR domain metaphors, ‘strategies’ (*strategie*) and ‘front’ (*fronte*), while introducing a distinctive spatial metaphor through ‘to bend’ (*curvare*). The passage constructs ESG sustainability as a battlefield, a front where industrial forces must execute tactical manoeuvres, warping their strategic operations to conform to new requirements. Corporations are presented as actively facing the challenges of strategic reorientation through the voice of a CEO explaining battlefield requirements. His qualification as being ‘at the head of’ (*a capo degli*) reinforces this military hierarchy: he leads an organisational force navigating this terrain. The phrase ‘to bend industrial strategies onto ESG sustainability principles’ (*curvare le strategie industriali sui principi della sostenibilità*

Esg) introduces a physical, spatial dimension to the military metaphor, foregrounding bodily manipulation, the physical bending or flexing of something rigid to conform to new contours. This spatial metaphor constructs industrial strategies as trajectories that can be redirected to follow different paths, and the preposition 'onto' (*sui*) frames these principles as an object surface or terrain onto which corporate trajectories must be mapped. This combination of military planning and physical manipulation creates a discourse where corporate adaptation becomes repositioning. The strategies are not merely business plans but campaign designs, systematic approaches to winning battles in competitive markets. The metaphor depicts a process that does not entail radical transformation, but rather adjustment: strategies are bent, but retain their fundamental character. Existing strategic frameworks should not be abandoned, merely adapted sufficiently to accommodate ESG requirements. Additionally, what Marco Gay discusses is the 'capacity to bend' (*la capacità di curvare*), as a challenge for companies, rather than an ability already developed: the process, already not of transformation but of adaptation, is one for which companies are yet to develop the appropriate capabilities.

Similarly to previous examples, the phrase *on this front* ('su questo fronte') explicitly marks sustainability ESG compliance as a specific theatre of operations within broader corporate warfare. However, here the front is not where defenders face climate change as an external enemy, but rather where corporations must demonstrate capability and competitive advantage. The text immediately identifies *innovation* ('l'innovazione') as *the main key* ('la chiave principale') for this front: it is the strategic asset that will determine victory on the sustainability front. Just as military success depends on technological superiority or tactical innovation, corporate success on the ESG front requires innovative capacity. This constitutes the fundamental element to reconcile the apparent contradiction of presenting the implementation of sustainability as an incremental problem that will not disrupt corporate practices. The focus is shifted away from corporate decision-making toward technological capability, naturalising the assumption that sustainability challenges are fundamentally technical rather than political or distributional problems. This construction obscures potential contradictions between profit maximisation and environmental limits, maintaining that existing strategic frameworks can be adequately flexed to meet sustainability requirements without breaking or requiring replacement.

- (66) With more than a third of consumers saying they are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products and services, businesses are wise to centre their green strategies as part of their brand marketing. Having a clear sustainability mission on your website is a simple way for a small business to make a big statement. Consumers are keen to shop with brands that align with their values (The Guardian)

The main actors in example (66) are businesses pursuing consumers, presented as market forces whose preferences must be exploited. The strategies are qualified as being *green*, metonymically representing ecological consciousness and expressing the *sustainability mission* of the brand; thus businesses are essentially advised to achieve competitive advantage by positioning themselves as being green. When combined, *green strategies* construct environmental action as tactical operations deployed to achieve competitive

objectives. Noting that consumers are *willing to pay a premium for sustainable products and services* and *keen to shop with brands that align with their values* positions their environmental concern as a market opportunity to be exploited through strategic manoeuvring. The sentence *businesses are wise to centre their green strategies as part of their brand marketing* spatially positions the strategies as a central ‘object’, making it the focal point of broader campaigns, in the wider positioning of brands through their marketing towards potential consumers (see Section 6.1.3.1, example (2)). The sustainability mission is positioned not as a goal but a tactical element within marketing campaigns, a weapon deployed to capture consumer attention and loyalty. Environmental action is absorbed into the same competitive-military logic, becoming another tool.

The use of the adjective *wise* further highlights the strategic acumen and competitive intelligence rather than moral obligation: environmental action is valued insofar as it contributes to competitive advantage. The text emphasises visual-discursive performance: the focus is on declaring environmental sustainability and making such declaration visible to achieve communicative impact rather than on material environmental outcomes. Being green becomes primarily a matter of signalling rather than action, connecting to notions of the dangers of greenwashing previously mentioned.

6.5.4 Concluding observations on the WAR domain

Figurative language drawn from the WAR domain emerges in a variety of areas within sustainability discourse, providing its fundamental connotations of hostile confrontation, urgency, and an outcome that can be classified as either a victory or a loss, with the former clearly being the preferred outcome. Various elements of the domain are exploited to set up different scenarios. The spatial recognition of a front foregrounds an ongoing fight and forces engaged in it: in example (63), the conventional metaphor of *front* is extended to *frontlines*, conjuring more vividly two armies deployed against each other across a contested boundary that can be directly mapped onto the concrete terrain of the Amazon rainforest.

Enemies are identified as inherently necessary in a WAR domain: on the one hand, this functions to identify fundamental problems ranging from the more abstract and all-encompassing climate change and social inequalities, as in example (55), where they are explicitly designated as adversaries to be fought with the ‘weapon of sustainability’ (*arma della sostenibilità*). On the other hand, the identification of enemies can also target elements that are themselves presented as part of the solution to sustainability challenges, revealing internal contradictions. Greenwashing, as in examples (53) and (56), becomes the adversary targeted by both regulatory and journalistic scrutiny, while in example (64), former industry insiders break ranks to expose the perceived meaninglessness of ESG, which they characterise as a hollow construct. When attention is not focussed on the other side, the role of single figures for the side that is presented as “ours” can be highlighted: individuals from a variety of sectors positioning themselves favourably towards sustainability can fulfil roles

ranging from warrior or defender, as with Larry Fink cast as a *besuited eco-warrior* in example (60), to ‘standard-bearer’ (*alfiere*), as with Minister Giovannini in example (61), or sustainability *champion*, as Juliet Kinsman in example (56). Specific weapons can be identified: sustainability itself is presented as a weapon in example (54), while the SEC charges with a ‘lance at the ready’ (*lancia in resta*) in example (57), and opponents draw knives in example (59). Situations and processes are framed in terms of stages and procedures of a military campaign: the collective effort is a war, as in example (54), where the conservation of the Congo Basin is framed as a decisive clash determining the outcome of the whole conflict, or in example (57), where regulatory interventions become offensives.

All of these aspects within the source domain take on different forms and compose different scenarios in the contexts where they are applied. Within corporate discourse, the conventional use of front or strategy conveniently signals active engagement and points to adaptation and incremental progress, rather than fundamental change, bending current approaches rather than radically transforming them. Within the finance world, the domain is frequently exploited in the recurring discussion and questioning of ESG principles and the systematic faults in how they have been implemented and presented as unquestionably part of the solution. All metaphorical uses entail some degree of scenario construction: even a familiar term like front retains its link to the site of confrontation between opposing forces, where conflict is experienced more directly and intensely. It thus evokes movement that signals either progress or regression: the imagery becomes far more vivid when the text invites the reader to visualise, for instance, a knight charging forward with a spear, as in example (57), than when an entity is described as merely engaged on a front, as in example (63). Lastly, since metaphorical density is high overall, other domains are frequently drawn on within the examples, ranging from JOURNEY to PHYSICAL FORCE or OBJECT. Although they are not the focus of this section, they interact more or less directly with the WAR scenarios established and thus their role in enriching the representation of the topic of discussion has been highlighted.

6.6 PERCEPTION

6.6.1 Features of the PERCEPTION domain

Within the PERCEPTION domain, sight and hearing occupy the highest positions in the universal hierarchy of sense modalities (Viberg, 1984). Both sight and hearing are classified as “distal” or “distant” senses because the apparent distance maintained between perceiver and perceived ensures a higher level of objectivity than the “contact senses” of taste, touch, or smell (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999). Vision is generally associated with objective and reliable knowledge because it is perceived as a primary source of verifiable data about the external world; additionally, visual experience is considered particularly salient because it can be more easily shared among participants in communication, facilitating collective

understanding and evaluation (Sweetser, 1990). This provides the basis for the conceptual metaphor “KNOWING/UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING” (Kövecses, 2020, p. 41), grounded in the general “Mind-as-Body metaphor” (Sweetser, 1990, p. 28) whereby physical perception serves as a source domain for understanding mental and social experiences. Because vision is perceived as allowing distance between perceiver and perceived, it is frequently recruited for higher intellectual functions and cognitive verbs such as “to know”. Hearing, while also a distal sense, occupies a subordinate position in the perceptual hierarchy. It is connected to internal reception of ideas (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999), positioned below sight because it is perceived as more passive, receiving information but not probing it (Classen, 2019). Consequently, while sight connotes reliable, objective knowledge accessible through first-hand observation, hearing suggests mediated, potentially unreliable information transmitted through intermediaries.

6.6.2 Quantitative results and general patterns

127 metaphors drawing on the PERCEPTION domain were found in the corpus; Table 6.7 presents the number of metaphors found for each newspaper, and the relative percentage that the PERCEPTION domain represents of the total number of metaphors found for each language and overall, considering both languages. The 93 Italian metaphors correspond to 6.7% of the total of metaphors in the Italian corpus, while the 34 English metaphors correspond to 5.7% of the total of metaphors in the English corpus. Thus, Italian newspapers contain considerably more metaphors in absolute terms, and also show a higher relative frequency, meaning PERCEPTION metaphors are proportionally more common in the Italian corpus. Overall, the 127 metaphors relating to the PERCEPTION domain amount to 6.4% of the total number of metaphors found in both corpora.

Table 6.7

Frequencies for PERCEPTION metaphors by newspapers and language

Language	Newspaper	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency/ (sub)corpus
ITA	<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	17	6.7%
ITA	<i>Il Giornale</i>	7	
ITA	<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	36	
ITA	<i>La Repubblica</i>	33	
Total (ITA)		93	
ENG	<i>Financial Times</i>	11	
ENG	<i>The Guardian</i>	5	
ENG	<i>The Independent</i>	16	
ENG	<i>The Telegraph</i>	2	

Total (ENG)		34	5.7%
Total		127	6.4%

Note. The relative frequency is calculated as a percentage of the total number of metaphors identified in each (sub)corpus: 1,386 in the ITA subcorpus, 590 in the ENG subcorpus, and 1,976 in the corpus as a whole.

These perceptual hierarchies structure metaphorical mappings in sustainability discourse. The first section (6.6.1) analyses SIGHT metaphors, demonstrating how visual terminology constructs claims to objective knowledge, establishes evaluative frameworks, and positions certain actors as possessing or not possessing privileged epistemic access to sustainability challenges. The second section (6.6.2) investigates SOUND metaphors, revealing how auditory terminology both critiques unproductive discourse and acknowledges the necessity of amplifying sustainability messages to broader audiences.

6.6.3 SIGHT

This section examines metaphors that structure sustainability discourse through visibility, focus, transparency and obstruction. The examples show how seeing becomes a way of conceptualising knowledge, evaluation and accountability.

- (67) Può diventare il modello da utilizzare in una fase in cui, sulla scorta del Pnrr, ci sono miliardi di euro da impiegare per ammodernare l'Italia. Questo – letto con la lente, ormai imprescindibile, della sostenibilità – è il cuore del convegno tenuto ieri dal Centro di eccellenza sulla finanza sostenibile per infrastrutture e smart cities (Sole 24 Ore)

It could become the model to be used at a time when, in the wake of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), billions of euros can be spent on modernizing Italy. This – interpreted through the now essential lens of sustainability – is the heart of the conference held yesterday by the Center of Excellence on Sustainable Finance for Infrastructure and Smart Cities

The specular terms *lens* and *lente* both instantiate the UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor, mapping evaluation or assessment criteria onto a physical optical device that filters or focuses what we see. The literal meaning denotes an object that shapes what is seen through it: it is conventionally associated with glasses or contact lenses worn to improve eyesight. Just as a physical lens modifies what we see, a metaphorical lens shapes what is being observed, influencing both the elements that are the focus of attention and the evaluation attached to them. In example (67), discussing infrastructure investment funds in Italy, the expression ‘interpreted through the now essential lens of sustainability’ (*letto con la lente, ormai imprescindibile, della sostenibilità*) appears in relation to the PNRR (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza). The phrase ‘read through the lens’ (*letto con la lente*) suggests that all information is filtered, focused, and interpreted via a particular sustainability-centred perspective. All discussions of infrastructure development and investment must be systematically evaluated through sustainability criteria, framing this lens not as one factor among many but as the obligatory evaluative standard. The modifier ‘now

essential' (*ormai imprescindibile*) is particularly significant: it intensifies the metaphor by suggesting that the sustainability lens is no longer optional but has become a mandatory, unavoidable filter through which these infrastructure projects must be viewed. Additionally, 'by now' (*ormai*) further strengthens this qualification, implying that sustainability considerations have definitively shifted from desirable to absolutely necessary.

- (68) Prof Susan Jebb [chair of the UK Food Standards Agency], described lab-grown meat as one of "the new innovations that might help us to change course" away from climate catastrophe. A "lens of environmental sustainability" might be applied to novel, safe and sustainable foods, she suggested" (The Guardian)

In example (68), the phrase *a lens of environmental sustainability* appears in a quote from Susan Jebb, the chair of the UK Food Standards Agency. She is proposing that the UK's regulatory framework for approving novel techniques for food production like *lab-grown meat* should prioritise environmental sustainability as a key evaluative criterion, similarly to the evaluation of infrastructure projects proposed in the previous example. The phrase *"a lens of environmental sustainability" might be applied* suggests viewing and evaluating food innovations specifically through sustainability criteria rather than assessing these products solely on traditional food safety grounds. Regulators would systematically consider their environmental benefits or harms, with the lens acting as a filtering mechanism that foregrounds certain considerations with regard to environmental impact, emissions, resource use while assessing new technologies. The metaphor thus frames environmental sustainability not as one factor among many but as the primary framework through which all aspects of novel food technologies should be examined and judged. This excerpt is also analysed in Section 5.2.6.2 (example (69)), where the focus falls on the JOURNEY metaphor of *changing course* away from climate catastrophe. The two metaphors operate in complementary fashion: the JOURNEY domain frames the need for a decisive reorientation of the food system, while the PERCEPTION domain specifies the evaluative criterion through which such reorientation should be guided

In both example (67) and (68), the metaphor implies several key aspects: selectivity, as a lens filters what passes through it just as these frameworks would prioritise sustainability factors; focus, as a lens brings certain things into sharper focus, suggesting environmental considerations should be prominent; and mediation, as everything viewed through this lens is interpreted via sustainability criteria..

- (69) È concentrata [l'installazione On] su una scultura tridimensionale in scala della vettura, realizzata in acciaio e illuminata. Il telaio dell'auto brilla sospeso appena sopra il terreno. «Una visione di un futuro più sostenibile che viene messa a fuoco», dice Barnes [Germane Barnes, l'architetto statunitense scelto da Lexus per realizzare l'installazione in occasione della Design Week]. Basandosi sul principio di un concept che prende vita, l'installazione sarà caratterizzata dalla collezione Code 130° (Corriere della Sera)

It [the installation On] focuses on a three-dimensional, scale sculpture of the car, made of steel and illuminated. The car's chassis shimmers, suspended just above the ground. "A vision of a more sustainable future that is brought into focus", says Barnes [Germane Barnes, the American

architect chosen by Lexus to create the installation for Design Week]. Based on the principle of a concept come to life, the installation will feature the Code 130° collection (Corriere della Sera)

In example (69), the phrase *una visione di un futuro più sostenibile che viene messa a fuoco* ('a vision of a more sustainable future that is brought into focus') delineates an extended SIGHT scenario: first, *visione* ('vision') maps understanding or conceptualisation onto the act of seeing, thus characterising the ability to imagine a sustainable future as being able to visualise it. Second, the metaphor is extended by elaborating on the modality of the figurative perceptual act: *messa a fuoco* ('brought into focus') maps the clarification of an idea onto the photographic or optical act of adjusting a lens to achieve sharp, clear focus. This process of 'accommodation' can be seen in expressions like "to be out of focus, to get something into focus, to come into focus" (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, p. 136).

In this discursive context, the phrase 'a vision of a more sustainable future that is brought into focus' (*una visione di un futuro più sostenibile che viene messa a fuoco*) operates on two levels: literally, the installation uses strategic lighting to illuminate and visually focus attention on the suspended car sculpture; metaphorically, the artwork clarifies or brings into sharp relief the concept of a sustainable future embodied by electric vehicle technology. The installation renders clearer and more concrete the vision of a sustainable future, like an image being brought into focus. Rather than merely representing sustainability, it actively 'focuses' viewers' attention on it, transforming an abstract concept into something tangible and visually prominent. The metaphor thus suggests that sustainability, while perhaps previously nebulous or peripheral in automotive discourse, is now being brought precisely defined through innovation, signalled by both the physical design of the installation and the broader shift towards electric mobility that it represents.

- (70) Oggi invece la grande attenzione ai principi Esg ha dato trasparenza alla sostenibilità: adesso ci sono gli strumenti e la sensibilità per capire quali aziende usano manodopera sottopagata o materie prime non sostenibili. I consumatori e gli investitori hanno più informazioni, costringendo le aziende a migliorare i comportamenti (Sole 24 Ore)

Today, however, the increased attention to ESG principles has brought transparency to sustainability: now there are the tools and the awareness to identify which companies use underpaid labour or unsustainable raw materials. Consumers and investors have more information, forcing companies to improve their behaviour

- (71) 42 per cent of global private capital - or \$4.73tn - is now managed in funds that claim to be run according to sustainable investment principles, according to a survey by data provider Preqin. Yet data and disclosure on environmental, social and governance metrics are even less transparent and standardised in private markets than in public ones - which have recently faced a barrage of allegations of greenwashing (Financial Times)

The reference in both examples to transparency maps the accessibility of information onto the optical physical property of transparency. Literally, transparent means 'able to be seen through', like clear glass or water that allows light to pass through so that objects behind can be distinctly perceived. A transparent medium presents no visual obstruction between the observer and what lies beyond. Metaphorically, transparency refers to information being

accessible, clear, and knowable, thereby enabling understanding and evaluation. Conversely, opacity or lack of transparency indicates information is obscured, hidden, or difficult to access and verify, obstructing the ability to see and thus the ability to know. In example (70), the argument is that 'heightened attention to ESG principles has given transparency to sustainability' (*la grande attenzione ai principi Esg ha dato trasparenza alla sostenibilità*). For years, companies increased profit margins through practices hidden from public view: exploiting low-cost labour in distant countries or using environmentally unsustainable materials. These practices existed in opacity, invisible to consumers and investors. However, ESG frameworks have resolved the issue of opacity: 'now there are the tools and awareness to understand which companies use underpaid labour or unsustainable materials' (*adesso ci sono gli strumenti e la sensibilità per capire quali aziende usano manodopera sottopagata o materie prime non sostenibili*). This transparency forces companies to improve their practices because 'consumers and investors have more information' (*i consumatori e gli investitori hanno più informazioni*), fundamentally shifting the paradigm from hidden exploitation to visible accountability.

This optimistic framing is somewhat countered in example (71), comparing disclosure standards across investment markets, noting that data on environmental, social and governance metrics *are even less transparent and standardised in private markets than in public ones*. Public markets are equipped with standardised metrics provided by established firms, which metaphorically function to some extent as transparent glass allowing investors to see through to companies' actual practices, albeit imperfectly. Nonetheless, companies *have recently faced a barrage of allegations of greenwashing*, questioning the reliability of the metrics. The author is thus highlighting how the situation is already rather worrying in public markets, where attempts at uniformity, clarity and transparency have been made but at least partially marred by greenwashing. Private markets, by contrast, lack any equivalent systems. The comparative *even less transparent* is particularly significant: considering the fallibility characterising public markets and their transparency problems, the comparison indicates that the situation in private markets is significantly worse. This opacity makes it difficult to judge who is integrating ESG principles seriously. The metaphor thus constructs a hierarchy of visibility, ranging from public markets with standardised reporting to private markets with minimal disclosure, highlighting the problems characterising both contexts.

Both examples employ the transparency metaphor to frame information accessibility as a critical issue in ESG accountability, though with different emphases: the Italian example celebrates increased transparency as progress, while the English example critiques persistent opacity as an ongoing problem.

- (72) Adverts lacking "robust evidence" were "likely to be misleading", the regulator [the Advertising Standards Authority, the UK regulatory authority for advertising] said. The watchdog said last year that it would scrutinise claims relating to energy, waste disposal and food sustainability as part of a broader project to "[shine] a brighter regulatory spotlight on environmental matters" (Financial Times)

In example (72), the phrase *shine a brighter regulatory spotlight* instantiates a metaphor mapping the direction of attention towards something onto illuminating it with light, thereby making it accessible for knowledge and evaluation. A *spotlight* literally denotes ‘a light with a very bright beam which can be directed at someone or something’, often used to illuminate performers on stage. The device projects a strong, focused beam aimed precisely at a specific area while leaving surroundings in relative darkness, rendering previously obscured details visible. Metaphorically, “shining a spotlight on something” means directing intense scrutiny and examination towards it. The verb *scrutinise*, which appears earlier in the same excerpt, reinforces this visual framing. Defined as examining someone or something very carefully, it construes regulatory activity as an act of close, attentive looking. Together with *spotlight*, it establishes a coherent cluster of SIGHT metaphors in which the regulatory process is consistently conceptualised as visual inspection: the ASA both looks closely (*scrutinise*) and directs light onto its object of attention (*spotlight*), with both actions serving to render environmental claims visible and therefore assessable.

Hence, in this scenario, the spotlight maps onto regulatory action, with authorities manoeuvring the spotlight and environmental matters becoming the illuminated object. The authority in question, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), is intensifying its scrutiny of environmental claims in advertising as part of its crackdown on greenwashing, specifically targeting claims relating to energy, waste disposal and food sustainability. The modifier *brighter* is particularly significant: it presupposes that regulatory attention already existed, thus casting aside potential presupposition of carelessness on the part of the ASA, but indicates the ASA is now making its inspections more rigorous. The implication is that environmental claims by companies have operated under insufficient scrutiny, and this lack of transparency and sufficient regulatory attention is now being directly addressed. The excerpt illustrates this by noting that adverts lacking *robust evidence* were deemed “*likely to be misleading*”, possibly frustrating efforts by consumer to adopt more sustainable habits. The regulatory spotlight exposed this inadequacy, revealing the greenwashing practices enacted by various companies and holding them accountable to the claims advanced. The metaphor thus frames regulatory attention as illumination that reveals truth and prevents deception in environmental advertising, with increased brightness corresponding to more stringent enforcement.

Just as *tools and the awareness* in example (70) and *disclosure on environmental, social and governance metrics* in example (71) were constructed as instrumental in transparency with regard to sustainability (though with varying degrees of efficacy), regulatory scrutiny is here positioned as fulfilling a comparable function.

- (73) The fog of war. If this is a transformational moment for the investment landscape, some say it is also an opportunity to redefine what it means to invest sustainably. The war in Ukraine ought to be considered “an evolution for ESG rather than muddying the waters”, says Sonja Laud, chief investment officer (Financial Times)

Example (73) extract employs two different metaphorical expressions exploiting different impediments to sight to highlight how Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has rendered the ESG

investment landscape unclear and difficult to navigate. Literally, fog is a thick cloud of water droplets that obscures visibility; metaphorically, it represents confusion that descends upon and envelops a situation. The section header *The fog of war* can be interpreted on two levels: it is an idiomatic expression, denoting the uncertainty and confusion inherent in military conflict, where reliable information is scarce and decision-making is consequently impaired. Additionally, within this context, it indicates that the military conflict in Ukraine is creating a metaphorical fog around ESG principles. Its use is topically-triggered inasmuch as it draws on the established connotations of epistemic uncertainty, impaired judgement, and inability to assess a situation clearly, while simultaneously referring to the actual conflict that has produced this confusion. Traditional frameworks that seemed relatively transparent are now shrouded in this fog, hanging over the investing landscape and making it difficult to see clearly how to apply ESG principles when ethical considerations (supporting Ukraine, energy security) appear to conflict with environmental commitments (reducing fossil fuel use). Sonja Laud counters this pessimistic framing by arguing that the influence on markets of the current war in Ukraine and the subsequent confusion surrounding ESG investing, which she describes as *muddying the waters*, can instead be viewed as an opportunity for *an evolution for ESG*. Literally, muddying water involves actively stirring up sediment from the bottom, transforming clear, transparent liquid into cloudy, opaque material. The idiomatic expression *to muddy the water(s)* hence refers to rendering an issue or situation confusing or hard to understand by introducing complications or distractions. The metaphor frames clarity of understanding as clear water: the more complications and contradictions introduced, the muddier (less transparent, more confusing) the concept becomes. Thus, the general concern conveyed in both metaphors is that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is muddying the waters of ESG investing by creating apparent contradictions that make it harder to understand what ESG actually means. However, Laud reframes the war's impact as evolution rather than obfuscation, rejecting the notion that it is in fact muddying the waters. Rather than introducing confusion, she suggests the war is forcing necessary clarification of what sustainable investment means in complex geopolitical reality, thereby refining rather than obscuring ESG principles.

- (74) Big Tobacco is killing the planet with plastics. No smokescreen should be allowed to hide that [...] The second [of the two main public-relations goals of tobacco companies] is to portray themselves as sustainable to investors. British American Tobacco has featured on Dow Jones Sustainability Index for 20 years now and Philip Morris on the Climate Disclosure Project's A List (The Guardian)

Similarly to example (73), the inability to acquire knowledge about a topic is conceptualised in the title in example (74) as the inability to see due to some entity obstructing vision, drawing on expression that usually concern the inability to see in the context of military operations. Literally, a smokescreen is a screen of smoke, especially one produced to conceal military or naval forces or operations. The deliberately deployed cloud creates a dense visual barrier that obscures visibility, making it impossible to see what lies behind it and thereby protecting hidden activities from detection. Thus, figuratively, a smokescreen denotes something deliberately designed to conceal activities or mislead through distractions or diversions. Just as physical smoke prevents people from seeing what is happening, a

metaphorical smokescreen prevents people from understanding or recognising reality. The verb *hide* reinforces this mechanism of concealment; therefore, the phrase *no smokescreen should be allowed to hide that* presents the tobacco industry as consciously hiding the fact that it *is killing the planet with plastics*. Hence, the topic-triggered metaphor depicts the tobacco industry, which literally produces smoke, as metaphorically using a smokescreen of greenwashing to obscure their environmental impact. Although companies are aware of the lasting damage the pollution caused by them is causing on the planet, metaphorically depicted as a living entity that is being mortally threatened, instead of taking initiative to modify their practices and address the issue, they *hide* the environmental damage caused by their products from investors and customers through corporate social responsibility initiatives. They present themselves as involved in initiatives including anti-littering campaigns or partnerships with environmental institutes on reforestation projects, which distract the public and mask the reality that tobacco manufacturing leads to deforestation, desertification, and massive plastic pollution. This kind of activities enable tobacco companies to be featured in sustainability indices like the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and Climate Disclosure Project's A List, allowing them to *portray themselves as sustainable to investors*. The article insists this figurative impediment to vision should not be allowed to obscure the truth, urging readers to figuratively clear their field of vision and see through the deceptive barrier to recognise the industry's actual environmental destruction.

6.6.4 HEARING

This section focusses on metaphors that structure sustainability discourse through auditory processes such as resonance, amplification, noise and discord. The examples show how sound can frame sustainability communication either as amplification and resonance or, more critically, as noise and discord that obstructs clarity and effective action.

- (75) Attraverso le parole chiave "Ospitale", "Genuino", "Sostenibile", la campagna pianificata per l'estate 2022 vuole essere cassa di risonanza degli obiettivi di sostenibilità, sicurezza alimentare, accorciamento della filiera distributiva, tutela della biodiversità e attrattività e sviluppo delle aree rurali (La Repubblica)

Using the keywords "Hospitable," "Genuine," and "Sustainable", the campaign planned for summer 2022 wants to give resonance to the objectives of sustainability, food safety, shortening the supply chain, protecting biodiversity, and the attractiveness and development of rural areas

The Italian phrase *cassa di risonanza*, used in example (75), literally denotes the resonance box or sound chamber of stringed or percussion instruments, the hollow cavity that amplifies sound by exploiting acoustic resonance. Figuratively, the expression refers to anything that has the power to spread and confer prominence upon news, events, or similar matters, functioning as a platform that disseminates and broadcasts messages to wider audiences. As English does not have an exact equivalent conveying the same meaning at both the literal and

figurative, the expression is rendered as 'give resonance to', which maintains a reference to the concrete domain of sound and foregrounds the notion of giving importance and spreading. In this passage, the 'objectives of sustainability' (*obiettivi di sostenibilità*) are conceptualised as sound, thus casting the process of spreading and communicating about them as the amplification and propagation of sound. Such propagation occurs through the 'planned campaign' (*la campagna pianificata*), which maps onto the resonance box that enables this acoustic transmission. This refers to the national advertising and promotional campaign by the Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, designed to promote agritourism while educating consumers about sustainable and responsible tourism. The metaphorical expression positions the campaign not merely as communicating these objectives, but as actively heightening them to reach wider audiences and create greater societal impact. The specific sustainability objectives, 'food safety, shortening the supply chain, protecting biodiversity, and the attractiveness and development of rural areas' (*sicurezza alimentare, accorciamento della filiera distributiva, tutela della biodiversità e attrattività e sviluppo delle aree rurali*) are articulated as distinct components, suggesting each can be mapped onto different sounds that can be propagated together through the resonance mechanism, much as multiple notes resonate simultaneously through a musical instrument's sound chamber. Evoking acoustic resonance thus carries the implication of not merely louder transmission but harmonic reinforcement, whereby multiple frequencies (the distinct sustainability objectives) can resonate simultaneously and coherently rather than producing discordant melodies. Drawing on this harmonic quality, the campaign aims to present these diverse objectives as complementary priorities that collectively constitute and are all integral to implementing sustainability.

- (76) Every sector of the economy depends on FE [Formula E, the all-electric motor racing championship] colleges for a flow of skilled labour, both young people and adults. Invest in their curricula, staffing and facilities and you change the shape of the economy. Much political noise surrounds sustainability internationally, and much surrounds education and levelling up. It only needs a new prime minister to realise that the answer is right in front of us (Financial Times)

The term *noise* literally denotes an unwanted, chaotic, or disruptive sound that lacks coherent structure or meaningful content, typically characterised by randomness and unpleasantness. In contrast to signal, carrying meaningful information, noise represents auditory interference that obscures rather than communicates. The expression *political noise* in example (76) is thus depicting unproductive discourse as disordered, meaningless sound, with excessive political rhetoric failing to produce substantive outcomes. The author argues that Further Education (FE) colleges, which provide vocational training and alternative educational pathways, represent the practical solution to achieving net zero by training workers in green skills across all economic sectors. The abundance of political discourse on *sustainability, education and levelling up* is framed as counterproductive, obstructing effective and substantive policy action as noise obstructs effective communication. Representing this noise as *surrounding* sustainability highlights its pervasiveness, suggesting the issue is enveloped by inescapable unproductive rhetoric. The criticism of current political approaches to sustainability is embedded in the presentation of a concrete solution with respect to renewed

attention to the education of *skilled labour*, whose intervention is framed as decisive, able to fundamentally *change the shape of the economy* by entering every sector with sustainability expertise embedded in their training. In contrast with the auditory scenario conveying ineffectiveness, the solution is presented as accessible through sight, being *right in front of us*, implying reliability due to the possibility of visualising the solution. While hearing suggests unreliable, mediated information susceptible to distortion and interference that create, in this case, noise, seeing represents privileged, direct knowledge.

(77) “I genuinely don’t believe anybody sets out to write a sustainability report to intentionally mislead... but at some point we have to say: this is what good looks like in order to drive consistency. It’s never going to be cookie cutter,” said Liz O’Leary, head of agriculture and natural assets at Macquarie Asset Management, pointing to the current “cacophony” of standards and metrics (Financial Times)

The term *cacophony* literally denotes ‘a loud, unpleasant mixture of sounds’, characterising harsh, discordant noise created when multiple sounds clash without harmony or coordination. Figuratively, cacophony describes situations of confusion, disorder, or disagreement as harmonic discord, whereby lack of coordination or consensus maps onto inharmonious, clashing sounds that fail to produce coherent music. The metaphorical framing in example (77) operates similarly to *political noise* discussed above, while intensifying the negative evaluation through connotations of harsh, clashing disharmony. Negatively valued auditory adjectives are customarily used metaphorically to describe displeasing qualities, transferring the unpleasantness given by lack of harmony in sounds to other areas where unpleasantness is perceived. For instance, while being in unison or in tune means agreeing, if something is discordant, it shows a lack of agreement. In this passage, Liz O’Leary addresses the fundamental challenge facing environmental, social, and governance (ESG) disclosure in private investment markets: the absence of a unified, standardised system for measuring and reporting sustainability performance. Multiple competing ESG frameworks operate simultaneously, including international initiatives, regional regulations, industry-specific standards, and proprietary rating systems developed by individual firms. The metaphorical mapping positions each ESG framework as producing its own distinct sound, with different methodologies, metrics, and reporting formats that cannot be harmonised, that is, meaningfully compared. The cacophony produces confusion rather than clarity: fund managers lack guidance on which standards to follow, and while O’Leary suggests that sustainability reports are not intentionally misleading, ...the absence of consensus on *what good looks like*, that is, agreed benchmarks for what a high-quality sustainability report should contain and how performance should be measured, prevents consistency.

Additionally, when companies deliberately act in bad faith, the discordant proliferation of metrics facilitates greenwashing, allowing companies to selectively adopt the most favourable frameworks or develop proprietary metrics that present their performance without external verification. Framing the regulatory confusion as a cacophony, the metaphor conveys an implication with regard to what might be a solution: what is needed is not silence, that is, an absence of standards, but harmony, coordinated frameworks that, like different

instruments in an ensemble, play complementary parts while maintaining sectoral specificity. O’Leary reinforces this when arguing that standardisation *is never going to be cookie cutter*, an idiomatic expression indicating that one-size-fits-all approaches are unrealistic across diverse industries and that reasonable variation must be accommodated. This passage appears in the same article as the *transparency* metaphor discussed above. Here, metrics in private markets are described as even less *transparent* and *standardised* than those in public markets. The issue is therefore framed through two sensory modalities: ESG performance is presented as being both invisible, due to a lack of *transparency*, and inaudible, because it is drowned out by *cacophony*. The article suggests that a solution requires a dual transformation: moving from auditory confusion to *harmony* through better coordination, and from visual *opacity* to *clarity* through the use of standardised disclosures.

6.6.5 Concluding observations on the PERCEPTION domain

The PERCEPTION domain construes access to knowledge about sustainability through the embodied experience of sensory perception, with SIGHT and HEARING occupying distinct and hierarchically ordered positions in this conceptual mapping. The SIGHT metaphors in the corpus consistently instantiate the KNOWING/UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor, establishing visual clarity as a precondition for informed evaluation of sustainability practices. The *lens* metaphor, appearing in both the Italian and English subcorpora in examples (67) and (68), positions sustainability as an evaluative filter through which all relevant activities must be viewed and assessed, with the modifier *ormai imprescindibile* (‘now essential’) in the Italian example (67) intensifying the metaphor by characterising this lens as no longer optional but obligatory. Similarly, the *visione messa a fuoco* (‘vision brought into focus’) in example (69) extends the SIGHT scenario from static observation to specific focus, mapping the clarification of the concept of a sustainable future onto the optical act of adjusting a lens to achieve sharpness, an extension rendered topic-triggered by the context of a physical installation employing strategic lighting.

The evaluative dimension of SIGHT metaphors becomes particularly prominent in examples addressing transparency and its obstruction. The *transparency* examples (70) and (71) construct a hierarchy of visibility, with the Italian example (70) celebrating the progress brought about by increased attention to ESG principles and the English example (71) highlighting the persistent opacity characterising private markets. When visual access is presented as deliberately impeded, the metaphors serve to frame greenwashing and related deceptive practices. The *fog of war* and *muddying the waters* in example (73) exploit different mechanisms of visual obstruction (atmospheric obscuring and active contamination of a transparent medium) to depict the confusion surrounding ESG investing in the wake of the Ukraine conflict, while the *smokescreen* in example (74) construes the tobacco industry as deliberately deploying a visual barrier to conceal its environmental destruction. These impediments-to-vision scenarios are counterbalanced by the *regulatory spotlight* in example (72), where the Advertising Standards Authority is depicted as intensifying its illumination

of environmental claims, with the modifier *brighter* presupposing that regulatory attention already existed but was insufficient in intensity.

Through HEARING metaphors the process of communicating sustainability objectives can be constructed instead as acoustic amplification, with *cassa di risonanza* ('resonance box') in example (75) functioning as the resonance chamber enabling the propagation of multiple sustainability goals simultaneously, much as a musical instrument's sound box amplifies multiple notes in harmony. By contrast, the two English examples from the *Financial Times* exploit auditory metaphors to convey criticism. *Political noise* in example (76) frames excessive political rhetoric on sustainability as disordered, meaningless sound that obstructs effective policy action, while *cacophony* in example (77) intensifies this negative evaluation to depict the proliferation of competing ESG standards and metrics as harsh, clashing disharmony that produces confusion rather than clarity. Notably, example (77) appears in the same article employing the *transparency* metaphor from example (71), framing the shortcomings of ESG metrics through both sensory modalities: performance is unknowable because it is neither observable (lacking transparency) nor audible (drowned in cacophony). This dual sensory framing reinforces the perceptual hierarchy posited by Sweetser (1990) and Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999): sight is associated with objective, reliable knowledge and is recruited to frame positive developments (transparency, the regulatory spotlight, bringing a vision into focus), while hearing, perceived as more passive and susceptible to distortion, is more readily mobilised to convey criticism of unproductive or confusing discourse.

6.7 Minor Domains

The following sections discuss metaphorical domains that occurred with lower frequency in the corpus (below 100 occurrences) and are therefore presented in less extended form than the more widespread domains analysed previously. While these domains constitute a minority of the data, they have been maintained as distinct domains rather than subsumed under wider categories because they refer to specific areas of human experience that are not tied or directly related to the topology of the other major domains. Each possesses distinctive characteristics that constitute a coherent thread running through its respective examples, providing particular cognitive windows as entry points into sustainability discourse. This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the application of each domain, through illustrative examples that demonstrate how each domain is exploited to articulate and structure the corners of discourse to which it pertains.

6.7.1 ORGANISM

Within this domain, two overarching categories emerge. Drawing on Musolff's (2016b) taxonomy of body metaphors in political discourse, these are distinguished into those relating to parts of the anatomy and their functions (examples 78 – 80), and those focussing instead on the notion of disease and therapy (examples 81 – 83).

- (78) As you might gather from the name, all the materials used are organic, ethically produced and sustainability is the backbone of the brand. The large unisex collection – featuring leggings, tops, dungarees and more in a chic, minimalist aesthetic – is designed to be mixed and matched, then passed on (The Independent)

Example (78) employs the BODY metaphor through the anatomical term *backbone*, which denotes the vertebral column extending along the back. The backbone serves as the primary structural support for the entire skeletal system, maintaining upright posture and protecting the spinal cord. Figuratively, the term conveys both structural necessity and moral fortitude, referring either to the most fundamental element of an organisation or to the courage required to undertake necessary action. In this context, sustainability is established as *the backbone of the brand*, foregrounding the notion of necessity by transferring the structural indispensability of the spine onto the perceived centrality of sustainability within the business model of the brand. The company in question, Organic Zoo, is a children's clothing brand specialising in unisex designs. By framing sustainability as the backbone rather than merely a supporting element, the metaphor positions it not as a secondary feature but as the load-bearing principle structuring all operational decisions. Just as the removal of the vertebral column would result in complete bodily collapse, the metaphor implies that removing sustainability from Organic Zoo's business model would fundamentally compromise the brand's identity. This assertion is substantiated by concrete evidence: all materials used are *organic* and *ethically produced*. Additionally, the collection is explicitly designed to be *passed on* between children, directly addressing the issue of clothing items rapidly become obsolete as children outgrow them, which can lead to waste. By designing for circularity, Organic Zoo demonstrates that sustainability functions as the organising principle determining material selection, production methods, and product lifecycle management. The metaphor thus establishes sustainability as simultaneously the structural foundation and the defining characteristic that gives coherence and direction to the brand's identity.

- (79) «Abbiamo [Bombardi Rettifiche, impresa specializzata in lavorazioni meccaniche di precisione] migliorato la produttività delle nostre macchine perché lavoriamo sempre con olii puliti e possiamo spingere le prestazioni». L'attenzione alla sostenibilità è nel Dna della famiglia Bombardi [proprietaria di Bombardi Rettifiche]: il primo impianto fotovoltaico, che copre un 30% del fabbisogno energetico aziendale, risale a 12 anni fa (Sole 24 Ore)

"We've [Bombardi Rettifiche, a small company specialising in precision mechanical processing] improved the productivity of our machines because we always work with clean oils and can push performance further." Attention to sustainability is in the Bombardi family's [owner of Bombardi

Rettifiche] DNA: the first photovoltaic system, which covers 30% of the company's energy needs, dates back 12 years

Example (79) employs the metaphor of *DNA*, which denotes the molecular structure containing genetic information transmitted from parent to children. Biologically, DNA serves as the hereditary material determining an organism's characteristics, encoding fundamental instructions that are replicated across generations. Hence, figuratively, DNA conveys intrinsic, unchangeable and distinctive attributes or qualities perceived as inherent to a system's identity, and it is often used to characterise the organisational identity of an entity. This usage is employed in the article, which asserts that 'attention to sustainability is in the DNA of the Bombardi family' (*l'attenzione alla sostenibilità è nel Dna della famiglia Bombardi*), mapping the biological properties of genetic inheritance onto the perceived intrinsic nature of environmental commitment within this family-owned firm. By framing sustainability as encoded in the family's DNA, the metaphor positions this value not as strategically adopted in response to contemporary market pressures or regulatory requirements, but as a foundational principle embedded in their business identity and transmitted through successive generations. The fact that the business actually constitutes a family enterprise lends additional resonance to the metaphor, since the genetic transmission from parents to children operates both literally, through family succession, and figuratively, through inherited business philosophy.

This assertion is substantiated by reference to the company's early adoption of environmental technologies. The installation of their first photovoltaic system 'dates back 12 years' (*risale a 12 anni fa*), establishing a temporal dimension that demonstrates sustained commitment predating the widespread commercialisation of sustainability discourse. The metaphor thereby conveys two implications. Firstly, it establishes continuity and authenticity by positioning sustainability as an inherent family characteristic transmitted across generations, mirroring the biological replication of genetic traits. Secondly, it implies permanence, suggesting that this commitment cannot be readily abandoned or modified, as it constitutes an essential component of the family's identity.

(80) Economics, Hazel Henderson [environmentalist and economist critical of conventional economics] concluded, was not a science, but "politics in disguise", while cash-flow-based GDP [Gross domestic product, monetary measure of the total market value of goods and services produced and rendered during a specific period of time by a country] was "a malfunctioning strand of cultural DNA replicating unsustainability" (The Telegraph)

In contrast to example (79) discussed above, which frames sustainability as an essential component of organisational identity in positive terms, example (80) employs the DNA metaphor to articulate a critical perspective on conventional economic measurement. Hazel Henderson, an environmentalist and economist, characterises *cash-flow-based GDP* as *a malfunctioning strand of cultural DNA replicating unsustainability*. Her main critique centres on GDP's systematic exclusion of environmental and social costs from economic accounting, positioning this metric as fundamentally incompatible with sustainability principles. The metaphorical elaboration operates at multiple levels, extending the conventional "is in the

DNA” formula through additional lexical material, explicitly evoking components and features of DNA that in conventional uses remain in the unused part of the metaphor. Firstly, the use of *strand* frames unsustainability more specifically as one component segment within a larger genetic system. Secondly, the metaphor explicitly foregrounds DNA’s inherent replicative function ensuring continuity and coherence, by attributing to this strand the action of *replicating unsustainability*. Thirdly, qualifying this DNA as *cultural* juxtaposes the biological mapping with the literal problem that Henderson identifies: GDP’s establishment as a standard measurement embedded within economic culture and policy frameworks. Most significantly, the adjective *malfunctioning* introduces an explicit negative evaluation. While the element being replicated, unsustainability, already signals dysfunction, the qualification of the strand itself as malfunctioning reinforces the severity of the systemic problem. Just as a biological DNA malfunction can cause hereditary disease, this figurative malfunction produces a cultural pathology that perpetuates enduring damage.

The metaphor therefore captures how GDP functions as a flawed code embedded in economic and political systems. Just as DNA replicates genetic traits across generations, GDP as a measurement system propagates its logic across economies, institutions and policy decisions worldwide. The mapping positions this replication as problematic: GDP’s narrow focus on cash-flow transactions systematically reproduces patterns of unsustainable development by rewarding resource extraction without accounting for environmental degradation and damages to human health. This creates direct opposition to sustainable development, which by definition requires accounting for environmental limits, resource depletion and intergenerational equity. Henderson’s DNA metaphor thus operates in direct contrast to its usage in the Bombardi example: while the family’s DNA encodes sustainability as an intrinsic positive value guiding their business philosophy, GDP’s cultural DNA encodes unsustainability as a replicated defect requiring systemic correction.

- (81) The lure of colossal payouts in the years to come appears to be irresistible to the oil companies, despite the world’s climate scientists stating in February that further delay in cutting fossil fuel use would mean missing our last chance “to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all”. As the UN secretary general, António Guterres, warned world leaders in April: “Our addiction to fossil fuels is killing us” (The Guardian)

In example (81), António Guterres, the United Nations secretary general, frames the dependence on fossil fuels as an *addiction*, which denotes compulsive dependence on a harmful substance despite awareness of its damaging consequences. Medically, addiction involves physiological and psychological dependency whereby the organism prioritises short-term relief over long-term wellbeing, continuing consumption despite knowledge of harm. Figuratively, it can be used to frame a damaging practice as being caused by pathological dependency. In this case, the metaphor maps this pathological dependency onto societal reliance on fossil fuels, framing current energy practices as a disease afflicting the collective body of humanity. By characterising dependence on fossil fuel use as *our addiction*, Guterres positions society, encompassing nations, corporations and consumers, as the afflicted organism, with the possessive pronoun *our* establishing collective responsibility. Fossil fuels are mapped onto the addictive substance, while *the lure of colossal payouts*

functions as the short-term gratification that perpetuates the dependency cycle despite mounting evidence of long-term harm.

The metaphor carries two main implications; firstly, it conveys how dangerous the use of fossil fuels is, inasmuch as drug use can prove lethal. This is reinforced by the verb phrase *is killing us*, which explicitly articulates the consequences of this addiction, positioning continued fossil fuel consumption as fatal to collective survival. The present continuous tense of *is killing* suggests concrete, ongoing harm rather than merely potential future damage. The metaphor thus establishes an urgent temporal dimension, substantiated by the scientist's warning that *further delay would mean missing our last chance "to secure a liveable and sustainable future"*. The adjective *last* depicts this as an irrevocable choice, suggesting that continuing the addiction definitively forecloses the possibility of recovery. If current levels of fossil fuel use by oil companies continue to be permitted, collective survival is threatened. Significantly, the pairing of *liveable and sustainable* establishes these attributes as inextricably linked: a future that is liveable is necessarily a future that needs to be sustainable.

The second fundamental implication of the addiction metaphor is that it foregrounds the difficulty of remedying the addiction. An addiction is a condition that requires time to be eradicated, and the process is invariably painful. Recovery for an addict is notoriously arduous and protracted, requiring perseverance and the endurance of considerable short-term suffering in order to ensure long-term wellness and health, reversing the typical pattern of addiction. The transition to renewable energy therefore corresponds to the challenging process of withdrawal and recovery, requiring sustained effort to break established dependency patterns and entailing unavoidable short-term hardship. The addiction metaphor thus positions sustainability not as one policy option among many, but as the essential recovery programme required to prevent collective "death", which will entail short-term suffering but ensure long-term survival.

- (82) The risk, she [Alison Taylor, executive director of NYU Stern's Ethical Systems research platform] says, is that relying on climate reporting without other policy measures would equate to "embracing another fad diet", while "the world will keep getting fatter - and hotter." Silvia Pavoni is the editor of Sustainable Views (Financial Times)

Example (82) presents a fundamental critique of ESG market premises, questioning whether climate and sustainability disclosures alone can effectively address climate change and highlighting limitations that should be acknowledged in public discourse. Alison Taylor, a professor at NYU Stern School of Business who studies corporate ethics and sustainability, maintains that relying solely on these measures can be compared to *embracing another fad diet*, with the verb *equate to* functioning as a metaphor flag that explicitly signals the comparison. Taylor deploys this metaphor to warn that, like a fad diet, depending only on voluntary climate disclosures might seem like an effective solution temporarily, yet it fails to resolve the underlying problem. Just as beginning a fad diet can initially appear to yield meaningful progress, so can adopting climate disclosures in annual reports look like an important step forward. Conveniently, in both cases the consequences are not expected to be

manifest immediately: impact in the form of, respectively, weight loss and lowering of global temperatures, requires time to become evident.

Additionally, as a fad diet does not in fact lead to concrete results, climate reporting alone does not prevent global warming; despite seeming significant, both may have disappointingly small effects. Companies can publish seemingly impressive climate disclosures in their annual reports, without concretely achieving rapid or meaningful environmental improvements. Climate reporting may thus be celebrated as consequential change toward more sustainable practices, yet, without substantive policy changes, it will not tip the scale toward actual substantial improvements. This risk is encapsulated in the statement that *the world will keep getting fatter - and hotter*, explicitly positioning on the same level the figurative consequences in the source domain (*fatter*) and the literal consequence in the target domain (*hotter*). The metaphor thus maps the scepticism and disappointment typically associated with fad diets into the domain of corporate sustainability practices. This constitutes a critique of ESG's current limitations and vulnerability to greenwashing, rather than an outright rejection of sustainability reporting altogether.

- (83) Per lei la sostenibilità può essere un buon antidoto contro la crisi che stiamo vivendo tra covid, guerra e aumento dei costi delle materie prime? Sostenibilità è una parola salvifica, oggi molto abusata tanto che poi non solo se ne perde il significato originario ma anche l'effettiva portata (La Repubblica)

In your opinion, could sustainability be a good antidote to the crisis we're experiencing amidst COVID, war, and rising raw material costs? Sustainability is a saving word, so overused today that not only is its original meaning lost, but also its true significance

Example (83) is taken from an interview to Andrea Segrè, a professor of International and Comparative Agricultural Policy. The journalist who is conducting the interview asks whether sustainability 'can be a good antidote against the crisis we are experiencing between COVID, war and rising costs of raw materials' (*può essere un buon antidoto contro la crisi che stiamo vivendo tra covid, guerra e aumento dei costi delle materie prime*). Therefore, the current crisis, caused by the concurrent factors of the coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and rising material costs, is framed as a pathological condition afflicting a socio-economic organism. The term 'antidote' (*antidoto*) activates a "MEDICAL SUPPORT scenario" (Augé, 2020, p. 111), drawing on medical discourse where an antidote denotes a substance that reverses or neutralises the effects of poison, toxins, or disease and thus restores the organism to health. The metaphor maps this curative function onto sustainability's perceived capacity to address multiple interconnected crises. Just as poison or disease represents a harmful substance threatening biological health, the concurrent crises of pandemic, war, and economic instability constitute toxins afflicting societal health, and sustainability can function as the curative agent that neutralises harm. Characterising sustainability as a 'good antidote' (*buon antidoto*) offers a stark contrast to the previous metaphorical framing of a *fad diet*, which emphasised ineffective or superficial solutions. The adjective *good* suggests an effective and appropriate remedy, implying specificity in the match between toxin and antidote and casting sustainability as a targeted, effective intervention. The medical framing

carries additional temporal implications. As with the notion of addiction in example (81), an antidote's effectiveness depends on timely administration: delayed intervention may allow toxins to cause irreversible damage or death. This urgency is implicitly mapped onto the sustainability domain, suggesting that delayed action risks allowing the current crisis to progress beyond the point of remediation. The metaphor draws on recipients' experiential knowledge of physical illness and the relief provided by effective medicine, making sustainability measures appear more tangible and urgent than abstract policy proposals.

Segrè's response sustains and elaborates the medical framing by characterising sustainability as a 'saving word' (*parola salvifica*). The adjective *salvifica* in Italian additionally carries religious connotations, intensifying the metaphor's evaluative charge beyond mere treatment to suggest existential rescue. However, Segrè immediately introduces a critical condition: this curative power is threatened by the fact that the word 'sustainability' is being 'overused' (*abusata*), resulting in a loss of both its 'original meaning' (*significato originario*) and its 'true significance' (*l'effettiva portata*). The effectiveness of the remedy and its capacity to drive meaningful change depends not only on its intrinsic properties but on maintaining conceptual clarity and precision in its application. The medical framing confers both urgency and frailty on sustainability, suggesting that while it constitutes the necessary remedy, its effectiveness depends on careful preservation of its substantive meaning against the erosive effects of overuse.

6.7.2 PERSONIFICATION

Ontological metaphors are mappings where an abstract entity is either reified, that is, made into a thing or personified, made into a person (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). While the former kind of ontological metaphors was discussed in the OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain (see Section 6.1), the latter is discussed here under PERSONIFICATION. Objectification and personification can be described as being "the flip side" (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 64) of one another. They both reframe the ontological status of the abstract entity in question and are quite common in language, but while the former provides construals of our often agentive interaction with something, the latter provides instead a coherent and accessible representation of the agentive effect that something can have (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). The first highlights our actions towards something, while the second highlights the effect that something has on us. Personification operates by attributing various human characteristics to abstract entities, and its linguistic realisation depends heavily on the use of verbs which attribute agenthood to the subject (Dorst, 2011). It is often realised via the "selection restrictions" (Dorst, 2011, p. 117) of a verb which would normally require a human subject or object but is instead attributed to a concept. Due to its complexity, personification can comprise a wide range of different mappings, since the concept PERSON may be attributed a large set of features pertaining to different aspects of human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The common thread is the attribution of agency in order to comprehend phenomena

in human terms, on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

In the following examples, the notion of sustainability is personified through an array of human actions and behaviours. The first three examples (84 – 86) focus on interpersonal relationships, presenting sustainability as interacting with other entities in ways that people would, evoking harmony and cooperation through positively valenced images. The final example, (87), attributes a more negatively connotated behaviour to sustainability. As is typical of personification, due to its primary aim of attributing agency where there would not literally be any, the metaphors are lexicalised through verbs, granting sustainability an agency it does not literally possess and framing it as an active participant.

- (84) Un'etica che ha radici in una generazione, quella del nonno [di Alberto Pirelli, business advisor di Pirelli ed ex vicepresidente del gruppo, oggi presidente di Fondazione Sodalitas, a foundation], con lo sguardo lungo sul tempo e che rivive in altri modi: «Fare incontrare il profitto con la sostenibilità richiede una visione di medio-lungo periodo. Non è facile ma abbiamo intrapreso [Fondazione Sodalitas] una direzione positiva» (Sole 24 Ore)

An ethic rooted in a generation, that of the grandfather [of Alberto Pirelli, Pirelli business advisor and former vice-president of the group, now president of Fondazione Sodalitas], with a long-term perspective, which lives on in other ways: "Having profit and sustainability meet requires a medium- to long-term vision. It's not easy, but we've [Fondazione Sodalitas] taken a positive direction" (Sole 24 Ore)

In example (84), the two abstract concepts of profit and sustainability are presented as two individuals located in different places, requiring active intervention to be brought together. Reconciling these two notions and the different measures and approaches that they require is conceptualised through the causative construction 'having [...] meet' (*fare incontrare*). The implication is that they currently exist separately, perhaps even in opposition, giving concreteness to the difficulty for businesses of continuing to make profit but also being sustainable. The causative verb *fare* signals that external agency is necessary: these concepts do not naturally converge but must be deliberately aligned through human effort. The choice of *incontrare* ('to meet'), rather than alternatives such as *unire* ('to unite') proves particularly significant, framing the relationship as an encounter between two independent agents rather than a merging of two objects. This constructs profit and sustainability as entities that maintain their distinct identities while being brought into dialogue, suggesting a relationship requiring negotiation and ongoing management rather than a permanent resolution.

The speaker is the business advisor at the tyre manufacturing business, who is articulating the challenge facing contemporary business. The difficulty of this reconciliation is explicitly acknowledged through 'it's not easy' (*non è facile*), yet this recognition is immediately tempered by a prospective assertion of progress. The prerequisite for achieving this alignment is framed as possessing 'a medium- to long-term vision' (*una visione di medio-lungo periodo*). This preconditions thus contrast short-term profit maximisation with sustainable business practices requiring patience and deferred returns, constructing the capacity to think beyond immediate gains as fundamental to reconciling these competing demands. The

positive outlook is reinforced through a JOURNEY metaphor (see Section 5.2) when Pirelli notes that the business has ‘taken a positive direction’ (*abbiamo intrapreso una direzione positiva*). This formulation marks the initial stage of the complex process while projecting confidence in its trajectory, simultaneously acknowledging the difficulty and the forward momentum.

- (85) Nessun compromesso: bellezza e sostenibilità, design e funzionalità difatti convivono in perfetta armonia. Esiste dunque un dialogo aperto tra architettura e Natura (La Repubblica)

No compromise: beauty and sustainability, design and functionality, live together in perfect harmony. Thus, an open dialogue exists between architecture and nature

The verb *convivono*, literally referring to living in the same place, personifies these abstract concepts, presenting ‘beauty and sustainability, design and functionality’ (*bellezza e sostenibilità, design e funzionalità*) as living beings capable of dwelling together in the same space. While the notion of having them meet in example (84) emphasises the active intervention needed to bring two separate entities together, in example (85) ‘live together’ (*convivono*) constructs a harmonious state already achieved, where different qualities co-exist side by side without conflict. The addition of ‘in perfect harmony’ (*in perfetta armonia*) reinforces the image of peaceful coexistence, positioning sustainability not as something in opposition to beauty, design or functionality, but as naturally compatible with them, requiring ‘no compromise’ (*nessun compromesso*). This construction of harmonious compatibility is further developed through the assertion that ‘an open dialogue exists between architecture and Nature’ (*un dialogo aperto tra architettura e Natura*), again personifying these fields as two entities capable of engaging in conversation. This dialogue implies reciprocal exchange and communication between two parties, with mutual understanding and responsiveness. The adjective ‘open’ (*aperto*) frames this as an ongoing process allowing for continuous exchange rather than a fixed resolution. This positions sustainability and architecture as engaging in a balanced exchange where both parties maintain agency and voice. The openness suggests this relationship is still being negotiated, similarly to the ongoing effort of having profit and sustainability meet. However, while both examples acknowledge ongoing negotiation, here the relationship between architecture and nature is presented as already established and functioning harmoniously, subject to continuous improvement through dialogue rather than still needing to be achieved.

- (86) As with any aerospace event, the question of sustainability lurks. The industry regularly reminds anyone who will listen that planes are responsible for only about 3% of global carbon emissions, but aviation is among the hardest sectors to decarbonise (The Guardian)

The verb *to lurk* refers to the action of waiting somewhere quietly and secretly, typically with malicious intent, and figuratively describes how, for instance, danger or unacknowledged feelings exist concealed beneath the surface. In example (86), *the question of sustainability* is conceptualised as an entity that *lurks*, positioning it as something present, but deliberately concealed and avoided. The verb maps negative or ominous connotations, constructing sustainability concerns as menacing and unwelcome, hovering uncomfortably in the

background of aerospace events without being openly addressed. Its connotations of threat and unpredictability suggest that while the industry knows sustainability is a problem, it is not fully engaging with it. Just as a person lurking is expected to do something malicious, though what exactly remains unknown, so too the consequences of this avoidance remain uncertain and potentially damaging. The metaphor thus constructs sustainability as an unresolved threat whose future impact cannot be predicted but whose menacing presence persists nonetheless.

This evasion is reinforced through the assertion that *the industry regularly reminds anyone who will listen that planes are responsible for only about 3% of global carbon emissions*. The phrase *anyone who will listen* carries distinctly negative connotations, implying a reluctant audience and suggesting the industry feels forced to repeatedly make this defensive claim to increasingly sceptical listeners. The author immediately undermines this assertion by noting that *aviation is among the hardest sectors to decarbonise*, juxtaposing the industry's emphasis on its relatively small contribution to global emissions with the challenging reality of addressing those emissions. This construction suggests that while the aviation sector insists on highlighting favourable statistics, it defers engaging with the arduous process of decarbonisation, leaving this unresolved issue to lurk out of sight, with unpredictable future consequences.

6.7.3 EXPLORATION

The EXPLORATION domain frames sustainability as an emerging territory associated with discovery, innovation and risk. Metaphors such as *pioneer*, *frontier* and *gold rush* evoke movement into spaces that are not yet fully known or settled, thereby foregrounding the novelty of sustainable practices and technologies. Examples (87 – 89) show how this domain can support both celebratory representations of sustainability as progress and more critical accounts of opportunistic exploitation.

- (87) We are excited to be working with a partner that shares a desire to innovate and find new answers to aviation's biggest challenges. "We at Rolls-Royce want to be ready to pioneer sustainability with whatever the future requires, be it hydrogen, electric power, sustainable aviation fuel or gas turbine efficiency" (The Independent)

In example (87), Rolls-Royce's chief technology officer frames the company's approach to sustainability through the pioneer metaphor, drawing on a source domain rooted in exploration and territorial discovery. The verb *to pioneer* originally refers to the historical figure of the pioneer as one of the first people to travel to and settle in previously unexplored territory; figuratively, it denotes any individual who has had a central role in the early development of something, and whose work or ideas are later developed by other people. The term acts as a metaphorical anchor for originality and discovery that brings substantial innovation within a field and historical relevance. When mapped onto the corporate

sustainability context, *pioneering sustainability* positions Rolls-Royce as an agent actively exploring uncharted technological territory, seeking novel solutions rather than following established practices. However, the specific phrasing of *want to be ready to pioneer* defers the innovation to the future. The chief technology officer does not state that Rolls Royce is pioneering these technologies, a claim that would be falsifiable. Rolls-Royce is framed as an agent of innovation, open to pursuing any development that might contribute to sustainability *with whatever the future requires*, claiming for the brand a central role in shaping the collective sustainable future. It conveys a preparatory stance, claiming ethicality through future-oriented commitment while avoiding the onus of substantiating claims of innovative contributions in the present. The positive connotations of the pioneer, in terms of innovation and active participation in change with significant societal impact, are evoked. At the same time, by signalling intention and aspiration rather than demonstrable achievement, the statement defers accountability to an unspecified future juncture, allowing Rolls-Royce to claim a pioneering role without the immediate obligation to prove it. The pioneer metaphor thus functions less as a description of current practice and more as an aspirational projection, constructing Rolls-Royce's sustainability commitment as preparatory, indefinitely deferred to a future moment when *whatever the future requires* becomes sufficiently determined to warrant decisive action.

- (88) Assets in ESG funds grew 53 per cent year on year to \$2.7tn in 2021, according to data provider Morningstar, amid a gold rush by asset managers to tap into rising investor demand by rebranding their funds as sustainable or launching new ones. The term has become a broad catch-all for a range of approaches to investment (Financial Times)

The phrase *gold rush* refers literally to a period of feverish migration to an area where gold has been discovered, most famously the California Gold Rush of 1848-1855 and the Klondike gold rush of 1898. During such events, large numbers of prospectors rushed to newly discovered goldfields in the hope of discovering gold and gaining wealth quickly, often with little planning or regard for consequences. In the context of example (88), a *gold rush by asset managers* uses the metaphor to characterise the investment industry's rapid and opportunistic response to growing demand for ESG funds. During the gold rush, a valuable resource was discovered suddenly, leading to an influx of miners seeking quick profits engaging in frenzied, competitive behaviour, often using methods for extraction without any consideration for long-term effects. Similarly, asset managers are depicted as miners recognising a profitable market opportunity in ESG investing, due to *rising investor demand*, and rapidly taking action by *rebranding their funds as sustainable or launching new ones*, with what many suggests are superficial measures that do not drive long-term change. Although the imagery connected to the gold rush can evoke romanticised notions of adventure, risk taking and limitless opportunities, its negative features can constitute a cautionary tale of delusions and exploitation used to convey condemnation of behaviour fuelled by greed and unrestricted by any rules (Nerlich & Koteyko, 2010). In this instance, it is the latter connotation that is foregrounded, suggesting that asset managers' motivations are primarily driven by profit rather than genuinely oriented towards sustainability. The rapid proliferation of ESG funds is depicted as driven more by a desire to capitalise on a lucrative

trend than by authentic commitment to environmental or social goals. The label is defined as a *broad catch-all for a range of approaches to investment*, an ambiguity that, while allowing ESG to appeal to a wide range of investors, creates ambiguity that enables greenwashing practices.

- (89) Next Mobility, in Fiera Milano la nuova frontiera del trasporto green. Dal 12 al 14 ottobre mobilità pubblica, sharing, sostenibilità, transizione energetica e innovazione al centro della manifestazione dedicata a mezzi, soluzioni politiche e tecnologie (Il Giornale)

Next Mobility, the new frontier of green transportation at Fiera Milano. From October 12th to 14th, public mobility, sharing, sustainability, energy transition, and innovation will be the focus of the event dedicated to vehicles, policy solutions, and technologies.

A frontier literally denotes the border of a country; however, it has acquired an additional meaning rooted in American history in the 20th century, referring to an area where people have never lived before, a territory about which little is known and which requires exploration and settlement. This meaning has been conventionally extended to designate the extreme limit of various figurative domains of knowledge, where research and innovation function as territorial exploration and boundary expansion. This notion is inherently connected with the metaphors in the two previous examples, with all three sharing an association with the overarching theme of discovery, expansion, and the exploitation of new territories. Collectively, they construct the image of an “American Frontier experience” where the search for riches (gold rush) drives the first explorers (pioneers) to extend the boundaries of the known world (frontier). Therefore, within this narrative the people leading progress become pioneers, the frontier is the limit of knowledge or innovation that they are pushing, and the gold rush describes the perceived advantages behind the expansion.

When mapped onto the sustainability context in example (89), framing green transport as ‘the new frontier’ (*la nuova frontiera*) positions sustainable mobility as the edge of settled territory, an unexplored domain beyond current boundaries promising discovery through ongoing technological and policy development. The metaphor suggests that this field represents the cutting edge of progress, the next territory to be explored and conquered within the broader scheme of sustainability implementation. By profiling green transport as a frontier, it evokes associations with innovation, opportunity, and forward movement, framing sustainable mobility as an exciting new realm of possibility. The modifier ‘new’ (*nuova*) reinforces temporal progression, suggesting that while previous frontiers may have been conquered already, this represents the contemporary challenge and opportunity requiring exploration. This framing is embodied particularly well by the event discussed here, Next Mobility, whose stated aim is to showcase emerging technologies and developments in ‘public mobility, sharing, sustainability, energy transition, and innovation’ (*mobilità pubblica, sharing, sostenibilità, transizione energetica e innovazione*). By foregrounding exploration, discovery, and technological advancement, the metaphor reinforces the tendency to rely predominantly on technological and scientific development in ‘green transportation’ (*trasporto green*) as the solution to emissions from the transport sector. This mapping positions sustainability challenges as a domain awaiting exploration

and technological conquest, solvable primarily through innovation rather than through structural reorganisation.

6.7.4 MYTH AND BELIEF

The MYTH AND BELIEF domain draws on magical and religious imagery to evaluate sustainability and related practices. These metaphors can invest sustainability with transformative or salvific force, presenting it as a concept capable of resolving complex crises. At the same time, they can also be used critically, framing certain approaches to sustainability as unrealistic, dogmatic or excessive.

- (90) Oggi, in un'epoca di transizione al nuovo, necessita identificare soluzioni che facciano perno sul concetto di sostenibilità, "formula magica" e pervasiva che, attraverso variegate declinazioni, ha riguardo al rapporto tra ambiente ed equilibrio degli ecosistemi del pianeta. Grazie ad essa è dato configurare la possibilità di uno "sviluppo sostenibile" (Sole 24 Ore)

Today, in an era of transition to the new, we need to identify solutions that hinge on the concept of sustainability, a pervasive "magic formula" that, through its varied declinations, addresses the relationship between the environment and the balance of the planet's ecosystems. This allows us to shape the possibility of "sustainable development"

In example (90), sustainability is characterised as a 'magic formula' (*formula magica*). A magic formula is a spell or ritualistic phrase believed to possess supernatural power to solve problems or bring about desired outcomes. The term suggests something invoked as a universal remedy, a panacea that, when uttered or applied, is expected to transform and resolve complex situations. This characterisation might initially appear to entail sceptical considerations, suggesting that sustainability risks being treated as a talismanic solution, invoked ritualistically without necessarily engaging with the complexity of implementation. Nevertheless, the discursive framing established here leans towards characterising sustainability as offering an almost miraculous solution. This is strengthened firstly by the further characterisation of sustainability as 'pervasive' (*pervasiva*) in contemporary discourse and invoked across all domains. Its pivotal role is then reinforced by positioning it metaphorically as the foundational element 'on which solutions should hinge' (*soluzioni che facciano perno sul concetto di sostenibilità*). In this 'era of transition to the new' (*un'epoca di transizione al nuovo*), sustainability is presented as truly salvific, constituting the central point of action and the universally applicable concept upon which all solutions must be based. The fact that solutions can 'hinge' upon it (*facciano perno su*) conveys reliability and structural dependability, establishing sustainability as a stable pivot point in an otherwise uncertain transitional period.

Its status as a magic formula and potential solution to a variety of problems is buttressed by its characterisation as possessing 'varied declinations' (*variegata declinazioni*), rendering it

adaptable to multiple contexts through its cross-cutting concern for the ‘relationship between the environment and the balance of the planet’s ecosystems’ (*rapporto tra ambiente ed equilibrio degli ecosistemi del pianeta*). These properties collectively establish sustainability as enabling the ‘the possibility of “sustainable development”’ (*la possibilità di uno “sviluppo sostenibile”*). The metaphor thus presents sustainability as a positive, all-encompassing force offering cohesive solutions to diverse issues. Rather than suggesting sustainability constitutes an empty incantation, ‘magic formula’ conveys that it is a powerful concept capable of resolving tensions between profit, social responsibility, and environmental protection.

- (91) It is time to shift from “magical thinking on fossil fuels” and see US oil majors as an unlocked resource to help accelerate transition. Including the heaviest emitters in the solution can ensure they do not use any net zero loophole to justify oil projects and instead share this responsibility of rebuilding a sustainable economy (Financial Times)

Conversely, the expression *magical thinking on fossil fuels* used in example (91) carries negative connotations. Magical thinking refers to the psychological phenomenon of believing that one’s thoughts, wishes, or actions can influence events in ways that defy rational causation or physical laws. It denotes unrealistic, wishful beliefs that bypass practical constraints and substitute fantasy for substantive action. The article frames this *magical thinking on fossil fuel* as a faulty position requiring urgent correction, criticising the current approach for failing to engage with *US oil majors* and thereby neglecting their potential as *an unlocked resource to help accelerate transition*. This magical thinking manifests in the assumption that climate goals can be achieved while continuing business-as-usual fossil fuel practices, wishfully presuming that US oil majors need not participate in energy transition. The current regulatory framework perpetuates this stance by allowing oil companies to exploit *net zero loopholes*, enabling them to use technical definitions to justify ongoing oil projects without genuine transformation. Failing to impose stricter regulations that close these loopholes reflects a dangerous belief that the problem will resolve itself without fundamental changes to the fossil fuel industry.

The author thus argues that stronger measures are necessary to ensure oil majors share this responsibility of *rebuilding a sustainable economy*. They possess the capacity to make significant contributions if actively engaged, but this requires deliberate regulatory action rather than passive hope. Moving beyond wishful beliefs thus demands a realistic approach that includes oil majors as active participants in the transition and contributors to reshaping the economy. Where *magic formula* positively framed sustainability as possessing almost miraculous transformative power, *magical thinking* negatively characterises assumptions about fossil fuel use as dangerously unrealistic fantasies. This creates a stark metaphorical opposition: sustainability as a magic formula positions it as offering genuine solutions, while magical thinking on fossil fuels frames the current approach as a faulty premise that actively obstructs the transition.

- (92) “Con il nostro contributo gli Orti Dipinti [progetto urbano su una pista atletica dismessa, trasformata in giardino e spazio di divulgazione di uno stile di vita rispettoso

dell'ambiente] avranno mezzi per garantirsi una autosufficienza gestionale e noi daremo un nuovo impulso alla nostra vocazione per la sostenibilità che parte dalle borse ma contagia tutto quello che ci circonda" (La Repubblica)

"With our contribution, the Painted Gardens [urban project on a disused athletics track, transformed into a garden and educational space promoting an environmentally respectful lifestyle] will have the means to guarantee their management self-sufficiency and we will give a new impetus to our vocation for sustainability which starts from the stock exchange but infects everything that surrounds us"

In example (92), Luigi Ceccon, the CEO of *Il Bisonte*, an Italian luxury leather goods brand, employs the RELIGION metaphor of *vocazione* ('vocation') to define the brand's attitude toward sustainability. In its literal sense, *vocazione* denotes a divine calling from God to religious or apostolic life. The original meaning has extended to refer to a strong conviction that it is one's duty or destiny to follow a particular profession, way of life, or course of action. In the present context, 'vocation for sustainability' (*vocazione per la sostenibilità*) exploits this extended sense to convey the depth and intensity of *Il Bisonte*'s commitment to sustainability, framing it as an all-embracing mission with religious undertones. Although the widespread contemporary usage to refer to a profession or way of life for which one feels particularly suited has diminished the saliency of the explicitly theological connotations, the term nonetheless retains an element of profound dedication and moral imperative. The possessive adjective 'our' (*nostra*) further reinforces this notion by explicitly attributing this feature to the company as a shared guiding principle.

The initiative discussed here is the project 'Painted Gardens' (*Orti Dipinti*), which transformed a disused athletics track into a garden that has become a centre for promoting an environmentally respectful lifestyle. This initiative is framed through a PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor as giving 'new impetus' (*nuovo impulso*) to this vocation, conceptualising the commitment to sustainability as an entity capable of being propelled forward with renewed vigour through concrete initiatives such as this one. This metaphorical layering positions sustainability not as a static value statement but as a dynamic force requiring continuous momentum. The metaphor undergoes a further reconceptualisation through the kinetic dimensions introduced by the verb 'starts' (*parte*). Ceccon asserts that this vocation 'starts from the bags' (*parte dalle borse*), establishing the company's primary product as the point of origin for their sustainability commitment. The notion of starting from a specific location conveys that the vocation for sustainability is firmly nested within the core production practices of bag manufacturing and possesses the capacity to move outward from it.

This outward movement is then reframed through a final metaphorical shift to the domain of contagion, articulated in the assertion that the vocation 'contaminates everything around us' (*contagia tutto quello che ci circonda*). While 'contaminates' (*contagia*) ordinarily carries negative associations, referring to the spread of disease or harmful influence, the metaphor here selectively maps only the mode of diffusion. The mapping foregrounds the pervasive and uncontrollable nature of contagion, its capacity to spread rapidly and comprehensively throughout an environment, affecting everything it encounters. By characterising *Il Bisonte*'s

sustainability commitment as contagious, Ceccon conveys that it is so deeply entrenched in the company's practices that it necessarily extends beyond the production of bags to contaminate other initiatives and decisions. This metaphorical progression from religious vocation, to physical force, to spatial movement, to contagion, constructs the brand's approach to sustainability as simultaneously deeply rooted, dynamic, and pervasive. The *Orti Dipinti* project is consequently framed not merely as a sponsorship activity but as the natural manifestation of a sustainability commitment that originates in core production practices and radiates outward to encompass all aspects of the company's engagement with the world.

- (93) Net zero crusade risks crushing Britain under a record mountain of debt; The taxpayer faces long-term costs as tax revenue dries up and the Ukraine war fuels a drive to clean energy. [...] Soaring costs from higher pension, health and social care spending will put "public debt on an unsustainable path in the long term", according to the OBR's [Office for Budget Responsibility, the UK's independent institution responsible for producing official economic and fiscal forecasts] Fiscal Risks and Sustainability report (The Telegraph)

Example (93) employs the RELIGION metaphor of *crusade* in the title, with markedly negative connotations to criticise the *net zero* transition. In its literal sense, *crusade* refers to one of a series of military campaigns fought in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries by Christian armies attempting to take Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims. A core feature of these historical initiatives is the fanaticism that has come to be perceived as central to them, with religious zeal justifying destruction in the name of a perceived moral absolute. This association underpins the term's figurative extension to denote a determined attempt to change something because one believes oneself to be morally right. Consequently, the metaphor is classified within this category and not within WAR, inasmuch as the central point is the quasi-religious fervour with which the objective of net zero is pursued. This dogmatic intensity is framed as precluding the nuanced, balanced debate required to implement the transition effectively. Such usage aligns with previous studies on how religious imagery is frequently used to conceptualise climate change activism in terms of the "dark side" of faith, specifically dogmatism, intolerance, and exclusiveness (Atanasova & Koteyko, 2015).

In contrast to the positive religious framing in the previous example, where *vocation* conveyed moral dedication, *crusade* foregrounds the destructive potential of religious commitment: the pursuit of a goal with no regard for consequences and a willingness to inflict collateral damage in service of a perceived higher good. By framing the net zero imperative as a crusade, the article suggests that environmental sustainability measures are being pursued with excessive zeal, resulting in disproportionate fiscal harm. The Ukraine war is presented as a factor that *fuels a drive to clean energy*, intensifying the momentum towards net zero since the war threatens fossil fuel and gas supply chains. This geopolitical pressure is depicted as precipitating the situation, accelerating the transition before adequate economic planning can be implemented. The concrete risk articulated is that the spending required to transition to a net-zero economy, combined with *soaring costs from higher pension, health and social care spending*, will place public debt *on an unsustainable path*. The metaphor thus frames environmental sustainability as being pursued at the expense of economic and fiscal sustainability. The implicit argument is that while the imperative to

address climate change may be legitimate, the “crusading” approach lacks the pragmatism necessary to ensure long-term stability alongside environmental objectives.

- (94) Musk [Elon Musk, chief executive office di Tesla] ha replicato su Twitter ovviamente, definendo i criteri ESG sulla sostenibilità “incarnazione del demonio” e dicendo che il club da cui Tesla è stata esclusa ha perso ogni credibilità. Se ne può parlare (La Repubblica)

Musk [[Elon Musk, chief executive office of Tesla] responded on Twitter, of course, calling ESG sustainability criteria “the incarnation of the devil” and saying that the club from which Tesla was excluded has lost all credibility. There is room for discussion

In example (94) Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla, employs the RELIGION metaphor ‘incarnation of the devil’ (*incarnazione del demonio*) to characterise ‘ESG sustainability criteria’ (*criteri ESG sulla sostenibilità*) following Tesla’s exclusion from the S&P 500 ESG index. The S&P 500 ESG Index is a sustainability-screened version of the standard S&P 500 stock market index, including companies from the S&P 500 that meet specific ESG criteria and serving as a benchmark for sustainable investment. Thus, it may seem paradoxical that Tesla, a pioneering company in the electric car market, was removed from it, although the decision is in fact due to the company lacking a decarbonisation strategy and failing to maintain an adequate labour code of conduct. In Christian theology, the incarnation of the devil refers to the physical manifestation of absolute evil, the literal antithesis of divine goodness. By adopting this extreme imagery, Musk frames the sustainability standards that resulted in Tesla’s exclusion as not merely flawed or misguided, but as fundamentally malevolent forces masquerading as moral virtue. Unlike the quasi-religious dedication found of a vocation or the misguided zeal of a crusade, this metaphor inverts the moral valence entirely by framing the regulatory framework as evil disguised as righteousness.

The metaphor suggests that ESG criteria constitute a corrupting force that perverts genuine environmental progress by imposing arbitrary standards. The author of the article responds to Musk’s outburst with the comment ‘there is room for discussion’ (*se ne può parlare*). This phrase functions as a rhetorical hedge, acknowledging that while Musk’s characterisation is extreme, the credibility and methodology of the ESG framework are legitimate subjects for critical examination. By mediating between Musk’s radical refusal and the formal justifications of the index, the author acknowledges a tension between the symbolic virtue of electric vehicle production and the specific social and governance failures that led to Tesla’s exclusion.

6.7.5 LANGUAGE

The LANGUAGE domain frames sustainability through linguistic processes such as translation and rhyme. Examples (95 – 96) foreground the relation between sustainability discourse, practical action and conceptual coherence, showing how sustainability can be construed as

something that must be translated into action or made to harmonise with broader environmental and social concerns.

(95) All'ex Ansaldo [ex stabilimento industriale milanese oggi parte del polo culturale BASE], è tutto un trapanare, un martellio, un impilare pannelli e listelli di legno, separare i materiali. Si cerca [gli operatori, agli allestitori e alle organizzazioni coinvolti nello smontaggio delle installazioni dopo la Design Week] di dare ordine al caos di cantiere, di tradurre la «sostenibilità» da parole in azioni. È il primo giorno dopo la Design week, e la densità di mezzi pesanti raggiunge l'apice (Corriere della Sera)

At the former Ansaldo plant [a former industrial site in Milan, now part of the BASE cultural hub in the Tortona district], it's all drilling, hammering, stacking wooden panels and strips, and separating materials. They're [the workers, fitters and organisations involved in dismantling the installations after Design Week] trying to bring order to the chaos of the construction site, to translate "sustainability" from words into action. It's the first day after Design Week, and the density of heavy vehicles is at its peak

In example (95), the expression *tradurre la 'sostenibilità' da parole in azioni* ('to translate sustainability from words into actions') conceptualises the shift from abstract theory to physical practice as a process of moving between two different languages. *Tradurre* denotes translation in the linguistic sense: converting text or speech from one language into another, transforming the form while preserving the intended meaning and making content accessible in a different linguistic system. The metaphor maps the process of implementation onto that of translation, positioning sustainability discourse as a source language that must be converted into the target language of concrete action in order to 'bring order to the chaos' (*dare ordine al caos*). The phrase *si cerca di tradurre* ("they are trying to translate") foregrounds the inherent effort and difficulty, acknowledging that conversion is a complex process. The surrounding description of 'drilling, hammering, stacking wooden panels and strips, and separating materials' (*un trapanare, un martellio, un impilare pannelli e listelli di legno, separare i materiali*) confers concreteness to the complexity, underscoring how translating sustainability from discourse into practice requires substantial physical labour and logistical coordination, paralleling the intellectual and technical demands of linguistic translation.

As the extract notes, the Design Week has just ended; the 'words' (*parole*) thus encompasses the abstract concepts, marketing declarations, or idealistic rhetoric often associated with major events such as this one. These abstract pronouncements remain ineffective unless they undergo transformation into 'action' (*azioni*), which in this context refers to the physical dismantling, recycling, and repurposing of exhibition materials. The risk of mistranslation is thus implicitly present: just as linguistic translation can fail to preserve meaning or can produce distorted versions of the source text, sustainability implementation can result in actions that do not genuinely embody the stated environmental principles. The metaphor thus shifts focus to pragmatic accountability, depicting the success of sustainable measures as hinging on the accuracy of the translation from abstract sustainability discourse into measurable practices.

- (96) La casa del futuro, però, dev'essere anche sostenibile e deve fare rima con «terra, aria, acqua, energia, risorse, persone, futuro», come riporta il Manifesto Verde lanciato ieri nella terrazza del Green Retail Park (Corriere della Sera)

The home of the future, however, must also be sustainable and must rhyme with "earth, air, water, energy, resources, people, future", as reported in the Green Manifesto launched yesterday on the terrace of the Green Retail Park

The expression *fare rima con* ('to rhyme with') conceptualises the relationship between sustainable housing and environmental values as one of linguistic structure. In its literal sense, *rima* denotes the homophony in the final part of two or more words, particularly in poetic verses, which provides structural harmony and formal coherence, creating a satisfying relationship between elements that feel naturally linked. In example (96), by asserting that 'the home of the future' (*la casa del futuro*) 'must rhyme with "earth, air, water, energy, resources, people, future"' (*deve fare rima con «terra, aria, acqua, energia, risorse, persone, futuro»*), the article maps rhyming in poetry onto the conceptual alignment of architecture with sustainability. Just as rhyming words achieve aesthetic coherence, sustainable housing must achieve functional and ethical coherence by adhering environmental and social values. As a rhyme provides a satisfying and resolution to a line of verse, the metaphor implies that construction practices are legitimate solely when they correspond exactly to environmental and social needs. The 'Green Manifesto' (*Manifesto Verde*) mentioned here aims to research how to make housing sustainable, and framing this endeavour as a 'rhyming' problem suggests that earth, air, water, energy, resources, people, and future should be considered as the inevitable components of sustainable housing, belonging together as naturally as rhyming words in verse. The poetic frame thus elevates sustainability from a set of technical requirements to an almost artistic endeavour, suggesting that sustainable housing must achieve harmonious correspondence between constructed spaces and the natural world rather than merely meeting regulatory standards.

6.7.6 MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

The MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE domain presents sustainability as a complex problem requiring calculation, balance or resolution. Expressions such as *equation* and *squaring the circle* foreground the multiplicity of variables involved and the difficulty of reconciling competing demands. Examples (97 – 98) show how this domain can both suggest that sustainability problems are rationally solvable and emphasise the apparent impossibility of fully satisfying environmental, economic and social requirements at the same time.

- (97) Cutting emissions from the back of the vehicle is "only one piece of the equation", explains BMW sustainability head Thomas Becker. "If you want to achieve the Paris Agreement objectives of keeping global warming to no more than 1.5C above pre-industrial levels you need to go beyond just offering a broader supply of electric drive trains" (Financial Times)

In example (97), the expression *only one piece of the equation* conceptualises sustainability challenges in the automotive industry as a mathematical problem, with *cutting emissions from the back of the vehicle* constituting only one component of it. In mathematics, an equation is a formula affirming that two amounts or totals are equal, typically containing one or more variables whose values must be determined. Solving an equation requires accounting for all variables and understanding their mathematical relationships, and no single variable alone provides the complete solution. The term has extended beyond mathematics to refer to any set of factors, ideas, or elements that affect to varying extents a complex situation and must be considered together in order to resolve it. This usage maps the activity of thinking or considering a problem onto that of calculating, with logical relations among various factors mapped onto mathematical relations. BMW sustainability head Thomas Becker employs this metaphor to argue that the measure of cutting exhaust pipe emissions *from the back of the vehicle* is insufficient on its own, to actually *achieve the Paris Agreement objectives keeping global warming to no more than 1.5C*. It represents one variable in a multi-variable equation that also includes supply chain emissions, manufacturing processes, and mineral extraction. The need to *go beyond just offering a broader supply of electric drive trains* thus positions this measure as necessary but incomplete: solving the equation requires addressing additional variables with regard to how the automotive sector is contributing to global warming.

Hence, addressing sustainability issues is framed as solving an equation, establishing its complexity and clarifying that sustainability is not a simple, single-factor problem but rather requires consideration of multiple interdependent elements. Just as mathematical variables in an equation combine according to specific relationships to yield a solution, the various emission sources constitute interconnected parts of a larger system whose elements must be addressed concurrently. Additionally, the metaphor signals incompleteness: addressing only tailpipe emissions leaves the broader equation unsolved, much as determining a single variable provides no solution when multiple unknowns remain. What is needed, the metaphor suggests, is systematic thinking, positioning comprehensive analysis as the necessary approach to resolving the challenge. By framing sustainability as an equation, the metaphor suggests there exists a calculable, logical solution if all variables are properly accounted for and their relationships correctly understood. The *equation* metaphor thus legitimises a comprehensive approach that acknowledges complexity while maintaining confidence that the problem remains solvable through identification and manipulation of its constituent variables.

- (98) È lui [Carmine Trecroci, economista, docente universitario ed ex presidente di Legambiente Brescia] ad essere stato scelto come regista del Centro Sviluppo Sostenibilità, cercando la quadratura del cerchio tra esigenze ecologiche e «sostenibilità economica e sociale» per dirla con il presidente di Confindustria Brescia [Confindustria Brescia è l'associazione territoriale che rappresenta le imprese industriali della provincia di Brescia], Gussalli Beretta (Corriere della Sera)

He [Carmine Trecroci, economist, university lecturer and former president of Legambiente Brescia] was chosen as director of the Sustainability Development Center, seeking to square the circle between ecological needs and “economic and social sustainability”, as Gussalli Beretta,

president of Confindustria Brescia [the local branch of Confindustria representing industrial businesses in the province of Brescia], put it

The expression ‘square the circle’ (*quadratura del cerchio*) in example (98) employs instead a geometrical metaphor to characterise the challenge of reconciling environmental with economic and social sustainability. The phrase refers to the classical geometric problem of constructing a square with the same area as a given circle, a task proven mathematically impossible. The Italian expression has extended figuratively to customarily denote any problem that is deemed to be unsolvable, exploiting its central feature of geometric impossibility. The metaphor thus conveys that reconciling conflicting goals equates to the impossible activity of squaring the circle. Just as circles and squares possess fundamentally different geometric shapes that cannot be reconciled, ‘ecological needs and “economic and social sustainability”’ (*esigenze ecologiche e «sostenibilità economica e sociale»*) represent seemingly incompatible demands. Ensuring environmental protection on the one hand, and economic growth and social needs on the other hand, appear to be fundamentally irreconcilable undertakings.

The text thus acknowledges the profound tensions within sustainability discourse, which may be as impossible as the geometric problem from which the expression derives. Nonetheless, although the metaphor’s foregrounding of geometric impossibility conveys extreme difficulty and positions the challenge as extraordinarily arduous, it contextually assumes a different nuance. The fact that the newly appointed director of the ‘Sustainability Development Center’ (*Centro Sviluppo Sostenibilità*) is pursuing this task suggests that some opening for resolution remains. While the phrase typically denotes a task that cannot be accomplished, here it indicates extreme difficulty rather than literal impossibility. The director’s role will require finding practical compromises and trade-offs that, while perhaps not achieving the perfect equilibrium implied by true geometric equivalence, nonetheless advance sustainability goals without compromising economic or social collapse. The phrase frames his task as demanding exceptional skill, creativity, and ingenuity in navigating competing demands, acknowledging inherent tensions while maintaining that workable solutions can be identified.

6.7.7 EXAM

The EXAM domain frames sustainability as a test of performance, preparedness or maturity. These metaphors draw on educational evaluation to rank actors, assess their ability to meet expectations and imply that failure has practical consequences. In examples (99 – 100), countries, cities or companies are positioned as subjects being assessed according to their environmental performance or their capacity to implement sustainable measures.

- (99) “All of this extra work adds to the cost and increases the carbon footprint - in a place that’s already at the bottom of the class in carbon emissions.” To mitigate the resort’s environmental impact, bin Sulayem [Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, former chief executive of

Nakheel, the state-run developer that launched Dubai's World Islands project, a 300-island artificial archipelago] has hired a sustainability adviser to seek out efficiencies (Financial Times)

In example (99), the expression *at the bottom of the class* characterises Dubai's poor environmental performance through an academic ranking metaphor. In an educational context, students are ranked according to their academic achievement, with those at the bottom of the class obtaining the lowest grades and performing worst amongst their peers. Hence, the metaphor maps educational assessment onto environmental evaluation, with countries and regions represented as students whose carbon emissions determines their grades: low emissions correspond to top academic performance, while high emissions position them at the bottom of the class. Through this mapping, international bodies and global standards take on the role of examiners that assess countries' environmental performance, with carbon emissions measurements of *environmental impact* serving as the grades that allow environmental performance to be objectively ranked. This ranking system carries a significative evaluative weight: just as academic failure can generate stigma, poor environmental performance brings reputational damage. The metaphor is employed to critique a project undertaken by the Dubai, entailing a considerable amount of *extra work* which *increases the carbon footprint* and thus exacerbating an already problematic situation. Being at the bottom of the class suggests negligence, inadequate effort, or incompetence; the adverb *already* explicitly highlights this already poor performance, positioning Dubai as a failing student whose current project worsens rather than improves performance. Crucially, the educational frame implies that improvement remains possible and should be pursued. Just as students can endeavour to raise their performance, Dubai could and should implement measures to reduce its environmental impact. Within this framing, the hiring of a *sustainability adviser* meant to seek out efficiencies cast them metaphorically as a tutor brought in to help the struggling student improve, though whether these measures will suffice to significantly improve Dubai's ranking remains an open question.

(100) Il fattore culturale rischia di essere un freno importante anche di fronte alla recente spinta verso la trasformazione sostenibile, che sarà probabilmente la "prova di maturità" di molte delle nostre Pmi (Sole 24 Ore)

The cultural factor risks being a significant impediment even in the face of the recent push towards sustainable transformation, which will likely be the "coming-of-age test" for many of our SMEs.

In example (100), the expression *prova di maturità* (literally "maturity test") refers to the final comprehensive examination taken by Italian students at the end of secondary school. This rigorous examination tests students comprehensively across all subjects and determines whether they have reached sufficient competences to receive their diploma and proceed to university or professional life. It is thus employed to characterise the sustainability transition as a thorough and definitive examination of Italian SMEs' readiness and capability. The phrase has been rendered in English as 'coming-of-age test' to retain these connotations of definitive evaluation and developmental milestone.

The metaphor thus maps this educational rite of passage onto the corporate sustainability challenge. Just as students cannot avoid or postpone the final exam, SMEs cannot defer sustainability demands in the current context, facing a test of, respectively, either academic preparation or business capability. The results determine future trajectories: passing the *maturità* demonstrates readiness for university and adult life, while successfully navigating the sustainability transformation determines viability for the future economy based on the successful shift from traditional to sustainable business models. The radical nature of this shift is underscored by the term ‘sustainable transformation’ (*trasformazione sostenibile*): while the more common ‘transition’ evokes gradual change, ‘transformation’ denotes a more fundamental restructuring requiring greater commitment.

The usage echoes similar educational metaphors in Italian public discourse. Semino (2002) documents how Italian newspapers employed expressions like *esame di ammissione* (“entrance examination”) and *prova* (“test”) when discussing the introduction of the euro as the common currency and Italy’s qualification for this passage, conveying anxieties that the country might fail to maintain required financial discipline. The *prova di maturità* metaphor carries similar undertones of apprehension, since the article discusses the ‘cultural factor’ (*fattore culturale*) of Italian small and medium enterprises (‘SMEs’, *Pmi*) usual resistance to change. This might act as a ‘significant impediment’ (*freno importante*) to the transition and slow down progress, constituting as an opposing force to the ‘recent push towards sustainable transformation’ (*recente spinta verso la trasformazione sostenibile*), which frames the implementation drive through PHYSICAL FORCE as a clearly oriented impetus. The sustainability transition thus functions as an unavoidable examination that will force these companies to demonstrate whether they have developed capabilities necessary for the contemporary business environment, or whether their resistance to evolution will result in failure. The metaphor additionally carries implications of inevitability and urgency, since the exam arrives at a fixed time and cannot be postponed. Similarly, sustainability demands cannot be deferred, and companies that have avoided developing necessary capabilities will now face a definitive reckoning.

6.7.8 FOOD

The FOOD domain, while appearing only marginally in the corpus, offers a distinctive way of conceptualising sustainability as preparation. The recipe metaphor foregrounds the idea that sustainability requires the right ingredients, an ordered procedure and practical know-how.

- (101) From wooden packaging to solar panels: how Charlie Bigham [founder of a ready-to-cook food company which adopted various sustainability initiatives] created a recipe for sustainability. For many of us, doing our bit for the planet involves buying reusable water bottles, avoiding plastic straws and recycling diligently. (The Guardian)

In example (101), the phrase *recipe for sustainability* in the article title employs a FOOD metaphor to characterise Charlie Bigham's approach to achieving environmental sustainability. A recipe is a set of instructions for preparing a dish, listing required ingredients and describing the step-by-step process needed to achieve a desired culinary outcome. The metaphor thus maps the implementation of sustainability onto the process of following a recipe in order to cook a dish. In this case, this applies to the ready-to-cook food company that Charlie Bigham operates, rendering the metaphor topic-triggered. While he literally creates recipes for meals and sells them, he figuratively created a method for making his business sustainable, with the figurative ingredients comprising the measures that his company implemented to be more environmentally sustainable and still profitable. The recipe metaphor conveys several dimensions. Firstly, it suggests replicability: just as recipes can be shared and followed by others, Bigham's sustainability approach could be adopted by other businesses. Secondly, it foregrounds the sequential nature of implementation; like cooking, sustainability requires following specific steps in proper order to be effective. Thirdly, it emphasises that various components must be combined to achieve the desired result, with no single element sufficient on its own; this level of complexity echoes the complexity inherent in the mathematical notion of an equation with multiple factors. Fourthly, the metaphor suggests tested refinement: like recipes that undergo perfecting, Bigham's sustainability methods have been developed through the years and are continuously improved. Lastly, it positions sustainability as producing achievable outcomes; following the recipe generates reliable, repeatable success, framing sustainability as attainable rather than impossible. The resulting "dish" is a sustainable business model that achieves environmental goals. This framing establishes a significant contrast: while individual contributions to sustainability, involve modest measures such as *buying reusable water bottles, avoiding plastic straws and recycling diligently*, the article positions Charlie Bigham's *bit for the planet* as substantially more complex and impactful, requiring the kind of detailed planning and multiple components that preparing an elaborate dish demands.

6.7.9 MONEY

The MONEY domain frames sustainability through economic notions of cost and price. The example below shows how environmental damage can be represented through market logic, as a hidden cost that is not reflected in the monetary price of goods but is nevertheless borne by the environment and society.

- (102) «È importante spiegare il concetto che dietro a un prodotto di basso costo si nasconde un prezzo molto più alto in termini di sostenibilità. C'è poco da girarci intorno, i vestiti che indossiamo sono una delle cause maggiore di sfruttamento delle risorse idriche mondiali» (Corriere della Sera)

It's important to explain the concept that behind a low-cost product lies a much higher price in terms of sustainability. There's no getting around it: the clothes we wear are one of the biggest causes of global water resource exploitation.

In example (102), the phrase *un prezzo molto più alto in termini di sostenibilità* ('a much higher price in terms of sustainability') frames environmental damage as a cost that must be paid. *Prezzo* ("price") refers to the monetary cost of goods or services in economic transactions, the amount paid to acquire something, and it figuratively denotes the effort or negative effect of doing or obtaining something. The metaphor thus establishes environmental impact as a price requiring payment: while the literal retail price of 'the clothes we wear' (*i vestiti che indossiamo*) may be low, the hidden cost in terms of resource depletion, pollution, and climate impact is significantly higher. The phrase *in termini di* ('in terms of') signals the mapping, acknowledging measurement using sustainability "currency" rather than monetary currency while maintaining the same economic frame of paying a price. The hidden environmental and social costs of cheap, fast fashion clothing are not reflected in the retail price: consumers pay a low price at the store, but society and the planet pay substantially more through environmental damage and resource depletion. This positioning renders environmental damage understandable through market logic, allowing it to be quantified, compared, and discussed through familiar commercial concepts.

In both cases, payment is inevitable: just as the commercial transaction requires payment, environmental degradation constitutes a necessary form of payment extracted from planetary resources. Additionally, the payment mechanism is presented in terms of a zero-sum game: the gain of consumers in paying less comes at the expense of the planet, which suffers the repercussions of production practices. By framing environmental impact as a "price," the metaphor suggests that sustainability costs can and should be calculated, made visible, and incorporated into decision-making processes analogous to financial accounting. This economic framing translates ecological damage into market-compatible terms, potentially enabling clearer communication about hidden environmental costs.

6.8 Patterns of Figurative Language Use: Topic-Triggering, Idioms, Direct Metaphor and the Conventional-Creative Cline

Beyond the identification and categorisation of metaphorical expressions within source domains and scenarios, the analysis revealed several recurring features of figurative language, highlighting broader questions about the mechanisms through which metaphors operate in discourse.

A distinctive feature of the corpus is the recurrence of topic-triggered metaphors (see Section 4.5.1), instances in which the literal topic of discussion primes the activation of a particular metaphorical mapping, thereby lending the figurative expression heightened resonance. When an article discusses the road haulage sector and simultaneously employs JOURNEY

metaphors to describe the industry's transition towards sustainability (*ha ingranato la marcia*, 'shifted into gear', see Section 5.2.1.2), the literal context of vehicles undertaking journeys creates a semantic environment in which the figurative language acquires an additional layer of meaning. A comparable effect is observed in the BUILDING domain: when a residential complex is described as having sustainability as its *perno* ('linchpin', see Section 6.4.3), the figurative centrality of sustainability in the planning process is reinforced by the fact that the statement concerns an actual physical structure. In the COMPETITION domain, the framing of sustainability as a competition is grounded in the literal context of a marathon (see Section 6.2.3), while the appearance of *racing towards* net zero in Formula One and Formula E contexts (see Section 6.2.3.2) generates a double semantic resonance in which the figurative race towards sustainability is grounded in a literal competitive racing context. In the PERCEPTION domain, the tobacco industry, which literally produces smoke, is depicted as deploying a *smokescreen* of greenwashing to conceal its environmental impact (see Section 6.6.3), while the idiomatic expression *fog of war* acquires a double semantic resonance when the confusion surrounding ESG investing is attributed to an actual military conflict (see Section 6.6.3). Similarly, in the FOOD domain, an entrepreneur that creates recipes for meals and sells them is depicted as having created a *recipe for sustainability* (see Section 6.7.8). These instances demonstrate the use of topic-triggered metaphors in sustainability discourse, wherever the literal topic of a concordance is perceived as providing a bridging context that simultaneously activates source-domain knowledge at both a concrete and an abstract level. Although a minority, they represent a striking feature, used to attract attention and engage readers; oftentimes they appeared in headlines, corroborating previous findings (Aitchison, 1987; Kövecses, 2002, 2018).

The corpus also contains a number of idiomatic expressions (see Section 4.4.1.1) that contribute distinctive evaluative and argumentative functions to sustainability discourse. In the JOURNEY domain, the Italian expression *di pari passo* ('at the same pace') and the more intimate *a braccetto* ('arm in arm', see Section 5.2.6.3) draw on images of physical proximity and coordinated movement to argue that environmental sustainability must advance in tandem with social and industrial concerns. The COMPETITION domain deploys the idiom *betting the farm on* (see Section 6.2.3.3) to characterise a corporate strategy of committing all resources to a single sustainability approach, conveying the risk involved through an image of total, irreversible commitment. In the WAR domain, the idiomatic expression *lancia in resta* ('lance at the ready', see Section 6.5.2.1) evokes chivalric imagery to position a regulatory body as a noble champion, while *beat the drum for sustainability* (see Section 6.5.3.4) maps persistent advocacy onto the rhythmic signalling that historically coordinated military operations. The PERCEPTION domain contributes both *fog of war* and *muddying the waters* (see Section 6.6.3), each exploiting a different mechanism of visual obstruction to characterise the confusion surrounding ESG investing. In most cases, these idiomatic expressions encode evaluative stances more compactly than equivalent literal paraphrases could achieve, confirming the observation that idioms carry richer inferential meaning than their non-figurative equivalents (Gibbs, 2024).

A further recurrent feature is the presence of direct metaphors and metaphor flags (see Section 4.4.2), which signal to the reader that a figurative interpretation is intended. In the JOURNEY domain, the comparison of a local sustainability initiative to Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon is explicitly introduced through the Italian marker *come* ('like', see Section 5.2.2.5), while in the ORGANISM domain, the verb *equate to* functions as a metaphor flag signalling the comparison of reliance on climate disclosures to *embracing another fad diet* (see Section 6.7.1). Alongside these explicit markers of comparison, inverted commas serve a prominent flagging function throughout the corpus, marking expressions such as *ingranato la marcia* ('shifted into gear', see Section 5.2.1.2) as departures from literal language (cf. Ahrens et al. 2024). The presence of these devices across the corpus suggests that journalists can be aware of the figurative nature of the language they deploy, and that the flagging serves to draw the reader's attention to the metaphorical mapping, inviting a more active interpretive engagement.

The linguistic metaphors are also characterised by a cline from conventional uses to creative ones (see Sections 2.3.1 and 4.5.2). At one end, highly conventionalised expressions such as *percorso/path* (91 combined occurrences), *sfida/challenge* (63), *strategia/strategy* (29), and *pilastro/pillar* (34) function as frequent background features of the discourse, their metaphorical quality often passing unnoticed. At the creative end of the spectrum, the corpus contains expressions that deliberately disrupt, extend, or challenge conventional mappings. Creative elaborations can be instantiated, for instance, developing nautical journey scenarios (see Section 5.2.1.5, 5.2.6.2) or explicitly evoking the frontlines of a war (see Section 6.5.3.3), or revitalising the conventional *thread* metaphor through colour specification in *filo verde* ('green thread', see Section 6.1.3.2), which simultaneously activates the GREEN FOR ENVIRONMENT metonymy and foregrounds the physical materiality of the object. Novel mappings can be drawn, as in the characterisation of sustainability as something that has *clonked people round the head* (see Section 6.1.3.4), or of a sustainable consciousness as something that can *trickle down* (see Section 6.1.3.5), or of reliance on climate disclosures as equivalent to *embracing another fad diet* (see Section 6.7.1), a metaphor that maps the superficiality and inefficacy of popular dieting trends onto corporate sustainability reporting. Additionally, conventional mappings can be evoked in order to be questioned or rejected, for instance by questioning the path we are setting ourselves on (see Section 5.2.2.7) or asserting that sustainability, rather than a destination to be reached, is in fact the starting point for projecting companies into the economy of the future (see Section 5.2.1.6). These creative expressions can often be associated with more overt critical evaluative stances, suggesting that, in the rare instances within the corpus where dominant discourses are to some extent challenged, metaphors may be selected in order to carry more impact.

As the examples discussed throughout this section demonstrate, the features of figurative language identified here do not operate in isolation but frequently co-occur within the same expressions, functioning as interlocking dimensions of metaphorical language in use. Idiomatic expressions, such as *fog of war*, often also function as topic-triggered metaphors; topic-triggering can also be related to a more conventionalised expression such as 'shifted into gear' (*ingranato la marcia*) being extended more creatively as in the road haulage

scenario. Creative novel mappings, in turn, can be expressed through direct metaphors, as the novel mapping of the *fad diet* comparison explicitly signals through the metaphor flag *equate to*. Rather than discrete categories, topic-triggering, creativity, idiomatic status, and direct metaphors thus represent connected properties that interact to modulate the rhetorical force of figurative expressions in context. These features also interact with the conventions of newspaper discourse (see Section 2.3.2). Topic-triggered metaphors appear frequently in headlines, where the constraints of limited space and the imperative to attract attention favour expressions that can simultaneously convey literal and figurative meaning (Krennmayr, 2011; Semino, 2009); by contrast, highly conventionalised expressions pervade the body of articles. By attending to these features and their interactions, the analysis reveals that metaphor in sustainability discourse is not merely a matter of which domains are activated but also of how those domains are linguistically realised, extended, challenged, and negotiated within specific discursive contexts.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the metaphorical framings of sustainability in British and Italian newspaper discourse through a comparable bilingual corpus analysis. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004), and the scenario-based approach (Musolff, 2006), and employing an adapted MIP(VU) procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen et al., 2010) for metaphor identification, the study examined 1,976 metaphorical expressions across eight newspapers published between May and July 2022. The analysis identified sixteen source domains and documented the scenarios through which sustainability is figuratively constructed in public discourse. This concluding chapter addresses the three research questions (Section 7.1), discusses the broader implications of the findings (Section 7.2), acknowledges the limitations of the study (Section 7.3), and outlines directions for future research (Section 7.4).

7.1 The Role of Metaphors in Sustainability Discourse

The analysis revealed that sustainability discourse is predominantly constructed through a limited set of recurring source domains, with JOURNEY accounting for a third of all identified metaphors, followed by OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE, COMPETITION, PHYSICAL FORCE, BUILDING, WAR, and PERCEPTION, alongside nine minor domains occurring with lower frequency. These metaphorical framings serve multiple, interconnected communicative functions. At the ideational level, they render the abstract, multifaceted, and inherently contested concept of sustainability comprehensible by mapping it onto familiar, concrete experiential domains. Nonetheless, although they lend concreteness to the abstract and multifaceted notion of sustainability, they are rarely employed with an explanatory function which would engage with the intricacies of sustainability and its implementation, serving instead to render the concept more intuitively graspable rather than to illuminate its underlying complexity. At the interpersonal level, they construct evaluative positions, distribute agency among participants, and establish stances of authority, urgency, or reassurance. At the textual level, they contribute to the internal coherence of sustainability discourse, generating intertextual and intratextual threads that bind together coverage across outlets and languages.

The scenario-based analysis proved particularly revealing in demonstrating how general source domains are elaborated into specific discursive narratives with distinct evaluative and argumentative implications. Within the JOURNEY domain alone, six overarching scenarios

were identified (DESTINATION, PATH, ACTIVE AGENT, ACCELERATION, CONSTRAINED MOTION, and TURN), foregrounding different aspects of the sustainability process: goal-directedness, the characteristics and choices entailed by the trajectory, autonomous momentum, demands for intensified speed, obstacles, and fundamental reorientation. This level of analytical granularity, grounded in Musolff's (2006, 2014, 2016b) theoretical framework, revealed distinctions that would have been obscured by an analysis operating solely at the level of broad conceptual domains, further reiterating the crucial role of scenario in discourse-based metaphor analysis. For instance, while the JOURNEY domain as a whole might be characterised as reinforcing a logic of incremental progress (Milne et al., 2006; Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023), the ACCELERATION, TURN and CONSTRAINED MOTION scenarios demonstrate that the conceptual resources of the source domain are also exploited to articulate the need for greater urgency, calls for wholesale redirection, or acknowledgement of friction and setbacks.

With regard to shared patterns and variations in metaphor use emerging across different languages, a notable finding was the higher density of metaphorical expressions in the Italian sub-corpus compared to the English sub-corpus. This asymmetry emerged consistently across most source domains and suggests that Italian newspaper discourse on sustainability tends to rely more heavily on figurative language as a communicative strategy. Several factors may contribute to this pattern, including differences in journalistic conventions, the features of Italian prose, and the degree to which corporate and institutional voices, which tend to deploy metaphorical language strategically, are directly quoted in the articles. Comparing the relative distribution of source domains within each sub-corpus reveals further cross-linguistic asymmetries (see Section 5.1). The two sub-corpora share the full inventory of sixteen domains, and the overall ranking of the major domains remains broadly comparable. This suggests that the metaphorical resources available for framing sustainability are broadly shared across the two languages, consistent with previous observations regarding the fundamental similarities in the metaphorical systems of English and Italian (cf. Deignan & Potter, 2004; Philip, 2006; Ponterotto, 2017; Semino, 2002). However the proportional weight assigned to individual domains differs across the two languages: the Italian sub-corpus concentrates a somewhat larger share of its metaphorical expressions in the JOURNEY domain, while the English sub-corpus distributes its metaphors more evenly across the mid-frequency domains. Additionally, divergence emerges at the level of the mid-frequency and minor scenarios. For instance, within COMPETITION, Italian discourse develops a BETTING scenario (see Section 6.2.3.3) that is virtually absent from English (with the exception of *betting the farm*), realised through the conventional collocations *puntare su* and *scommettere su* ('to back', 'to bet on'), which frame sustainable investment as a wager with something at stake. Within the BUILDING domain (see Section 6.4.3), Italian favours an articulated structural repertoire (*pilastri* 'pillars', *fondamenta* 'foundations', *cardine* 'linchpin') while English remains closer to the generic frame of building and construction. Additionally, the TURN scenario is more productive in Italian, anchored on *svolta* ('turn', 'turning point') and on nautical reorientation imagery (*bussola* 'compass', *stella polare* 'pole star', *tenere la barra dritta* 'to keep the helm steady'), for which English offers only sparse equivalents.

Creative, one-off instantiations occur in both sub-corpora, showing that the shared conceptual repertoire leaves room for innovation in either language; the most novel coinages,

however, appear somewhat more readily in English. Here, inventiveness tends to depart from the conventional lexis of a domain by noting, for instance, that the visitors to the Chelsea Flower Show risk being *clonked round the head* by the omnipresent sustainability message, recasting GDP as *a malfunctioning strand of cultural DNA replicating unsustainability*, or comparing overreliance on climate reporting alone to *embracing another fad diet*. Italian creativity, by contrast, more often extends or modifies established scenarios, for instance comparing the ecological transition to *il biglietto per salire sul treno, ormai già partito* ('the ticket to board the train, which has already departed'), and a local initiative to *un primo passo, come quello del primo uomo sulla luna* ('a first step, like that of the first man on the moon'). In both languages the novelty thus lies in the realisation rather than in the underlying mappings, but English tends towards more unexpected expressions, while Italian more often elaborates on more familiar scenario.

The variation that does emerge is therefore one of relative prominence and specific lexicalisation rather than of categorical presence or absence and thus of the underlying conceptual repertoire. The same source domains and the same broad scenarios are available throughout; what varies is which of them each discourse community foregrounds for elaboration and which it leaves backgrounded, together with the lexicon on which they draw. This is the frame-level understanding of cultural variation adopted in Section 2.1.3, where culture operates not on the inventory of domains but on their selective elaboration within discourse.

At the level of individual newspapers, some patterns in the qualitative data are worth noting. The most overtly critical or sceptical metaphorical framings of sustainability tended to appear in newspapers with specific editorial profiles. The right-leaning press in both languages produced rare instances of metaphor deployed to challenge dominant sustainability narratives: *The Telegraph* employed the *clonked round the head* metaphor (see Section 6.1.3.4), a negative characterisation of sustainability messaging as aggressive and unwelcome, while *Il Giornale* framed the consequences of the EU's environmental policy as *contraccolpi* ('blowback', see Section 6.3.3.2), foregrounding the social costs of the transition and problematising the assumption that sustainability unfolds as a uniformly positive process. Conversely, the most sustained critical engagement with the internal contradictions of ESG frameworks was concentrated in the *Financial Times*, where the focus on the world of finance appeared to licence more technically grounded scepticism. Metaphorical framings such as the *cacophony* of competing standards (see Section 6.6.4), the *fad diet* comparison (see Section 6.7.1), and the negation of ESG as a *win-win* (see Section 6.2.3) articulated critique not of sustainability itself but of the instruments and metrics through which it is operationalised.

With regard to the third research question, the analysis identified several recurring features of figurative language that characterise sustainability discourse beyond the level of source domains and scenarios (see Section 6.8). Topic-triggering, idiomatic usage, direct metaphors and metaphor flags, and a cline from highly conventionalised to deliberately creative expressions emerged as distinct yet frequently co-occurring properties of the metaphorical language in the corpus. Two observations arising from this analysis are worth foregrounding.

First, the co-occurrence of multiple features suggests that the rhetorical force of figurative language in sustainability discourse is shaped not by any single property in isolation but by the interaction among them. Second, these features align with the communicative conventions of newspaper discourse: creative and topic-triggered metaphors frequently appear in headlines, where the imperative to attract attention is strongest, while conventionalised expressions pervade the body of articles, forming the background against which more striking figurative choices can become more salient. This distribution confirms that the metaphorical construction of sustainability in the press is shaped not only by the conceptual resources of the source domains but also by the genre-specific demands of the medium in which it is produced.

7.2 Broader Implications

The findings carry implications that extend beyond the linguistic level and intersect with debates in sustainability communication, media studies, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Perhaps the most consistent pattern across the domains examined was what might be termed a “business as usual” logic. In the JOURNEY domain, sustainability is overwhelmingly construed as a process of ongoing, forward-directed movement, with targets set for distant points in the future that defer concrete accountability while communicating purposeful intent. The BUILDING domain similarly constructs a purposeful, complex process with long-term results (cf. Charteris-Black, 2004), moving concrete implementation in the future while seemingly demonstrating relevant progress. These framings contribute to strengthening a version of weak sustainability that is not only compatible with continued economic growth, technological innovation, and market-based solutions, but rather depends on them. Innovations and technological advancements are presented as solutions postponing the actual implementation of changes to a future that is not chronologically defined or, when it is, is subject to changes that become naturalised within figurative framings. Delays in implementation can, for instance, be conceptualised as delays on advancing on a path; thus, the solution in the form of acceleration instinctively appears both logical and attainable. The dominant figurative frames offer reassuring narratives delineating established detailed processes (gradually moving forward, exerting a push, or laying foundations and posing bricks on them). Framings suggesting radical transformation, degrowth, or systemic redistribution remain largely absent from the metaphorical repertoire. The framing of GDP as a *malfunctioning strand of cultural DNA replicating unsustainability* represents a stark outlier from the overwhelming majority of perspectives, which remain rooted in an institutionalised discourse that never questions this economic model and its implications. The results confirm observations regarding the dominance of weak sustainability framings in public discourse (cf. Atanasova, 2019b; Diprose et al., 2018; Fuoli & Beelitz, 2023; Milne et al., 2006; Yacoumis, 2017).

The data also revealed a consistent pattern in the distribution of agency. When sustainability is construed as a JOURNEY, the question of who leads and who follows becomes consequential:

in numerous concordances, companies and institutions positioned themselves as guides accompanying others along a path, while consumers were more frequently cast as followers. Within the PHYSICAL FORCE domain, sustainability was often characterised as requiring external pressure from agents, whether from regulatory frameworks, market forces, or consumer demand, to advance. This distribution of agency carries ideological implications: by foregrounding corporate leadership and individual consumer choice, the metaphorical framing tended to background the systemic and structural dimensions of the sustainability challenge, including the role of entrenched industrial interests in perpetuating unsustainable practices. These metaphorical choices are thus not neutral but serve ideological functions, establishing presuppositions that audiences are invited to accept as natural and self-evident (Charteris-Black, 2004; Musolff, 2016b).

However, the corpus also demonstrated that dominant framings are not monolithic. A notable dimension of this internal complexity concerned the critical voices within sustainability discourse itself, particularly with regard to ESG frameworks and the threat of greenwashing. Across several source domains, metaphorical expressions were found to articulate scepticism towards the reliability and coherence of ESG criteria. In the COMPETITION domain, the characterisation of ESG as a *challenge* whose difficulty is *magnified* by the incoherence of weighing disparate qualitative factors against each other exposed the structural limitations of evaluation frameworks that purport to render sustainability measurable. In the PERCEPTION domain, the *cacophony* of competing standards and metrics instead framed the absence of a unified, standardised system for measuring sustainability performance as auditory discord, while the paired metaphors of *fog of war* and *muddying the waters* construed the confusion surrounding ESG investing as a form of impaired vision. These critical framings recurred across both subcorpora and across multiple source domains, suggesting that the problem of ESG standardisation constitutes a recognisable and persistent theme within the corpus. Greenwashing is discussed as a related but distinct preoccupation, metaphorically constructed through several domains. The OBJECT AND SUBSTANCE domain proved particularly productive in this regard, with sustainability credentials depicted as objects that can be *inflated*, *burnished*, or *scaled back* under scrutiny, establishing a contrast between metaphors of authentic integration and metaphors of superficial performance. In the PERCEPTION domain, the tobacco industry's *smokescreen* and the broader impediments-to-vision scenarios framed greenwashing as a deliberate obstruction of the public's capacity to see and evaluate corporate practice. In the WAR domain, regulatory bodies were cast as agents charging against greenwashing practices with a *lance at the ready*, positioning the issue as requiring combative intervention. These metaphorical constructions suggest that sustainability discourse, as represented in the corpus, is not uniformly promotional or optimistic; rather, it accommodates a significant undercurrent of doubt regarding whether the institutional frameworks developed in the name of sustainability are adequate to the task.

More broadly, counter-narratives emerged through creative metaphorical elaboration that challenged the naturalised assumptions of mainstream sustainability discourse. These critical voices tend to employ striking, unconventional metaphors whose rhetorical effectiveness lay precisely in their contrast with the more conventional expressions dominating corporate and institutional communication. The capacity of metaphor to both

reproduce and challenge dominant ideological positions, although the latter is demonstrated by a minority of figurative framings in the corpus, confirms the dynamicity of metaphorical framings in discourse. Reflecting the nuances of concrete experience, elements within the source domains can be profiled and foregrounded to develop and buttress competing viewpoints. Nonetheless, traditional news media might not offer the optimal site for such developments, due to their tendency to reproduce neoliberal and technocratic frames of sustainability (Atanasova, 2019b; Diprose et al., 2018; Yacoumis, 2017).

7.3 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the temporal scope of the corpus, comprising articles from May to July 2022, captures a particular discursive moment, also shaped by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, which emerge as relevant factors in relation to the implementation of sustainability throughout the corpus. While this period proved analytically productive, the metaphorical patterns identified may not be fully representative of sustainability discourse over longer timeframes. Second, the restriction to broadsheet newspapers, though justified by their documented influence on public discourse and agenda-setting functions, excludes other significant sites of sustainability communication, including tabloid press, broadcast media, social media, corporate sustainability reports, and policy documents. Third, the focus on articles retrieved through the keywords *sustainability/sostenibilità* and *sustainable/sostenibile* necessarily excludes texts that discuss sustainability-related issues without employing these specific terms, potentially overlooking relevant metaphorical patterns in adjacent discourses such as climate change, energy transition, or environmental justice. Fourth, metaphor identification in cross-linguistic research inevitably involves interpretive judgement, and while the adapted MIPVU procedure, dictionary consultation, and systematic annotation framework were designed to maximise rigour and transparency, the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, precluding formal inter-rater reliability measures.

7.4 Future Directions

The findings of the present study open several avenues for future research. Longitudinal analysis tracking metaphorical patterns across extended timeframes would reveal how the metaphorical landscape of sustainability discourse evolves in response to policy developments, environmental events, and shifts in public attention. A particularly productive line of investigation would be the examination of how specific metaphorical framings are adopted, adapted, or contested as they circulate between corporate reports, policy documents, media coverage, and social media, tracing the intertextual pathways through

which metaphors migrate across genres and contexts. The cross-linguistic dimension of the present research could be expanded to include additional languages and cultural contexts, investigating whether the patterns observed in English and Italian newspaper discourse hold across other European or non-European settings. Lastly, experimental research examining the cognitive effects of the metaphorical framings documented in the present analysis would bridge the gap between corpus-based identification of metaphorical patterns and the psychological mechanisms through which those patterns influence public understanding, providing empirical evidence for how different figurative framings shape audience perceptions, judgements, and reasoning about sustainability.

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