PLANET4B Research Brief

understanding **P**lural values, intersectionality, **L**everage points, **A**ttitudes, **N**orms, behaviour and social l**E**arning in **T**ransformation for **B**iodiversity decision making

Using biodiversity to persuade: A discourse analysis

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Keywords

biodiversity discourse, anthropocentric values, ecocentric values, rhetoric function, systematic review, business and industry leaders, environmental NGOs, political parties, news outlets

How do we perceive biodiversity?

The meaning we assign to the world around us influences the way we behave and treat things. Therefore, it is of great importance to better understand how society views and understands fundamental challenges of our time, such as biodiversity loss. How do different social groups perceive and communicate about biodiversity? How do perceptions, communication, and worldviews intersect with values?

The latest document (Report on biodiversity and related concepts perceptions) published by the PLANET4B researcher group analyses the biodiversity discourse. It reviews the existing relevant academic literature and identifying the key rhetoric functions, responsibilities and tasks and implied values of different actor groups in Europe, such as: news outlets, political parties, environmental NGOs, and business and industry leaders (see the overview in Table 1). The report also shows why and how these groups rely on the particular type of discourse in their communication and how the political stance influences the values highlighted in the discourse. The study reflects on the differences between the investigated countries[1].

Table 1. Overview of the apparent prevalence of the value domains of biodiversity in the publications from the different actor groups. The number of "+" indicates the dominance of the values referred to.

Actor groups / Value of nature	Academic literature	News outlets	Political parties	NGOs	Business
Anthropocentric value (Science-centric value in brackets)	++ (+++)	+++	+++ (+)	+++	+++ (+)
Intrinsic value	+	+		+	

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[1] Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, The Netherlands, Switzerland, U.K.

Key findings

- The language that is used and communicated is intended **to motivate action or inaction**. For example, political parties often accuse other actors, such as the incumbent government, of a lack of action in promoting biodiversity. This is an attempt to gather political support and thereby gain or hold power. The absence of a common understanding of biodiversity allows actor groups to choose rhetoric strategically to further their agendas.

- Two value domains were identified: **anthropocentric (including science-centric) and ecocentric**. Anthropocentric values are the dominant value category used when arguing for or against biodiversity conservation.

- In the news outlet's discourses, the biodiversity discourse relies heavily on rhetoric of **'warning', 'calling for action', 'informing', 'persuading', 'accusing' and 'othering'** to attract the attention of a wide audience.

- Political parties attempt to gather political support, and thereby gain or hold power, by using a rhetoric that is centred on **'persuading', 'accusing', and 'othering'**. With this rhetoric, they place themselves as being the solution to biodiversity loss or provide justification for their actions or inactions.

- The rhetoric of environmental NGOs includes **'calls for action, 'warning', and 'persuading'** their audience to engage with their issues: usually by relating consequences of action or inaction with the effects on humans, to gaining followers and gathering support for their activities by **using anthropocentric arguments to further their ecocentric ideologies**.

- The business discourse is based on a rhetoric of **'persuading' and 'raising hope'**, as business and industry leaders present an optimistic picture in which 'business as usual' is a viable and sensible option.

- The rhetoric used in biodiversity discourse differs between countries.

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