Climate activism in the Portuguese press: The case of the newspaper PÚBLICO

O ativismo climático na imprensa portuguesa: O caso do jornal PÚBLICO

L'activisme pour le climat dans la presse portugaise : Le cas du journal PÚBLICO

Cláudia Almeida*

Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal.

Abstract

Over recent years, the Portuguese climate movement has been progressively consolidating its presence in the political sphere and media space. Featuring in news channels is frequently a goal actively pursued by social movements, especially due to their influence on the public perceptions. Given the media's role in the creation and consolidation of social representations, and the lack of data available on climate activism coverage in the Portuguese media, this study aimed to assess the representations and contextualization of climate activists in the Portuguese press. Our contribution to this understanding relied on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the evolution of climate activism coverage, the representation profiles of activists, and some (de)legitimisation indicators, such as those directly associated with the protest paradigm – namely the opportunity for self-representation, the characterization of activism as a nuisance, and the use of statements by authority figures. The analysis of 175 articles published online in the newspaper PÚBLICO revealed a preferential framing of the activist, who often has the opportunity for self-representation. Furthermore, and contrarily to what has been described in other international studies, the newspaper attributed negative representation profiles exclusively to foreign activists and the data revealed a predominance of the student-activist profile, instead of the nuisance framing.

Keywords: climate change, climate activism, climate crisis, Portuguese press, climate movement

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, o movimento social pelo clima português tem vindo a afirmar-se progressivamente no espaço político e mediático. A cobertura mediática é um objetivo intencional procurado pelos movimentos sociais, especialmente devido à sua influência nas representações que permeiam o pensamento coletivo. Devido ao poder que os media têm na criação e consolidação de representações sociais, e face ao conhecimento limitado sobre a cobertura mediática do ativismo climático em contexto nacional, este estudo teve como objetivo avaliar as representações e a contextualização dos ativistas

* Correspondência: claudiamdga@gmail.com

pelo clima na imprensa. Para isto, foi realizada uma análise quantitativa e qualitativa da evolução da cobertura do ativismo climático, dos perfis de representação dos ativistas, e de alguns indicadores de (des)legitimação, tais como os diretamente associados ao paradigma do protesto — nomeadamente a autorrepresentação e o recurso a declarações de figuras de autoridade. A análise de 175 artigos publicados online no jornal PÚBLICO revelou um enquadramento preferencial do ativista, o qual tem frequentemente oportunidade de autorrepresentação. Adicionalmente, e ao contrário do que foi descrito por estudos internacionais, o jornal atribuiu exclusivamente perfis de representação negativa a ativistas estrangeiros e os dados revelaram uma predominância do perfil estudante-ativista, em detrimento de enquadramentos que salientam o incómodo causado pelos ativistas.

Palavras-chave: alterações climáticas, ativismo climático, crise climática, imprensa portuguesa, movimento social pelo clima

Résumé

Récemment, le mouvement portugais pour le climat s'est progressivement imposé dans l'espace politique et médiatique. La médiatisation est un objectif des activistes, notamment en raison de son influence sur les représentations qui alimentent la pensée collective. En raison de son pouvoir de création et de consolidation des représentations sociales, et compte tenu de la faible étude sur la couverture de l'activisme climatique au Portugal, cette étude visait l'évaluation des représentations des activistes climatiques dans la presse portugaise. À cette fin, l'article reporte une analyse quantitative et qualitative de l'évolution de la couverture de l'activisme climatique, des profils de représentation des activistes et des indicateurs de (dé)légitimation, tels que ceux directement associés au paradigme de la protestation — à savoir l'autoreprésentation et le recours aux déclarations de figures d'autorité. L'analyse de 175 articles publiés dans le journal en ligne PÚBLICO a révélé un cadrage préférentiel de l'activiste, qui a souvent la possibilité de s'auto-représenter. Contrairement à ce qui a été décrit par les études internationales, le journal a exclusivement attribué des profils de représentation négatifs aux activistes étrangers et les données ont révélé une prédominance du profil étudiant-activiste, au détriment des cadrages qui mettent en évidence les nuisances causées par les activistes.

Mots-clés: changement climatique, activisme climatique, crise climatique, presse portugaise, mouvement social climatique

Introduction

The urgency of mitigating climate change has been repeatedly stated through different media and in different tones — we are rapidly moving away from the window of opportunity to effectively mitigate the harmful effects of climate change. According to the latest Assessment Report by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021), anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have already tipped our average temperature to 1.1oC above pre-industrial values. Unless there is an immediate radical reduction in emissions, the thresholds of 1.5oC and even 2oC may be out of reach.

From the Brundtland report to the Paris Agreement, numerous nonbinding treaties and agreements filled with loopholes denounce the global political inaction and reveal themselves as markedly inadequate to tackle this global issue. Climate activism attempts to face this political inaction and create real solutions for the climate crisis. Recognizing how it embodies

inescapable social, environmental, and political challenges, activists emphasise that current greenhouse gas emission trends are pushing societies towards collapse.

With increasingly well-defined contours and mobilising more and more social actors, climate activism plays an important role in contesting government measures, while embodying the dissenting voices that denounce the ineffectiveness of climate policies. Over recent years, the Portuguese climate movement has been progressively consolidating its presence in the political sphere and media space, in particular after the arrival of the international movement of the school strikes for climate (Kowasch et al., 2021).

A significant dimension of these groups' action is focused on seeking media coverage in order to disseminate their goals and premises to the general population, draw attention to the issue of climate change and exert pressure on policymakers to respond to their demands. Activists often display a mediacentric approach in their strategic planning, deliberately searching for ways to permeate media channels to further their goals (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Lester & Hutchins, 2009). The media field is embedded with disputes over hegemonic meanings and activists are constantly fighting to have their frameworks featured (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

Given the media's role in the creation and consolidation of social representations, this study aimed to assess the representations and contextualization of climate activists by the Portuguese press. Its central role is highlighted by the correlation found between the multiplication of climate protests and the increase in the general population's interest in the topic of climate change (Sisco et al., 2021). In particular, we analyse some of the indicators of the presence of the protest paradigm, which defines the tendency of mainstream media to represent protests and activists through a negative lens, in particular through an excessive focus on the performative elements and consequences of the protest rather than on the demands, the aims or the context that led to the protest (Bergman, 2014; Chan & C. Lee, 1984). While this paradigm was identified in foreign countries (Gavin, 2010; F. Lee, 2014; Reul et al., 2018), no such analysis has been carried out in the Portuguese context.

Therefore, it is relevant to characterise the relationship between Portuguese activists and the press, to consider whether this is a fruitful relationship for the activists' aims, and, above all, to outline the social representations created by the press. This is a step in understanding the complex relationship between the climate movement and the media, crucial to the success of the movement itself. In summary, with this study, we aim to contribute to the understanding of the victories and defeats of a movement that, to a large extent, holds the future of our society in its hands.

Theoretical framework

Social movements aim to create social and structural change, especially by replacing current social representations and profoundly changing the dominant discourse or the legal framework in a specific field. As Johnston (2014, p. 14) stated, "social movements are characterized by big, change-oriented ideas that guide them and impart them to an overall unity". A social movement organizes around its goal to create ambitious structural change, encompassing different social actors.

Across a social movement, we can usually identify organizations, informal groups, participants, and observers (Johnston, 2014; Porta & Diani, 2006). Thus, social movements hold space for different levels and modalities of participation, a feature we will likewise observe in the climate movement. Its organization is largely horizontal and informal, relying on information and solidarity networks, even if some of its social actors have defined hierarchies and formal management (Delina et al., 2014).

Activism, on the other hand, refers to the grassroots collective actions carried out to pursue civic or environmental goals (Felice, 2018). While there is a large overlap between social movement and activism, not all instances of activism are part of a social movement; for example, whenever there is no collective unity or continuity in the action. The protest (collective legal street demonstrations) is still the preferred mode of action, although other relevant modes of action include public declarations, petitioning, direct action, and civil disobedience.

With the rapid development of technologies of information and communication, scholars have suggested the emergence of a new paradigm of activism that is inherently unpredictable, dynamic, and based on digital networks (Campos et al., 2016; Felice, 2018). However, with new possibilities, new challenges arise. The digital space deemed insufficient to grant the deep commitment required to build a social movement, creating a dichotomy between online and offline activism (Campos et al., 2016). The entry into the activism field of the school strikes for climate, in particular, has rekindled these ambivalent views on digital civic participation, resulting from unresolved tensions between traditional and modern conceptions of activism.

On the other hand, the entry of the school strikes for climate into both the global and the national climate activism sphere meant both a revitalization of the movement itself, as well as a starting point for reframing the concepts of democracy and civic participation (Thomas et al., 2019). Portuguese students and climate activists, having followed international trends, also jumped headfirst into this opportunity to have their voices heard and fight for a living future. In particular, it was shown that Portuguese young activists have brought political leadership, environmental citizenship, and transformative learning dimensions into the national climate movement (Kowasch et al., 2021). Its impact on the wider movement is undeniable, having attracted significant mediatic and political interest for the politically engaged student. The

general population also became more interested in learning about climate change, as it is suggested by the fact that the most intense search activity on climate change between February and May 2019 was around the time of the March 15th climate strike, suggesting that this first demonstration had a notable impact on the general public (Sisco et al., 2021).

Searching for media coverage is an intrinsic dimension of activism. Activists actively look for media coverage as a central strategy point, searching to make their message reach a larger audience, beyond their own networks. Due to this need of activists having their claims featured in media channels, a significant relationship of dependence is established between these two. And while this relationship is twofold — it is certainly true that media channels also benefit from turning to activists as sources for news materials — it is markedly unequal. Activists are in a considerably less favourable position as communication channels are essential for the survival of a social movement, while media channels have access to a variety of information sources that compete amongst themselves for media attention (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

This constant search for dissemination of the movement through media coverage reveals a media-centric approach by activists, which implies that a large proportion of actions is planned with the main goal (sometimes the only goal) of featuring in communication channels. This mediacentric view thus exacerbates the widespread belief that without coverage, an action loses legitimacy and has little effect (Lester & Hutchins, 2009). In the same vein, media coverage is interpreted as a force that creates the very legitimacy of a protest: "a demonstration with no media coverage at all is a non-event, unlikely to have any positive influence either on mobilizing followers or influencing the target. No news is bad news" (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 116).

Activists are thus vulnerable to misrepresentations or unfavourable representations by the media, which are more likely to occur the more a movement defies established power structures or advocates for profound structural change (F. Lee, 2014; Reul et al., 2018). This is sometimes referred to as the protest paradigm, which defines the delegitimization pattern sometimes employed by the media (Bergman, 2014; Chan & C. Lee, 1984; F. Lee, 2014; Reul et al., 2018).

Unfavourable representations may translate into an excessive focus on the violent episodes or carnivalesque aspects of the collective action, misleading or omitting the purpose of the action, a preference for statements from authority figures or bystanders rather than from the protesters, or a clear-cut delegitimization of the social actors and their aims (Bergman, 2014; Chan & C. Lee, 1984; Reul et al., 2018). With no explanation provided for the protests or their underlying contexts, and by placing a disproportionate focus on the disturbances caused or on a carnivalesque dimension, the demonstrations would appear, to most readers, excessive and unjustified.

In these cases, the mediacentric approach runs the risk of searching for media coverage at all costs, leading to unfavourable representations that can harm the public image of the activist groups and discredit their aims, especially to an uninformed audience (Gavin, 2010). In sum, a

larger media coverage is not always synonym with successful strategizing. Activists must weigh considerations on radicalism, general knowledge about the topic, and possible distortion of goals and claims before planning any interventions.

In the specific case of climate action, the chronic inaction demonstrated by governments and policymakers has been at the core of the climate movement, which pressures governments to take effective and proactive climate action. The urgent need for immediate climate action, so as to not surpass points of no return and trigger self-perpetuating feedback mechanisms, has led some scholars to endorse the resort to forms of activism deemed radical, namely civil disobedience (Delina et al., 2014; Feldman & Hart, 2016; Roser-Renouf et al., 2014).

When looking at the media coverage of the climate crisis, studies have shown that climate change has an uneven coverage between different newspapers and media channels (Bacon & Nash, 2012; Carmichael & Brulle, 2017; Carvalho, 2011; Feldman et al., 2012). This is evidenced by the choice to include climate deniers, thus placing the debate as a discussion over its scientific validity, or to frame climate activism in the science that supports its urgency. Similarly, allowing or not activists to intervene directly in the media coverage, or relegating them to a more passive role, is another way in which journalistic norms hint at the media outlet's position towards the activists.

In Portugal, the climate crisis has struggled to become a prominent topic of coverage. Until 2003, climate change was one of the least covered environment-related topics by Portuguese newspapers (Rosa, 2006). Even if this paradigm has changed in more recent years, Jiménez-Gómez and Martín-Sosa-Rodríguez (2021) found that the Portuguese media, especially when compared to other European countries, such as France and Italy, were still lagging in contextualising extreme weather events as a consequence of climate change.

Furthermore, climate change coverage in the Portuguese media is predominantly focused on the international context while news coverage of national climate-related events and policies is less representative. When looking at newspaper samples from 2007 to 2014, it was found that the total amount of articles concerning Portugal specifically was only 21.5%, focusing more frequently on international governing bodies and international policies (Horta et al., 2017). This paradigm could prove to be an additional hurdle to be overcome by Portuguese activists who aim to spread their message through communication channels as it may create further barriers to the coverage of national activists and their demands. On another hand, despite typically not being a central theme in media coverage, it is observed that the relationship between environmental activists and the Portuguese media may be more harmonious than what is observed in international studies (Rosa, 2006).

The Portuguese paradigm is inextricably linked with its political and social context. Still affected by decades of an oppressive regime, at the beginning of the century the Portuguese media were still considerably underdeveloped, in other words, a sign of a "society in transition"

(Cardoso, 2006). In spite of this chronic lagging, the recent digitalisation of the media has opened up the field to unprecedented innovations, such as the opportunity for the public to interact directly with the content, freedom from the constraints of printing, and a larger democratisation of the information.

Our analysis will take these main concepts and contribute to the assessment of how the Portuguese media coverage of climate activism positions itself compared to the paradigm found in international studies, namely the protest paradigm found in the studies carried out in Belgium (Reul et al., 2018), Hong Kong (F. Lee, 2014), and the United Kingdom (Gavin, 2010). No studies have been carried out in the Portuguese media that have focused specifically on climate activism.

Methodology

This research is centred on the social representations conveyed by the Portuguese press about climate activism, encompassing the wide array of collective actions performed to raise awareness, put pressure on decision-makers to take definitive action, and run resistance against major greenhouse gas emitting companies. Climate activism can be broken down into different types of action, such as commentary, campaign, partisan action, denouncing, protest, symbolic action, dramatic action, direct action, and civil disobedience, for example (Rosa, 2006; Smith, 2011). To encompass the diversity of actions, different ways of doing activism were considered, from more conventional to more disruptive forms.

As established by the theoretical framework, the pursuit of media coverage is a central axis of activism insofar as media channels disseminate information to a wider population and play an important role in creating and legitimising social representations. The main goal of this paper is to characterize the media coverage of actions within the scope of climate activism, both in its quantitative evolution (how many articles were published covering climate activism throughout the years) as well as in its qualitative dimension (what are the dominant activist representation profiles, the predominant themes, and how the actions are contextualized).

To this end, the newspaper PÚBLICO, a Portuguese mainstream newspaper of reference, was chosen as the source for the research. The choice of PÚBLICO was the result of its twofold establishment as a newspaper of reference and as a generalist newspaper, as well as its membership in the international World Media Network. After a search for the keywords "climate change", "climate justice" and "climate crisis" (in Portuguese) the articles were selected based on whether they were consistent with the subject of climate activism, regardless of the type of article (opinion, news, report, interview, etc.). Through this process, a sample of 175 articles, published between January 2015 and June 2019, was selected and analysed using content

analysis.

Through content analysis, an in-depth analysis of the collected data was possible, allowing for the understanding of varied and rich data. As mentioned by Silverman (2001, p. 152), "Texts provide rich and naturally occurring, accessible data which have real effects in the world".

To carry out this research, qualitative and quantitative categories were selected based on aspects that were highlighted by relevant international studies on the same subject, namely the protest paradigm dimensions. With the selected categories, we recorded the formal aspects of the news piece (the number of pages, the journalistic genre, and whether or not there was an image), as well as a central theme, the representation profiles of the activist, and indicators that point to the type of representations that raised (self-representation, the characterization of activism as a nuisance, and the use of statements by authority figures).

The representation profiles of activists adopted were the following (adapted from F. Lee, 2014; Reul et al., 2018; Rosa, 2006):

- Expert: the activist is a researcher, professor, or holds a degree in climate change or adjacent areas.
- Representative of civil society: the activist is speaking on behalf of an organization or a grassroots collective.
- Neutral: the activist is not characterized in any particular way.
- Nuisance: the activist is characterized by using lexicon related to disruption of daily life, destruction, or violence.
- Eccentric or outcast: the activist is said to show unusual behaviour without apparent justification.

After the first reading through the collected sample, it proved necessary to create new categories to account for cases specific to the Portuguese movement and its evolution which were not yet evidenced in the current literature:

- Expert and representative of civil society: the activist is described as both an expert and a spokesperson for the civil society.
- Student: the activist belongs to the international climate strikes movement and this fact is highlighted as their main characteristic.
- Rebel: the activist is described as promoting mass civil disobedience, without highlighting any disturbance.
- Artist: the activist is presented as a professional artist.

While there could be multiple representations of activists in each article, the representation profile sought to frame them as one unified category, assigning the profile that best suited each

case.

In addition to this categorization, we collected data that pointed to the legitimization or delegitimization of the activist: in particular, self-representation, the characterization of activism as a nuisance, and the use of statements from authority figures. Self-representation was assessed according to three aspects: the presence or absence of direct quotes from activists in the body text, the presence or absence of quotes in the title or subtitle of articles, and the authorship of articles by activists. The characterisation of activism as a nuisance was assessed according to whether violence, conflict with the police, or disruption of public life was mentioned. Finally, the use of statements by authority figures and their classification as either favourable or antagonistic was taken note of. The analysis of these categories, separately and together, enabled a comprehensive understanding of how climate activism was represented by PÚBLICO. The following chapter will present the collected data and the main conclusions that can be withdrawn from them.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was structured to answer the questions that guided this research, as well as to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the newspaper coverage of climate activism, while developing a replicable and comparable study.

Formal aspects

Firstly, we looked at the quantitative evolution of the media presence of the Portuguese climate activism. We can see a progressive affirmation of climate activism in the media, indicated by the sharp rise in the number of articles over the years under review. During this period, every year more articles about climate activism were published than in the previous year. The number of articles published in 2019 is particularly noteworthy, considering that it was the year with the highest number of published articles, even though the analysis period included only articles published in the first semester.
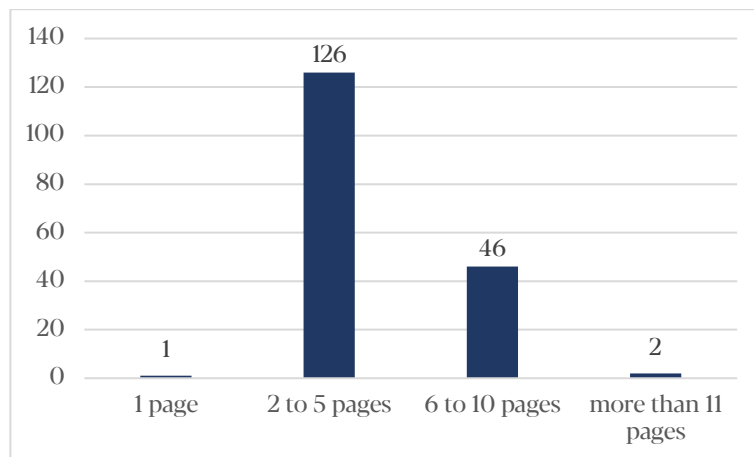
GRAPH 1

Number of published articles on PÚBLICO online on climate activism from January 2015 until June 2019
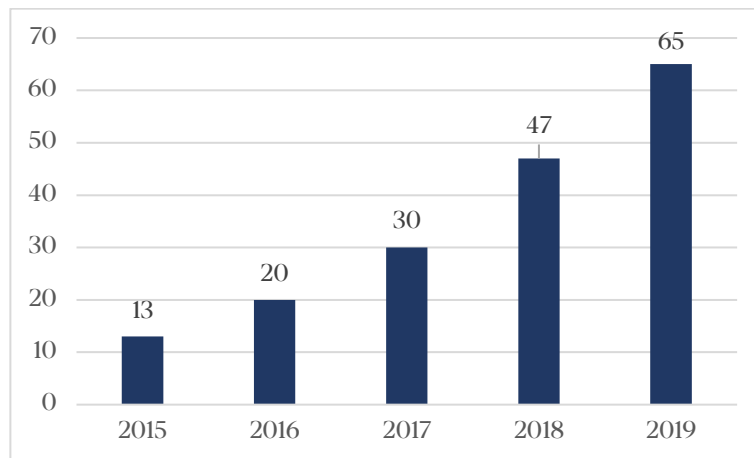
In order to characterize the sample, certain formal aspects were collected during the first analysis, namely the number of pages or the inclusion, or not, of an image.

GRAPH 2

Sample distribution according to the number of pages

With an average of 4,8 pages, the sample reveals that the articles collected are relatively long, which can be a consequence of digitalisation, which eliminates printing constraints related to the physical newspaper, as well as competition between different pieces. In terms of the presence or absence of images, the data shows that 123 articles displayed at least one image, corresponding to 70.3% of the sample. The changes to the press made possible by the progressive digitalisation could also explain this high usage of images, as online articles are not bound to printing costs.

Finally, the journalistic genres found most frequently in the sample were news articles (69

occurrences), followed by opinion articles (46) and features (28). The interview (12) and the analysis article (11) were also represented in the sample. In short, we have a sample composed of articles that fall into various journalistic genres, although there is a clear predominance of news and opinion articles. The collection of articles in the digital format allowed the predominance of articles of medium and long length, new formats of journalistic articles (such as the inclusion of videos), and the frequent inclusion of images accompanying the text.

The thematic evolution throughout the years

Despite the relatively short time frame under analysis, the coverage of climate activism shows clear shifts in both the climate movement and its presence in the media.

GRAPH 3
Sample distribution according to the main theme of each article
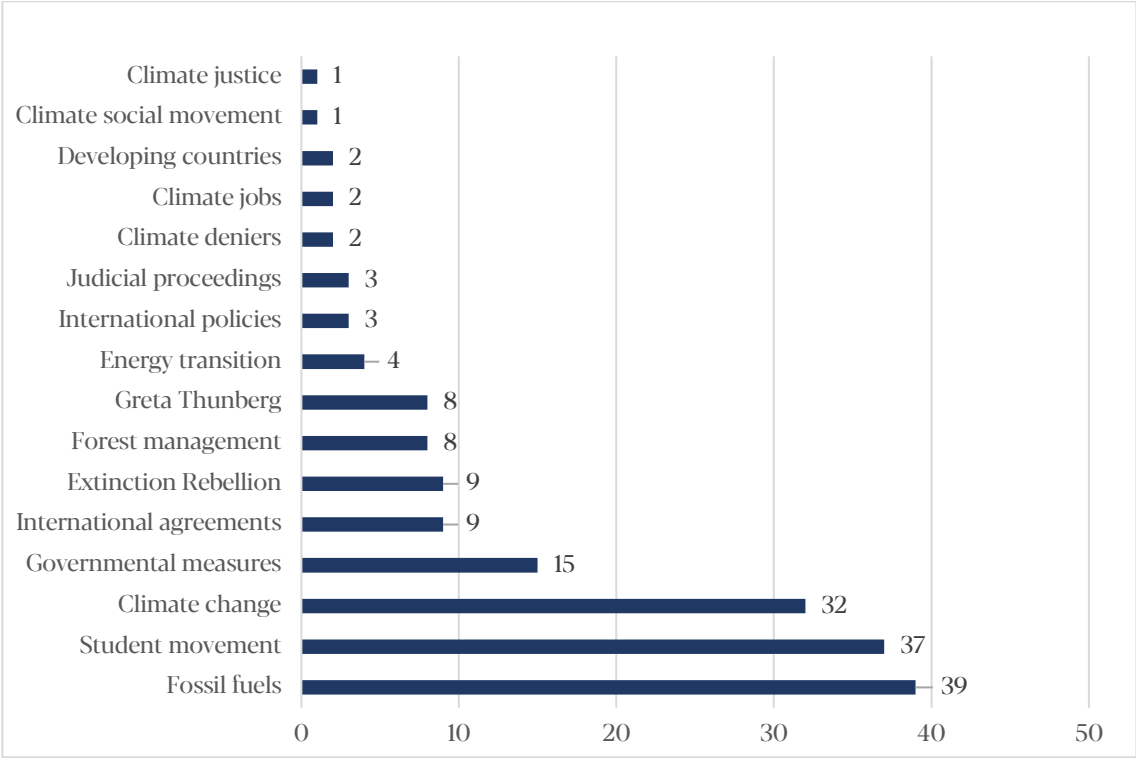
As observable in graph No. 3, three topics were predominant in the selected sample — fossil fuels, the student movement, and climate change (as a general theme or focusing on its risks). The topic of fossil fuels, while always present in the discussion around the climate crisis, became particularly relevant in Portugal in the context of the signing of contracts for oil prospection and exploration in the south of the country. From 2016 to 2018, fossil fuels were the sub-topic

most discussed in the sample, highlighting how during this period the objection to fossil fuels reached a dimension of national protest, involving different organisations, members of civil society, and even political parties and local governments.

The second topic with the most occurrences was the student movement itself, suggesting that this new actor in the climate justice movement generated significant media interest (especially considering that the global climate strikes for climate only reached Portugal in 2019). The mass participation of school students in social and environmental causes, both nationally and internationally, and the consequent promotion of school strikes as a means of action, were unprecedented, having turned into a milestone both for the social movement itself and its media coverage.

The political dimension of climate change (whether referring to specific policies, the political sphere in general, or international agreements) was also significant in the collected sample. Illustrating the inseparable nature of the climate crisis and the political sphere, activists presented policy proposals to be implemented, condemned certain public policies seen as harmful to the fight against climate change, or thoroughly analysed international agreements such as the Paris Agreement.

Furthermore, the prominent figure of Greta Thunberg, a young Swede who single-handedly started the school strikes for climate phenomenon in 2018, did not go unnoticed in the press, featuring in several articles. These journalistic articles have a strong personalization component, with a strong emphasis on her life journey, especially as human-interest stories. With the climate crisis serving only as a background for the coverage, these articles have focused mostly on unrelated private details about the life of the activist. Nevertheless, they account for the importance Greta held for the movement, in particular the international multiplication of the school strikes for climate (or the "Greta effect").

The use of personalization was not, however, reserved for the coverage of Greta Thunberg. Over the five years under review, 28 articles used this journalistic norm, meaning that the news's central motive was the human figure itself. Of these 28 articles with personalization, 18 occurred in 2019. This hints that the arrival of the school strikes for climate to the Portuguese movement coincided with a sharp increase in the use of this journalistic norm. The Portuguese student-activists have sparked curiosity and were the subject of detailed descriptions of personal characteristics or life stories. Extinction Rebellion was another significant addition to the Portuguese climate movement which had visible repercussions on media coverage during the time frame under analysis, also resulting in some curiosity as to who these activists were.

The representations of the activist

How the press perceives and represents activists has changed over the years under review. To analyse these changes, we have resorted to representation profiles, i.e., simplified categories that characterize the dominant representation of the activist in each article, which can carry a positive, neutral, or negative connotation.

TABLE 1

Distribution of the representation profiles of activists in the sample

Year	Expert	Civil society representative	Expert and representative	Artist	Student	Rebel	Neutral	Nuisance	Eccentric	Total
2015	1 (7,7%)	7 (53,8%)	-	-	-	-	2 (15,4%)	3 (23,1%)	-	13
2016	6 (30%)	7 (35%)	4 (20%)	-	-	-	3 (15%)	-	-	20
2017	3 (10%)	8 (26,7%)	10 (33,3%)	1 (3,3%)	-	-	8 (26,7%)	-	-	30
2018	7 (14,9%)	13 (27,7%)	16 (34,1%)	1 (2,1%)	1 (2,1%)	1 (2,1%)	8 (17%)	-	-	47
2019	2 (3,1%)	2 (3,1%)	4 (6,2%)	1 (1,5%)	44 (67,7%)	9 (13,8%)	3 (4,6%)	-	-	65
Total	19 (10,9%)	37 (21,2%)	34 (19,4%)	3 (1,7%)	45 (25,7%)	10 (5,7%)	24 (13,7%)	3 (1,7%)	0	175

As we can observe in the table presented, the profile with the most occurrences was the student, followed by the civil society representative, and then the joint category of expert and civil society representative. The fact that the student profile was the one that collected the most occurrences in total, making up more than a quarter of all occurrences, is noteworthy, especially because during the first three years it did not have any occurrence, and in 2018 it appeared only once. It was in 2019 that this new profile established itself as the dominant representation of the activist, starring 67,7% of the articles published in that year.

This affirmation of the student-activist in the media field also accounted for an important shift in the media coverage of climate activism: up until this point, there was a clear preference for activists that were experts or representatives, any other representation being very marginal. In 2019, by contrast, the most frequently mentioned profiles refer to new arrivals to the climate movement, relegating the previously dominant categories to the side-line.

Finally, the markedly negative category nuisance had some relevance in 2015 but did not reoccur during the period under analysis. It is important to note that this profile was only attributed to international activists who carried out actions outside the country (mostly in the context of the Paris Agreement). This means that Portuguese activists were never represented as a nuisance in PÚBLICO, even when it came to the direct actions or civil disobedience

promoted by Extinction Rebellion.

Representation profiles are useful abstractions in that they allow for comparison and analysis of temporal evolution. As we see from these data, during the period of analysis there was an important transformation in the representation profiles, validating once again that the year 2019 was a turning point in the Portuguese climate movement. The data also confirm that the representations have been mainly favourable or neutral and that the profiles that would have been unfavourable are practically inexistent and exclusively attributed to foreign activism.

Legitimisation or de-legitimisation?

In order to further analyse the tone and nature of the social representations disseminated by the journal, we need to look beyond the characterization of the activist and analyse other aspects of how their actions are portrayed, namely the different elements that characterise the protest paradigm. Through this analysis, we can determine whether (and to which extent) the issue at stake, the means of action, and the demands of activists are being devalued or if, on the contrary, the actions are being systematically contextualised and the activist framed as a legitimate social actor.

One of the relevant indicators for this analysis is the possibility of self-representation, that is, when the activist, through direct quotes or the authorship of articles, is able to communicate directly with the reader and convey their message with few or no edition filters. Indicating an abdication of the media's power to create and frame social representations, the newspaper gives voice directly to the activist and, in varying degrees of intensity, gives them the power to interpret and report on the topic with reduced interference. This self-representation may occur in different ways: through the authorship of full articles, the inclusion of direct quotes by the activist, or the transcription of press releases.

GRAPH 4

**Sample distribution according to authorship**
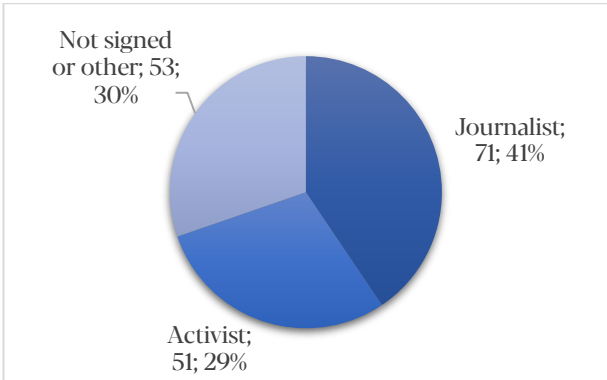
The graph depicting authorship shows us that 53 articles, nearly one-third of the articles collected, were signed by activists, a significant proportion of the sample. In these cases, unlike the direct quotes, the newspaper allows the activist to speak directly to the reader without the process of editing and selection by the journalist. This is also indicative of the relationship between the newspaper and the activist since it implies a surrender of the mediatic space.

Opening the media field directly to the voice of the activist, not as an external object, but as a creator and producer of content, is likewise a way of representing the activist as a legitimate and relevant voice. It is relevant, however, to highlight that the 51 articles authored by activists were either opinion articles or analysis articles, thus placing them among other competing and conflicting voices. To determine the number of articles with direct quotes from activists, the 51 articles authored by activists were eliminated from the total, as they cannot be considered direct quotes. From this sample of 124 articles, more than 80% included at least one direct quote, with the majority including multiple direct quotes (within the articles with quotes, the average is 8 direct quotes per article). This is, therefore, a sample in which articles that include at least one quote are frequent and articles with numerous quotes are equally frequent.

GRAPH 5

Sample distribution according to the presence or absence of direct quotes from activists
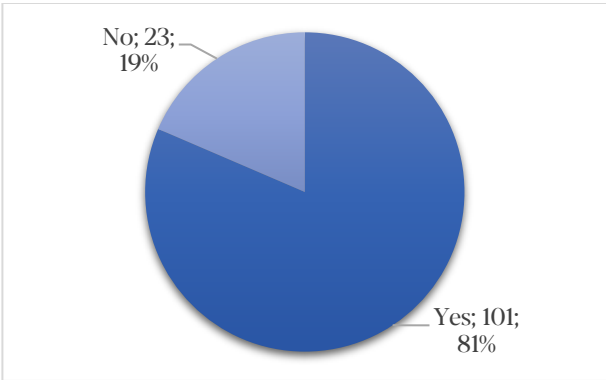
The use of a direct quote as a headline, in turn, is a further clear indicator of alignment with the activists' message. While an activist quoted in body text may be presented as one of several competing perspectives, the choice of using a quote as a title or sub-title underwrites that point of view as key, around which the news article will be developed.

GRAPH 6

Sample distribution according to the presence or absence of direct quotes in the title or subtitle of the article

Title; 20; 16%

Subtitle; 13; 11%

No; 91; 73%
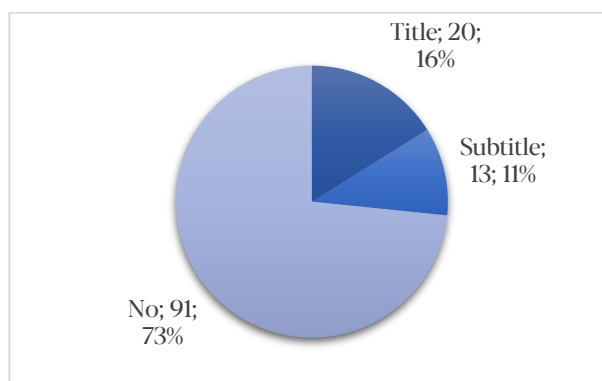
More than a quarter of the articles include a direct quote on the title or subtitle, whether centring a comment by an activist, such as a critique of public policies, the statement of demands, or the recognition of the movement's importance. One example is the title "The public space now includes young people who, unable to vote, have a lot to say" (our translation), which values the movement and highlights the importance of the students' voice.

Overall, this opportunity for self-representation is the ultimate legitimisation of the activist and their goals, as they are given the opportunity to build their own narrative and avoid the propagation of unfavourable representations. Between direct quotes and authorship, few are the social representations created completely without the interference of the activists themselves.
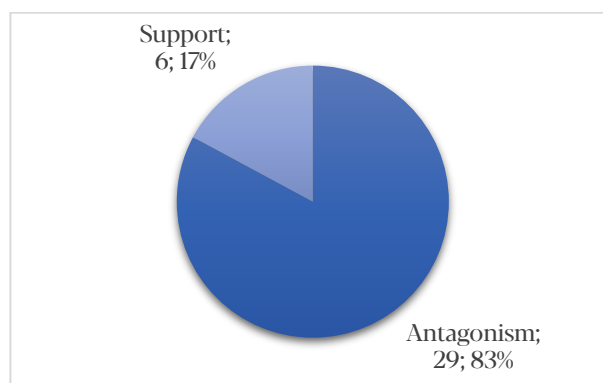
GRAPH 7

Sample distribution according to the use, or not, of statements by authority figures

Yes; 35; 20%

No; 140; 80%
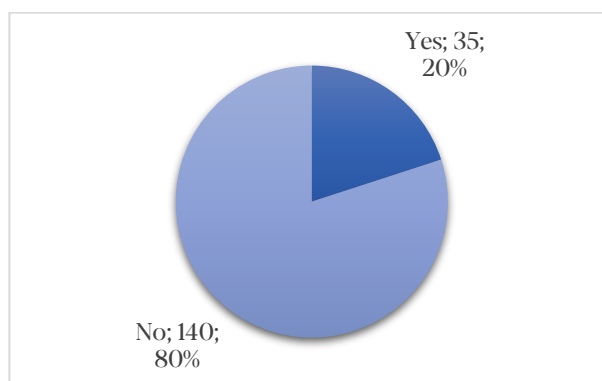
GRAPH 8

Categorisation of statements by authority figures according to whether they provided support for or challenged the activists

Support;
6; 17%

Antagonism;
29; 83%

On the contrary, declarations from authority figures are sometimes presented in contrast with the activist's voice, usually contradicting their statements or responding to accusations made by the activist.

So far in our analysis, negative representations of the activist have been practically inexistent. In this final indicator, the paradigm is moderately different. As we can see, in 20% of the articles, declarations from authority figures were included alongside activists' statements. Although it cannot be considered a dominant phenomenon, it is still the most representative indicator of delegitimization in our analysis. It should be noted, nevertheless, that in 6 articles, the testimony of the authority figure expressed agreement with the activists, positioning him/herself on their side against a common antagonist. This occurred mostly in the context of the opposition to fossil fuel exploration contracts where local politicians sided with the activists against the central government.

By way of example, let's consider the statement of the mayor of Lagos in a 2018 news report, in which she states that "If the government insists [on hydrocarbon exploration], I feel it is a declaration of war on the region". In these moments, the social movement managed to bring together local populations, local decision-makers, and even certain local companies to protect the regional natural resources and ensure sustainability.

In the other cases, the official statements worked in the opposite direction, minimising the issue at stake, the legitimacy of the activists to speak out on a certain subject, or their understanding of the full issue. This was particularly noticeable after the arrival of the school strikes for climate in Portugal.

For example, despite massive adherence to the first climate strike, in a 2019 report, the president of the National Association of Directors of Public Schools insisted that "the strike went unnoticed. There were indeed some young people who chose to take that action, but it had no impact on the normal functioning of the school". Numerous declarations from decision-makers

attempted to minimise the activists' struggle, by claiming that only workers have the right to strike, that adherence to the strike was not significant, or by devaluing their motivation, often framing climate strikes as an excuse for missing school, among others.

These views were presented in antagonism to the activist and, because of their position of power, typically hold much higher credibility than the activists' declarations. While these negative representations did not come from the journalist directly, the choice to include them also informs us about the positioning of the newspaper in question. Nevertheless, these views are never replicated by the journalist's voice and seem to serve the purpose of maintaining the balance between opposing views, as expected in a newspaper of this nature.

In conclusion, and taking an overview of the collected indicators, the climate activist has progressively built a significant presence in the media channel, not only as an expert but increasingly as a member of civil society, equipped with the legitimacy to intervene actively. As we have observed, activists shared their voices with journalists and mostly had the opportunity to be in control of their own representations. The analysis ended at a turning point in climate activism, with profound changes and innovations in the movement, which the newspaper welcomed mostly enthusiastically. Some of the tendencies described in foreign studies, such as the protest paradigm, were therefore not observed in this study.

Conclusions and discussion

Recognizing the urgency of climate action, and how important it is that the climate movement succeeds in having their demands heeded, the analysis sought to contribute to the characterization of the social representations disseminated by the Portuguese press. This is crucial to understand how the general public perceives these social actors and their reach. We can first observe that the climate activist has progressively asserted their position in the newspaper, as indicated by the sharp rise in the number of articles published over the years under review.

The data also shows us that 2019 was a turning point in the movement, especially due to the school strikes for climate. In 2019, the most frequent topic in the coverage was the student movement and the most frequent activist representation profile of activists was that of the student. The school strikes for climate have arguably been the most valuable addition to the climate movement, which is also corroborated by our data.

The sample accounted for this unprecedented entry into the civic field of a new political actor that has traditionally been excluded from civic participation — school children. The significant media coverage of these new social actors solidifies their entry into the civic field, and points to the ways in which the civic organization of school children has revolutionized

established notions of citizenship and democracy. The embodiment of climate injustice, these young students are faced with a dystopian future to which they have not contributed and feel compelled to participate in the civic society on a scale that is unheard of. This significant change within the composition of the social movement clearly transpired into the Portuguese reality, as the data suggests.

The increase in the resort to personalization in the articles about the student-activists, however, hints that the focus may have shifted from the primary motive of the activism itself. While it is not necessarily harmful to have these human-interest pieces on the activists, which humanise them for the readers, this tendency risks emptying the debate and diverting attention from the primary motivation for action.

On the other hand, the use of representation profiles of activists showed us a mostly favourable or neutral overview of the social representations of the activist, in which the only negative representations referred to activism carried out abroad. It also revealed that a large percentage of activists featured were also experts on climate change, showing us that the newspaper tended to choose the activist-expert as a trusted source.

This tendency may have been overturned in 2019, in which the student-activist won primacy. It will be relevant to observe the subsequent time frames to determine whether this change in the dominant activist profile was momentary, the result of novelty, or whether the student profile has been established as a legitimate and prevalent social actor.

Although negative representations do exist in the sample collected, they are notoriously marginal, besides being directed at activists acting outside Portugal or based on direct quotes from authority figures. A significant portion of these negative representations was directed at school strikers by figures of authority. This tendency to direct negative representations of the student-activist, namely in the sense of discrediting their competencies, the legitimacy of their civic participation, or the demands presented had also been identified by Thomas et al. (2019).

Furthermore, a strong component of self-representation, and several instances of placing a direct quote from the activist on the title and subtitle, paint a significantly more harmonious relationship between media and activists than the ones observed in international studies. Titles and subtitles with direct quotes, paraphrases of activists' statements, or statements that coincide with the activists' perspectives set the tone of the article in solidarity with the activist. This data is particularly relevant considering that readers do not always read the full article.

The self-representation component, in particular when the activist is the author of the article, implies an abdication of the word by the newspaper or journalist, who decides to give the activist a platform to communicate directly with the general public. In a further analysis, this also indicates a temporary abdication of the newspaper's main function of interpreting and shaping reality.

In conclusion, the data analysis reveals a coverage paradigm of climate activism markedly

distinct from what was observed in foreign studies, in which the protest paradigm was more prevalent. The activist has a significant presence (and with growing importance, as we see in the evolution of the number of articles) not only as an expert but increasingly as a member of civil society, also equipped with legitimacy to actively intervene.

The fact that this research focuses exclusively on a single newspaper naturally does not allow for a comparative or comprehensive analysis of the various Portuguese media. The conclusions drawn cannot be transposed to the Portuguese press in general, particularly to more conservative newspapers. The analysis may, however, describe the trends and characteristics present in PÚBLICO, with the intention of being possible to replicate and build a more comprehensive and detailed overview of the Portuguese media coverage.

Ultimately, the conclusions drawn may be relevant for the future of the Portuguese climate movement, as they may suggest ways for activists to approach mainstream communication channels, strategize relationships with the media, and assess their media impact. It would be relevant, in the future, to be able to compare these findings with other analyses of other newspapers or communication channels and thus broaden our understanding of climate activism in the Portuguese media.

The present paper paves the way for future analyses, which could deepen the understanding of this relationship of (inter)dependency after a phase of increasing movement strengthening and cohesion. However, the COVID-19 pandemic that erupted in early 2020 abruptly interrupted this evolution and emphasised the uncertainty experienced by the climate movement regarding our collective ability to cope with this challenge. As with any immediate crisis, the media once again relegated the climate emergency to the background, with potentially disastrous consequences in terms of climate action and the sustainability of the movement.

The climate movement has since adapted and shown remarkable resilience, however doubtfully having been able to recover pre-pandemic media coverage. Just as the period under analysis in this paper accompanied the climate movement in a decisive phase of profound transformation, possible future analyses will also encompass moments of profound uncertainty, in a decade that is undoubtedly decisive for the future of humanity.

References

Bacon, Wendy, & Nash, Chris (2012). Playing the media game: The relative (in)visibility of coal industry interests in media reporting of coal as a climate change issue in Australia. *Journalism Studies*, *13*(2), 243-258. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2011.646401

Bergman, Noam (2014). Climate change and public discourse of climate change in the UK. *Carbon Management*, *5*(4), 339-348. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17583004.2014.995407

Campos, Ricardo, Pereira, Inês, & Simões, José Alberto (2016). Ativismo digital em Portugal: Um estudo exploratório. *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, *82*, 27-47. https://doi.org/10.7458/SPP2016826977

Cardoso, Gustavo (2006). *Os media na sociedade em rede*. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

Carmichael, Jason, & Brulle, Robert (2017). Elite cues, media coverage and public concern: An integrated path analysis of public opinion on climate change, 2001-2013. *Environmental Politics*, *26*(2), 232-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2016.1263433

Carvalho, Anabela (2011). *As alterações climáticas, os media e os cidadãos*. Grácio Editor.

Chan, Joseph, & Lee, Chin Chuan (1984). Journalistic paradigms on civil protests: A case study in Hong Kong. In Andrew Arno & Wimal Dissanayake (Eds.), *The news media in national and international conflict* (pp. 183-202). Boulder.

Delina, Laurence, Diesendorf, Mark, & Merson, John (2014). Strengthening the climate action movement: Strategies from histories. *Carbon Management*, *5*(4), 397-409. https://doi.org/10.1080/17583004.2015.1005396

Feldman, Laurent, & Hart, P. Sol (2016). Using political efficacy messages to increase climate activism: The mediating role of emotions. *Science Communication*, *38*(1), 114-125. https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547015617941

Feldman, Laurent, Marbach, Edward, Roser-Renouf, Connie, & Leiserowitz, Anthony (2012). Climate on cable: The nature and impact of global warming coverage on Fox News, CNN and MSNBC. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *17*(1), 3-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211425410

Felice, Massimo di (2018). *Net-ativismo: Da ação social para o ato conectivo*. Paulus Editora.

Gamson, William, & Wolfsfeld, Gadi (1993). Movements and media as interacting systems. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *528*, 114-125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716293528001009

Gavin, Neil (2010). Pressure group direct action on climate change: The role of the media and the web in Britain. A case study. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *12*(3), 459-475.

Horta, Ana, Carvalho, Anabela, & Schmidt, Luísa (2017). The hegemony of global politics: News coverage of climate change in a small country. *Society & Natural Resources*, *30*(10), 1246-

1260. https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2017.1295497

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2021). *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Working group I contribution to the sixth assessment report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change.* Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781009157896

Jiménez-Gómez, Isidro, & Martín-Sosa-Rodríguez, Samuel (2021). European press coverage of cities' adaptation to heatwaves and climate change. *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación, 12*(1), 45. https://doi.org/10.14198/medcom000024

Johnston, Hank (2014). *What is a social movement?* Polity Press.

Kowasch, Matthias, Cruz, Joana, Reis, Pedro, Gericke, Niklas, & Kicker, Katharina (2021). Climate youth activism initiatives: Motivations and aims, and the potential to integrate climate activism into ESD and transformative learning. *Sustainability, 13*(21), 11581. https://doi.org/10.3390/su132111581

Lee, Francis (2014). Triggering the protest paradigm: Examining factors affecting news coverage of protests. *International Journal of Communication, 8,* 2725-2746. https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547015617941

Lester, Libby, & Hutchins, Brett (2009). Power games: Environmental protest, news media and the internet. *Media Culture and Society, 31*(4), 579-595. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443709335201

Reul, Robin, Paulussen, Steve, Raeijmaekers, Daniëlle, Steen, Laurens van der, & Maeseele, Pieter (2018). Professional journalistic routines and the protest paradigm: The Big Potato Swap in traditional and alternative media. *Journalism, 19*(7), 899-916. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916636170

Rosa, Gonçalo (2006). *A Quercus nas notícias: Consolidação de uma fonte não oficial nas notícias de ambiente.* Porto Editora.

Roser-Renouf, Connie, Maibach, Edward, Leiserowitz, Anthony, & Zhao, Xiaoquan (2014). The genesis of climate change activism: From key beliefs to political action. *Climatic Change, 125,* 163-178. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-014-1173-5

Porta, Donatella della, & Diani, Mario (2006). *Social movements: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Blackwell.

Silverman, David (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction.* SAGE.

Sisco, Matthew, Pianta, Silvia, Weber, Elke, & Bosetti, Valentina (2021). Global climate marches sharply raise attention to climate change: Analysis of climate search behavior in 46 countries. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 75,* 101596. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2021.101596

Smith, William (2011). Civil disobedience and the public sphere. *The Journal of Political*

Philosophy, 19(2), 145-166. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2010.00365.x

Thomas, Amanda, Cretney, Raven, & Hayward, Bronwyn (2019). Climate strike 4 climate: Justice, emergency and citizenship. *New Zealand Geographer, 75*, 96-100. https://doi.org/10.1111/nzg.12229