

Global, Not Yet Local: Media Coverage of Climate Change and Environment Related Challenges in Latvia

Vineta Kleinberga

Rīga Stradiņš University
vineta.kleinberga@rsu.lv
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7819-5790>

Abstract. Media are essential actors in transmitting, contesting and embedding the attitudes towards climate change, yet media performance in post-communist countries has been relatively little researched. Informed by conceptual frameworks of strategic narratives, agenda-setting and framing, this paper investigates the media coverage of climate change and environment related issues in Latvia. The paper demonstrates the representation of climate change and environment related issues in Latvian and Russian-speaking traditional and online media, using quantitative data analysis of 3753 media articles, video and audio broadcasts from August 2020 till January 2021, as well as qualitative content analysis of seven papers.

The findings reveal a significant amount of climate change and environment related articles and broadcasts in Latvian media. News agencies and public broadcasters are the most important media segments in terms of publishing, whereas online media are prior in terms of the audiences reached. International efforts emerge as a dominant theme in the media coverage, while climate change *per se* receives a minor journalist attention. Both observations confirm a low level of climate change domestication in the Latvian media. Media reliance on political and government information sources and prepackaged material suggests a high potential for official political narratives to spread, yet the persuasive power of strategic narratives remains blurred as the perception side is highly underreported.

Keywords: climate change; strategic narratives; media projection; domestication; information sources; Latvia.

Globalus dar nereiškia, kad lokalus: klimato kaitos ir su aplinka susijusių iššūkių nušvietimas Latvijos žiniasklaidoje

Santrauka. Žiniasklaida vaidina labai svarbų vaidmenį nušviečiant, paneigiant ir suformuojant požiūrį į klimato kaitą, tačiau žiniasklaidos veikla pokomunistinėse šalyse dar nebuvo pakankamai ištirta. Remiantis konceptualiais strateginio naratyvo principais, darbotvarkės nustatymu ir žiniasklaidos rėmais, šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamos Latvijos žiniasklaidoje nušviečiamos klimato kaitos ir su aplinka susijusios problemos. Straipsnyje atskleidžiamas klimato kaitos ir su aplinka susijusių problemų aptarimas tradicinėse bei internetinėse latvių ir rusakalbių žiniasklaidos priemonėse naudojant kiekybinę 3 753 žiniasklaidos straipsnių duomenų analizę, vaizdo ir garso transliacijas nuo 2020 m. rugpjūčio iki 2021 m. sausio, taip pat kokybinę septynių populiariausiųjų turinio analizę. Išvados atskleidžia nemažą skaičių su klimato kaita ir aplinka susijusių straipsnių ir transliacijų Latvijos žiniasklaidoje. Naujienų agentūros ir visuomeniniai transliuotojai yra svarbiausi žiniasklaidos segmentai, susiję su leidyba, o internetinė žiniasklaida yra pranašesnė atsižvelgiant į tai, kad pasiekia didesnę

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auditorijos daļi. Tarptautinēs pastangos yra dominuojanti žiniasklaidos tema, o klimato kaita per se sulaukia minimalaus žurnalistų dėmesio. Abu pastebėjimai patvirtina, kad Latvijos žiniasklaidoje klimato kaitos tema dar nėra pakankamai prisijaukinta. Žiniasklaidos priklausomybė nuo politinių ir vyriausybinių informacijos šaltinių ir iš anksto paruoštos medžiagos rodo didelį oficialių politinių naratyvų plitimo potencialą, tačiau strateginių naratyvų įtikinamoji galia išlieka neryški, nes duomenų apie suvokimą nepakanka.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: klimato kaita; strateginiai naratyvai; žiniasklaidos projektavimas; prijaukinimas; informacijos šaltiniai; Latvija.

Introduction

Climate change is a “super-wicked” problem (Levin et al., 2012), requiring multiple and complex solutions at collective and individual levels, and requesting targeted and multi-layered communication. Media play a crucial role in the process of communication, raising the awareness and forming the attitudes towards climate change. Over time, climate change has received fluctuating and cyclic media attention, depending on political constellation, public opinion, corporate interests, and changing beliefs in climate change as a scientific fact (Shanahan, 2018). Scholars demonstrate that such factors as country’s vulnerability to climate change, its obligations under international agreements and its dependency on fossil fuels contribute to increased media attention (Schmidt et al., 2013). Nevertheless, post-communist countries do not fully comply with such an observation. Studies show that media attention to climate change, e.g., in Poland (Kundzewicz et al., 2019) and Russia (Schmidt et al., 2013), is low notwithstanding their obligations under international treaties and dependency on fossil fuels. Few studies reveal that climate change *per se* has not attracted the media attention in the region, even if journalists report about issues that are related to climate change, e.g., the phasing-out of coal in the Czech Republic (Lehotský et al., 2019; Osička et al., 2020). It suggests that climate change may not yet be a recognized problem in the post-communist media space, thus mirroring the low salience of climate change and environmental issues in former communist states in general (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2015; McCright et al., 2015).

The aim of this study is to advance knowledge on climate change media representation in post-communist space, exploring the media coverage of climate change and environment related challenges in Latvia. Despite the mentioned cases, the scholarship on media representation of climate change in Central and East European region, including the former Soviet Union countries, is scarce. A comparative study on the coverage of the Conference of the Parties summit in Paris in 2015 in six countries – France, Germany, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (US) – demonstrates that the summit has received the least visibility in the Polish media (Painter et al. 2016). The media coverage of the 2013/2014 Assessment Reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has also been found the least extensive in Poland (Kundzewicz et al., 2019). Studies on Russia show that climate-related natural hazards foster media attention, yet altogether climate change receives low and superficial coverage in the Russian newspapers (Boussalis et al. 2016; Yagodin 2018). Particular challenges such as phasing-out of coal receive high media attention in coal-intensive countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic, yet media hardly ever associate the issue with climate change (Lehotský

et al. 2019; Osička et al. 2020). Instead, media echo political preferences and focus on economic side-effects of phasing-out coal in Poland (Osička et al., 2020; Žuk & Szulecki, 2020), or completely miss climate change in the Czech Republic while reporting about economic implications of termination of coal production on private companies and local employment, and rarely touching upon environmental pollution (Lehotský et al. 2019; Osička et al. 2020). Emphasis on the domestic in depiction of climate change related issues resembles the media practice of “introverted domestication” (Olaussen, 2014) missing the connection between domestic and global aspects. However, it has been found as the least dominant practice in the Lithuanian media (Rabitz et al., 2020). Instead, the Lithuanian media show a strong commitment towards internationalisation of climate change related topics, with majority of articles either depicting climate change as globally and locally interconnected phenomenon (“extroverted domestication”) or offering a completely global perspective of climate change (“counter-domestication”) (Ibid.).

This paper contributes to understanding of the performance of media in climate change communication in the region, investigating the media coverage of climate change in Latvia. Latvia restored its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and since then has aspired to be part of the Western political, economic and cultural space, naming the process as its “return to Europe” and culminating in Latvia’s accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004. Political and economic reforms have been carried out to ensure Latvia’s compliance with the EU norms and legislation, and to facilitate the convergence with the living standards of prosperous EU countries. Climate change, however, has not achieved a similar level of attention at political level. For years, Latvia has been named a hesitant nation when climate-related policies at the EU level have been discussed (Ruse, 2013), on its part confirming the “post-communist effect” (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2015), which manifests itself in the lack of environmental awareness both in the the political party programs and the ideological orientation of the people (Ibid.). Only recently the political elite has embraced the commitment to increase Latvia’s ambitions in climate policy, with the Prime Minister of Latvia stating that Latvia should change from a country “that reluctantly accepts the decisions by other countries, to a country that is one of the main promoters of the climate policy in the EU” (Cabinet of Ministers, 2019). Rhetoric has resulted in augmented national targets for implementation of the European Green Deal, aiming to reduce Latvia’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 65% till 2030 (Ministry of Economics, 2020) and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Yet the attitude of Latvian society towards climate change is ambiguous. Recent survey demonstrates that 83% of the Latvian population considers climate change as a serious problem globally, half of the population (53%) considers it as a serious problem for Latvia, and only 27% of the population considers it as a serious problem for themselves and their families (Rīga Stradiņš University [RSU], 2021). It points to significant variations in societal perceptions, when geographical proximity of climate change is considered.

As media are important agents in formation of perceptions, transmitting, transforming and contesting the information on climate change, this paper aims to discover how media address climate change in Latvia, given a recent turn in political narrative in particular, and the European Green Deal and global ambitions with regard to the Paris

Agreement more generally. Informed by conceptual frameworks of strategic narratives, agenda-setting and framing this paper focuses on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of climate change coverage in Latvia, aiming to answer several questions. How many news items are devoted to climate change in the Latvian media? Which media segments and particular media cover the issue? What thematic frames and information sources are used in climate change-related media coverage?

The paper is structured as follows. The first part describes the theoretical framework of the study, revealing the role of media as agents in the process of strategic narrative formation and projection. In the second part, methods of data selection and analysis are described. The third part demonstrates the findings of the study, concluding that the climate change related coverage in Latvia, though relatively high in numbers, is homogenous and lacks analytical perspective. Climate change *per se* hardly emerges as an issue and is mostly framed through the lens of international efforts and environmental protection, creating a deterritorialized and geopolitically disconnected discursive environment on climate change.

Theoretical framework

In contemporary world, soft power rather than hard power determines country's appeal in international relations. The founders of the strategic narrative theoretical framework (Miskimmon et al., 2013) demonstrate that strategic narratives have become increasingly important in power relations, and it is through strategic narratives that the actors define the world and provide meaning to it. Media are important agents in spreading of strategic narratives. As Miskimmon et al. (2013) maintain, "without attention to the media ecology in which this communication takes place we are missing a crucial component of the process itself" (p. 10). The persuasive power of strategic narrative depends on the alignment between the formation, projection and reception phases of the narrative (Miskimmon et al., 2013; Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin, 2017), therefore in the research of strategic narratives adequate attention should be paid not only to construction of strategic narratives at official political level, but also projection and contestation of them in media ecology, as well as perception of narratives by different audiences, be they domestic or international ones.

In democratic societies, media are not passive intermediaries. The theory of agenda-setting (McCombs, 2005; McCombs & Shaw, 1972) prescribes that media consciously select the issues, which to present to the public, and with this foster formation of public consensus. Instead of "telling people what to think", media are "telling what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, as cited in Dearing & Rogers, 1996). As agenda-setters media thus are important actors in political process, providing salience to certain issues, while undermining others. Yet media not only select issues to report about; they also frame them in a certain way, "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman, 2003, p. 417). It suggests that the media are not only important actors in the fact that they decide to report on climate change, but also in the way they do it. In other words, "media not only tell us what to think about [...], but media also tell us

how to think” (Ghanem et al., 2009, p. 517). Not all aspects of official political narrative “earn acceptance” in the media representation (Entman, 2003, p. 421). On the contrary, in democratic societies media act as professional gatekeepers, contesting the political endeavours, asking for accountability and highlighting alternative positions.

Yet framing is used not only to contest the political efforts. Frames are considered as “invaluable tools for presenting relatively complex issues [...] efficiently and in a way that makes them accessible to lay audiences because they play to existing cognitive schemas” (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p.12). In other words, journalists use their knowledge on the audiences’ beliefs, values and political and socio-economic contexts to report about complex problems. Climate change is such a multi-faceted challenge, which involves contestation not only about the phenomenon itself but also about action, which should be taken to address it. The role of media is crucial in depicting and interpreting uncertainties surrounding climate change, such as the global warming trend, the anthropogenic factor in climate change, and the timing, scope and impact of climate change (Painter, 2018).

Depiction of climate change thus depends largely on the journalists’ interpretation of it. A study has found that “there is a small group of prolific writers, mostly working for the science section, which contributes a large share of climate coverage” (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2014, p. 418); yet, in most cases, “the traditional professional journalist still seems to dominate climate journalism” (Ibid., p. 408). As such, journalists are not experts of climate science; therefore, their depiction of climate change is influenced by the information sources they use. Anderson (2018) demonstrates that up to the mid-1980s the scientists were the main news sources for journalists on climate issues, yet from the late 1980s the news has been increasingly influenced by politicians. Official governmental sources have had a privileged access to media because of “their authoritative position” and the resources they can devote to public relations (Ibid., p. 470), and the trend has not been reversed with the rise of digital and social media. On the contrary, the role of prepackaged information, such as official press releases, has accelerated, finding their way in the news via internet and the news agencies. The prevalence of political information sources in media representation has far-reaching implications. Exploring the cases of Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, Osička et al. (2020) have concluded that media by and large act as platforms for voicing the perspectives of countries’ decision makers and energy policy stakeholders. By this, media activate the dominant discourses and prevent alternative options from emerging, thus enabling certain policy options, while constraining others (Ibid., pp. 24-25).

The policy of editors and proprietors, as well as financial and human resources the media can devote to a particular issue, are also important factors, influencing the quality of climate change coverage. Boykoff et al. (2015) point to a regional asymmetry and a critical information gap, observing a relatively low reporting on climate change in the regions of South America, the Middle East and Africa. Low coverage in these regions tends to go together with reproducing the news from the Western news agencies or media releases without any local context (Anderson 2018, p. 473). However, the media effect of agenda-setting is higher if media report about issues that are relevant to the audiences. If individuals perceive the issue as irrelevant then their “need for orientation” is low;

as a result, they pay little or new attention to the news (Valenzuela & McCombs 2019). Arguably, domestication of climate change related issues offers a way to increase the salience of climate change in society. Perceptions of climate change as distant in space, time and social affiliation have been shown as crucial in people's behaviour (McDonald, 2018). Alongside the news value itself, Berglez & Lidskog (2019) point to geographical and cultural proximity and domestication, such as country's interests, knowledge, values, experience, as essential factors, determining which events and how are being reported. Addressing distance in climate change reporting Olausson (2014) distinguishes three discursive modes of domestication: (1) introverted domestication; (2) extroverted domestication; and (3) counter-domestication. Whereas the introverted domestication focuses on the prevalence of the domestic over the global, and discursively constructs "geopolitical disconnectivity" (Ibid., p. 716), the extroverted domestication looks for interconnections between the global and the domestic, thus fostering "geopolitical interconnectivity" (Ibid, p. 720). On the contrary, the counter-domestication ignores the domestic dimension, focusing instead on the global, thus discursively creating "geopolitical deterritorialization" (Ibid, p. 722). A study on Lithuania has found that media provide a globalized perspective in climate change representation with half of the examined articles making interconnections between the domestic and the international causes and consequences of climate change ("extroverted domestication"), and one third of the articles emphasizing solely the global dimension ("counter-domestication") (Rabitz et al., 2020). A research on Swedish media demonstrates that the media discourse is more domesticated: in reporting about wildfires in Australia, the Mediterranean region and the US media mention climate change only in one tenth of the articles, thus in majority of cases choosing not to associate the wildfires with climate change (Berglez & Lidskog 2019). Scholars refer to Sweden's long-standing political and societal consensus on climate change, which underlies the media treatment of climate change related issues as an internal affair rather than a problem, which is faced by all humanity (Ibid.). On the contrary, a study on the media representation on phasing-out coal in the Czech Republic (Lehotský et al. 2019) suggests that climate change might be domesticated, yet not as a result of long-term domestic awareness on climate change. Rather, it is an effect of economy, employment and company-centered media perspective, as a result of which coal mining is separated from coal combustion and its impacts on environment (Ibid.). The cases of Sweden and the Czech Republic thus suggest that Olausson's (2014) "geopolitical disconnectivity" may result both from high and low resonance in media space on climate change.

To sum up, media are important agents in transmitting, explaining and contesting the strategic narratives. Their role as agenda-setters involves both the decision to report about the issue and the way how to do it. By choosing the information sources and framing, media can either align with the official political narrative, or contest it. To increase the salience of the issue frames, relevant to the audiences, are particularly important, and domestication, properly interlinked with the global dimension, may provide means to make climate change relevant to the audiences. At the same time, domestication of climate change may result in "geopolitical disconnectivity" if the effects of and the solutions to climate change are disentangled from their global context.

Methodology

The data-set of this study consists of articles and broadcasts (further in text – units), which have been published in the print and the online media, the television and the radio stations, and the state and the local government information channels of Latvia, containing such keywords in Latvian and Russian languages as “climate change”, “global warming” and “environment”. Whereas “climate change” and “global warming” are common phrases, attributed to changing weather conditions, “environment” is frequently used in public discourse to demonstrate the causes and the effects of climate change, and environmental issues have been found as closely linked to climate reporting in the region (Rabitz et al., 2020; Lyytimäki & Tapio, 2009). To account for units, which report about the impact of climate change on environment and its consequences (e.g., pollution of environment, environmental catastrophes), yet do not mention climate change or global warming, this study includes in the analysis the units, containing the keyword “environment” in adequate contexts.

A list of the monitored media incorporates 710 media outlets, and it covers nearly all media, published in Latvia both in Latvian and Russian languages.¹ The list includes national newspapers and magazines, regional newspapers, public and commercial television and radio channels, news agencies as well as online media, which consists of general and sectoral news portals, e-news portals of national and regional newspapers and magazines and lifestyle and advisory portals. In addition, government and municipalities’ information channels, such as websites, and municipalities’ information leaflets are included in the sample.

The appearance of keywords in media coverage was monitored in the period from August 1, 2020, till January 31, 2021. Such a period was chosen to monitor the media coverage of climate change before and after the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, which was planned to take place on November 2020, yet due to the COVID-19 pandemic was postponed till 2021. Despite it, the deadline for signatories of the Paris Agreement to submit enhanced nationally determined contributions to reduce their GHG emissions remained at the end of 2020, which makes the chosen time period valid for analysing the media coverage of the climate change discussion.

The units have been selected by an information search and analysis tool Station (station.lv). The selected units have been verified manually to exclude units, where the keywords have been used in unrelated contexts. The units have been analysed following two parameters: publicity and the audience reached. Publicity refers to number of articles published, whereas the audience reached means the sum of average audiences of particular media. In the case of printed media, it is an average audience of a particular newspaper or magazine; in the case of radio and television it is an average audience of a concrete

¹ Latvia is a multi-ethnic society with 25% of ethnic Russians in Latvia, part of whom still have the status of non-citizens or do not use Latvian as the language of inter-ethnic communication. To reach the Russian-speaking part of the population the biggest news portals (e.g., Delfi, Tvnet) produce their content both in Latvian and in Russian. Public television and radio have separate channels in Russian. As well, media information sources exist directed exclusively towards the Russian-speaking audiences (e.g., Сегодня, МК-Латвия).

time-slot of a particular channel; in the case of online media, it is an average number of real users per day for a particular media, which has been calculated on a monthly basis.

Table 1. Selected peaks for media analysis.

Date	Number of units	Audience reached (million contacts)
29.12.2020	78	2.19
28.12.2020	76	2.78
15.09.2020	68	3.33
21.01.2021	61	2.46
25.01.2021	59	2.09
07.10.2020	58	3.09
23.09.2020	51	2.49

A quantitative data analysis has been carried out to determine a share of climate change related articles by months, languages (Latvian and Russian), dates, media segments and top media. To analyse the thematic framework of climate change related units, seven peaks have been selected following two criteria: they have the highest number of published units per day and they reach the biggest audiences. Only the peaks, where both criteria are present are included in the selection (Table 1).

For analysis of themes and framing in the peaks qualitative content analysis has been applied. The units have been analysed manually, following a codebook, which consists of eight categories: media, language, topic, number of republished units, thematic framing, information sources, centrality of climate change, and attribution of news to Latvia. The results of the coding have been summarised under six themes, observed in the peaks, i.e., pollution of environment, international efforts, domestic policy, involvement of society, sustainable entrepreneurship and climate change *per se*. The content of each unit has been evaluated following twelve frames (in alphabetical order): COVID-19, Climate, Economy, Education, Energy, Environment, International efforts, Normative issues, Politics, Research and innovation, Security, Society. Frames have been devised deductively, based on a pilot study of 80 units, which had been collected during the first week of the monitoring in August 2020, and complemented during the study.

Results

Media coverage

Altogether in the observed period 3753 articles and broadcasts containing the keywords, in Latvian and Russian were published. The biggest number of units was published in September (798), followed by October (732), December (716) and January (647). Relatively less attention to climate change and environment related issues was paid in November (532) and August (328).

Majority of units were published in Latvian (3197 units, 85%), whereas almost six times smaller number of units was published in Russian (556 units, 15%). In terms of the audience reached, the share of the news in Latvian is even higher: they reached 89.5% of the audience, while the news in Russian reached 10.5% of the audience.

As to the media segments, online media published almost half of the units (1827; 49%), followed by news agencies (663; 18%) and radio (566; 15%) (Figure 1). The remaining shares were published by regional newspapers (220; 6%), television (192; 5%), national newspapers (175; 5%) and magazines (110; 3%). In terms of the audience reached, it is also online media that reach the largest audience, and the share of them is significantly higher (78%) than in the case of published units. Other media segments reach considerably smaller audiences, i.e. radio – 8%, television – 5.5%, national newspapers – 5%, regional newspapers – 1.7%. News agencies, which publish almost one fifth of the climate-related units, reach the audience of only 0.5%.

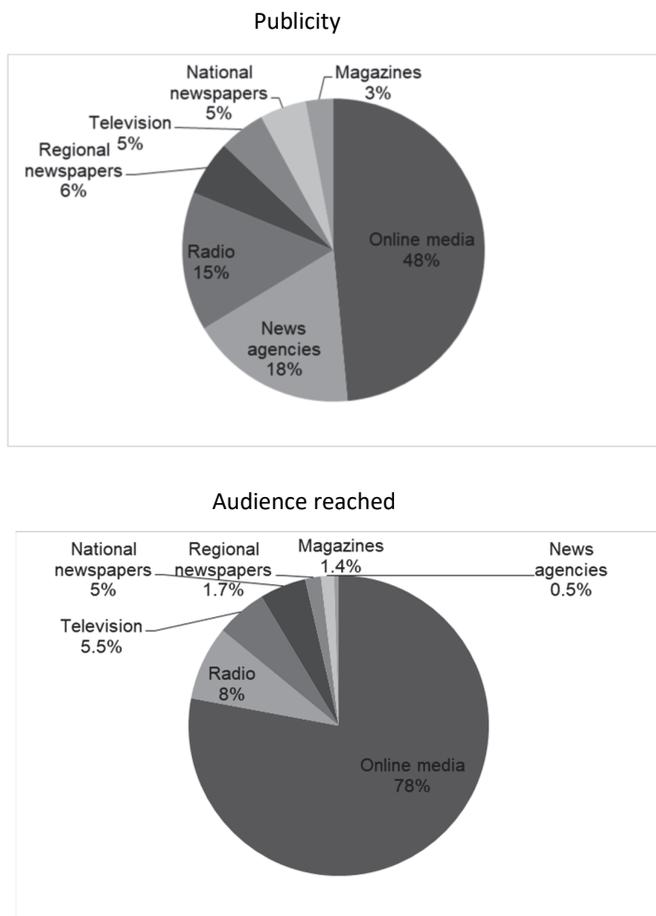


Figure 1. Coverage of climate change and environment related issues by media segments (in %)

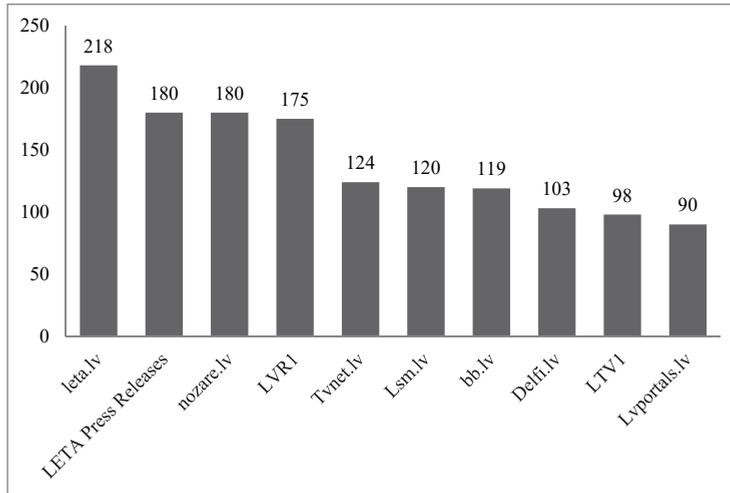


Figure 2. **TOP 10 media in coverage of climate change and environment related issues by publicity (number of units)**

Ten the most salient media in Latvia regarding the publishment of climate change and environment related units are as follows: the national news agency LETA and its branches (LETA Business portal nozare.lv and LETA Press Releases) take the first three places (578) (Figure 2). It is followed by the Latvian public radio Latvijas Radio 1 (*Radio Latvia 1*, LVR1) (175 units) and the online news portals Tvnet.lv (124 units), Lsm.lv (120 units), bb.lv (119 units) and Delfi.lv (103 units). Lsm.lv represents the Latvian Public broadcasting, whereas Delfi.lv and Tvnet.lv are two the most popular e-news portals in Latvia (Gemius Audience 2021). An online news portal bb.lv (*Baltijas Balss*, *Baltic Voice*) is the most popular e-news portal in Latvia, oriented towards Russian-speaking audiences. However, its provided content is ambiguous, as its former versions (*Segodnya*, *Vesti Segodnya*) have been criticised for spreading the Russian propaganda (Springe 2017). The list is concluded by the Latvian public television Latvijas Televīzija 1 (*Latvian Television 1*, LTV1) (98 units) and the online news portal of the official publisher of the Republic of Latvia “*Latvijas Vēstnesis*” (*Latvian Herald*) Lvportals.lv (90 units).

Regarding the audience reached by the climate change and environment related news, the list of ten most visible media is different (Figure 3). The news in the most popular online news portals in Latvia – Delfi.lv and Tvnet.lv – reach substantially bigger audiences than the news in other media (30.11 million and 25.82 million contacts respectively). They are followed by the online portal of the public broadcaster Lsm.lv (11.41 million contacts). Similar audiences are shared by online portals of the national newspapers Kasjauns.lv (7.6 million contacts) and La.lv (7.3 million contacts), online news portal Apollo.tvnet.lv (6.96 million contacts) and bb.lv (6.47 million contacts). At the end of the list is LTV1 (5.21 million contacts) and LVR1 (4.57 million contacts), followed by an online news portal of a national newspaper Nra.lv (4.28 million contacts).

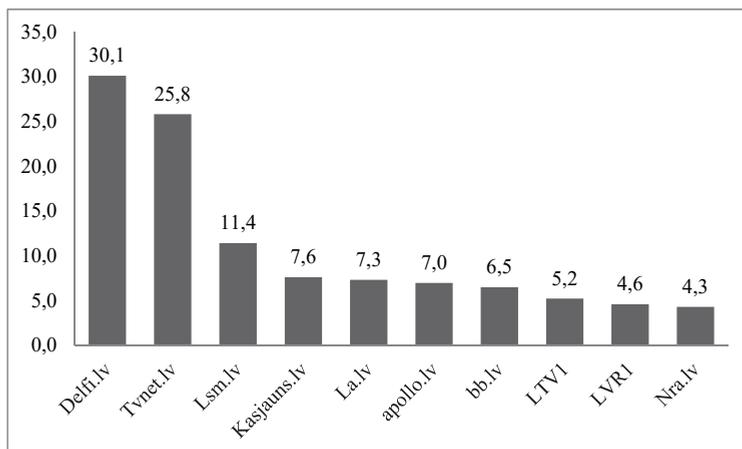


Figure 3. TOP 10 media in coverage of climate change and environment related issues by the reached audience (million contacts)

Overall, quantitative analysis demonstrates that there is a significant number of units, covering climate change and environment related issues in the Latvian media: on average, the Latvian media publish 20 units per day. The biggest number of units is published in Latvian, and the Latvian-speaking media reach also the majority of the audiences. The online media publish half of the units and reach two thirds of the audiences. The second biggest publisher – the news agencies - publishes one fifth of the units but reaches only 0.5% of the audiences. Radio publishes three times more units than television and national newspapers yet reach only few percent higher audiences. Regional newspapers though publish little more units than national newspapers, have three times smaller audiences. Magazines publish the least number of units and reach the audiences similar to regional newspapers. The most salient media in terms of publishing the climate change and environment related news is the news agency LETA, public broadcasters and the biggest online news portals, whereas in terms of the audiences reached the biggest online news portals, the internet versions of national newspapers and public broadcasters are the most important players. In the Russian language, the e-news portal bb.lv dominates the field.

Thematic framework

Six themes dominate the contents of the articles and broadcasts in the selected peaks with various level of attention devoted to climate change. The highest attention of journalists in the peaks has been paid to issues, which are purely environmental, such as *pollution of environment*. The leak of oil at the Butinge oil terminal in Lithuania into the Baltic Sea, potentially reaching the territory of Latvia (97 units) has been the most widely reported topic, complemented by pollution of Latvia's river Jugla (21 units), raids of the State Environmental Service in industrial zones to control adherence to environmental norms (6 units) and an amount of textile waste in Latvia (4 units). Environmental protection dominates the framing, alongside security in the case of oil leak at Butinge terminal. An

aspect of politics is invoked, looking for the guilty ones and political responsibility. Climate change, directly or indirectly, does not figure as a topic in these units. Content-wise, in the case of the oil leak at the Butinge oil terminal or pollution of Latvia's river Jugla it is justifiable, yet the news on the raids of the State Environmental Service or the textile waste in Latvia might have added a climate change related dimension.

The second most popular theme, and the major one regarding climate change, is *international efforts* to address climate change. In this bloc, climate change is a major or secondary topic. Part of the coverage is devoted to the EU ambitions to be a leader in the world in climate change adaptation and the set GHG emission targets (32 units). Another part is tied to the US involvement in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and most notably – the controversy between Donald Trump and Joe Biden (47 units). Journalists report widely on the first day in office of Biden, revoking of Trump's orders and rejoining the Paris agreement, and touch upon the EU and US cooperation in addressing climate change. International cooperation, politics and normative issues, such as the EU and US moral responsibility to lead on climate issues, underlie the framing of these articles and broadcasts. However, Latvia is rarely revealed as being part of international efforts, though the performance of Latvia's highest-level officials attracts journalist attention, e.g., the speech of the President of Latvia at the UN General Assembly was widely covered (22 units). Climate issues in his speech, however, are revealed only marginally, mostly showing them in the context of another topic – need to tackle disinformation. Overall, in this bloc media cover climate change as an issue, which is being addressed globally, but with no reflection on local resonance: across international efforts, Latvia's situation, position and challenges are rarely demonstrated.

The third theme in the selected peaks is *domestic politics*. In this bloc, the covered issues are related to environmental protection rather than climate change, as in reporting about the government decision on the packaging deposit system operator in Latvia after decades' long debates (17 units) and conclusions of the State Audit Office of an inefficient wastewater management system in Latvia (16 units). Impact on environment and politics – such as political will or lack of it – dominates the framing about the Latvian domestic politics. Nevertheless, some attention to climate change is paid when the EU-related activities are reported, e.g., in covering the presentation of the European Commission's "Farm to Fork" strategy in the parliamentary committee in Latvia (4 units), or the plans of the Latvian government to increase the registration tax for used cars (5 units). However, it is only political ambitions or criticism of their superficiality, which are being reported, not the causes or effects of the mentioned policies on climate change.

Another theme concerns *involvement of society* in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The biggest attention is devoted to the World Cleanup and Latvia's Big Cleanup Days (16 units) encouraging people to collect waste in their surroundings and to plant trees for carbon capture. Some activities of Latvian entertainment and art professionals are covered, such as signing of cooperation memorandum on climate neutrality between the Latvian film industry and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MEPRD) (10 units), and the organization of art and science festival EKO-DATI in Riga (6 units), combining the concerns over ecological issues with the increasing

role of artificial intelligence and digitalization. Some units cover public involvement in national and local decision-making process (call for non-governmental experts to join the Environmental Advisory Council at the MEPRD, 6 units). Some attention is dedicated to an eco-innovative plastic waste project (3 units), and the ambiguous attitude of the Latvian society towards the forests and the forestry (4 units). There is a mix of frames, observable in this bloc: societal involvement both to preserve environment and to contribute to climate neutrality, as well as the educational aspect. In the biggest number of units climate change is a major or secondary topic, yet climate change is missing in part of the units, e.g., those that report about the plastic waste project or that ask experts to join the Environmental Advisory Council.

Transition towards *sustainable entrepreneurship* appears in the peaks to a lesser extent. There are a few articles which invite the entrepreneurs to join Business Days, organized by the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (5 units), some forecasts on the impact of climate change on insurance market (3 units) and an opinion of the Swedbank's² economist about opportunities provided by climate change during the COVID-19 pandemic (3 units). Single units have been devoted to certain sectors or entrepreneurs, e.g., electric car charging network in Latvia; development of wind energy parks in Latvia and the scepticism of society about them; plans of the national air carrier AirBaltic towards climate neutrality; the very beginning of circular economy and re-cycling in Latvia. Climate change is mostly a secondary topic in this bloc, and there is no dominant frame in these articles: opportunities by climate change for energy sector and economy, research and innovation, as well as international efforts are underlined.

Climate change per se is a relatively minor theme in the selected peaks. Journalists report about the hottest September in the world (6 units) and the heat records in Latvia in 2020 (3 units). Several units cover the increasing number of environmental catastrophes in the world (2 units) and changing winters in Latvia (2 units). Single units are dedicated to an issue of melting glaciers; interaction of climate change and spread of infectious diseases; extinction of species in the world and appearance of new invasive species in Latvia; heat records in the world in 2020 and the expected temperature rise in the future. Some articles report scientific discoveries regarding climate change (e.g., impact of potential use of nuclear weapons on climate change). Climate change is the dominant frame in this bloc, basically revealed through changing weather conditions and its impact on environment. In most cases, climate change is related to observations in the world, though changing weather conditions have been reported also with regard to Latvia. However, journalists rarely expand on the connection of air temperatures with human activity, e.g., the rise in the temperature is most often reported as a meteorological fact, but not as an effect of anthropogenic climate change, and heat effects on the population are also rarely discussed.

Overall, the biggest number of units in the selected peaks has been devoted to the theme of environmental pollution, and climate change is not a topic there. However, there are units in this theme, where climate change might have been employed as a frame, yet it is not. In general, international activities is a theme, where climate change has been

² Biggest bank in Latvia.

reported the most, and climate change has been framed as a subject of international efforts and normative assumptions there. In the units about domestic politics, climate change related issues are framed in terms of environmental protection and politics, whereas the units about societal involvement and sustainable entrepreneurship demonstrate mixed frames. Climate change *per se* receives a relatively minor attention of journalists, and though framed as changing weather conditions, the issue of climate change receives little explanation both in terms of its causes and effects.

Media as narrators

In the analysis of peaks important findings are related to media as narrators. Each peak contains a number of units about the same topic, yet in majority of cases they report a fact without a comprehensive analysis of the topic. Moreover, in most cases the articles and broadcasts do not differ from each other content-wise. For instance, on 25 January 2021, journalists in 17 articles and broadcasts report about the Virtual International Climate Adaptation Summit, yet all units repeat the same information, and do it in a purely informative way, e.g., though there is an information on the organizers and objectives of the summit, no information on the initial debates or decisions has been provided, as well as no indication of Latvia's participation (or not) in the summit.

Similarity of units points to the importance of particular media in setting the agenda, as media reproduce the news from each other. In the peaks, several media appear as the most common publishers of the units, such as the national news agency LETA (leta.lv, nozare.lv, LETA Preses relīzes, EsunES.leta.lv, rus.leta.lv) and Latvian public broadcasters (Lsm.lv, LTV1, LTV2, LVR1, LVR2, LVR4, Radio 5). Yet, in terms of the reached audiences, the most important narrators are the biggest news portals in Latvia – e.g., Delfi.lv, Tvnet.lv, Kasjauns.lv, Apollo.tvnet.lv, and their Russian versions, as well as a Russian-speaking e-news portal bb.lv. Regarding the audiences reached, public broadcasters also play a prominent role, as well as commercial television TV3. Importantly, different themes attract different media for spreading the news. For instance, regional newspapers, online news portals and radio report more on the issues that concern domestic politics, involvement of society and pollution of environment, e.g., about the wastewater management or the Big Cleanup Days in Latvia, or the environmental control raids in the industrial zones. The e-news portals in Russian pay relatively more attention to climate change *per se* issues, whereas international efforts are mostly covered by the biggest online news portals in Latvian, national newspapers and news agencies.

Latvian media act passively in presenting a stance on the issue: the news is the dominant genre in representation, and only few analytical articles are present. In most cases, journalists use various information sources to complement the news, following a scheme that a journalist presents a fact, and then it is commented by a relevant-to-the-topic information source, e.g., politician, state or municipality official, entrepreneur, representative of non-governmental organisation. Usually, a single information source is used. In the peaks, the most common information sources are politicians and government officials, either Latvian or international. They are present in all themes, except sustainable

entrepreneurship and climate change *per se*. In the theme of sustainable entrepreneurship, it is the entrepreneurs or representatives of professional associations, which either have published their opinion or are approached by a journalist. In the theme of climate change, it is most often scientific discoveries, the reference is made to. Reporting about heat records in Latvia, the state-owned Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre is used as a source.

Overall, the media select information sources, depending on the topic. Alongside the Latvian politicians and government officials, in few cases journalists add entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations or ordinary people to report about topics that are covered under themes of environmental pollution and domestic politics. On the topics of international efforts, international politicians and institutions are the main source of information. In the theme of societal involvement, government and municipality officials are mixed with representatives of civil society (non-governmental organisations, activists), culture, and education. Nevertheless, journalists rarely look for alternative views to their main source of information, as a result of which the information provided is homogenous and uncontested.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the media coverage of climate change and environment related issues in Latvia is ambiguous. On the one hand, there is a significant number of news devoted to the topics that are related to climate change and environment. On the other hand, the coverage of issues relies on prepackaged material and is homogenous, and climate change as a topic *per se* receives only minor attention. The findings suggest that journalists in Latvia tend to react to the international agenda of adapting to climate change, and especially, when the controversy between crucial international players, e.g., the EU and the US, is involved. However, when international activities are covered, they are framed as international efforts and normative problems, and the aspects, highlighted by Schmidt et al. (2013), with regard to Latvia are not discussed, i.e., country's vulnerability to climate change, responsibilities under international agreements or dependency on fossil fuels. Notably, the potential effects of rising temperatures or melting glaciers on Latvia are rarely discussed also in the news items about climate change *per se*. It points to a practice of "counter-domestication" (Olausson 2014) in creating a "geopolitically deterritorialized" (Ibid.) discursive environment on climate change – a trend, which has been found as relatively persistent also in neighbouring Lithuania (Rabitz et al. 2020). In such a discursive environment climate change acquires an image of an abstract phenomenon taking place elsewhere in the world, addressing of which lies on the shoulders of global players. By spreading the image of climate change as a global, not local phenomenon policy options for action at domestic level thus are discursively constrained.

On the other hand, certain characteristics of "introverted domestication" (Olausson 2014), creating a "geopolitically disconnected" (Ibid.) discursive environment, can be found in framing, used in the theme of domestic politics. In Latvia, journalists almost never use climate change as a frame for domestic decisions: e.g., reporting about the

decision on the the packaging deposit system operator or the tax increase for used cars. It is rather lack of political will, corruption and leaning towards certain business interests, which underlies reporting on domestic issues. As well, the reporting in the theme of climate change *per se*, e.g., on heat records in Latvia, does not relate extreme weather conditions with climate change. Such a practice of “disconnecting local phenomenon from their global ramifications” (Olausson 2014, p. 715) points to similarities with the Czech media (Lehotský et al. 2019; Osička et al. 2020), making no linkages of phasing-out of coal with climate change. A journalistic practice, promoting geopolitical disconnectivity, however, fosters a discursive environment, which may hinder achievement of climate goals both domestically and globally. The Czech case (Lehotský et al. 2019) illustrates that disentanglement of coal production from coal consumption, and the media framing in support of private companies and employment, have enabled a “permissive discursive environment”, within which contradictory government decisions, requesting households to modernize domestic heating, at the same time subsidizing modern coal-fired boilers, were made (Ibid., p. 783). Berglez & Lidskog (2019) point to normative issues that disentanglement of wildfires from anthropogenically-driven climate change may pose, i.e., by treating climate change as an internal affair, Swedish media fail to account for the global character of climate change. It may have implications for policies, requiring comprehensive, all humanity embracing action.

The findings suggest that two discursive environments – the geopolitically deterritorialized and the geopolitically disconnected – coexist in the Latvian media space. In the first case, climate change figures as a distant phenomenon, not associated with Latvia. In the second case, local activities exist, potentially addressing climate change, yet the links with climate change are not made. It points to necessity of finding a locally resonant, yet globally connective framing for climate change, which would fit the national context. Environmental protection may emerge as an option in searching for relevant frames for climate change coverage in Latvia, through which a practice of “extroverted domestication” can be implemented. The findings demonstrate that impact of climate change on environment – similarly as in Finland (Lyytimäki & Tapio, 2009) – is frequently mentioned as a justification for action. In many cases, environmental protection is a dominant frame in the units, where climate change is not a topic, e.g. in reporting about waste.. In line with the agenda-setting theory, which maintains that media agenda-setting effect is higher if the issue is relevant to the audiences, domestication via local environmental protection could provide a perspective of greater relevance to the audiences, at the same time not losing the global context.

On the narrators’ side, the findings demonstrate that high share of information is published by news agencies and public broadcasters, and there is a high level of news reproduction. Even if the news agencies are marginal in terms of the audiences reached if compared with the online media the findings show that the news in the online media is frequently republished from the news agencies. It points to the importance of prepackaged information in news dissemination, which largely affirms the observations of Anderson (2018). However, the journalists play an important role in deciding, which news to republish. The news that was reproduced the most covered the themes of environmental pollution and international

efforts. The least reproduced news covered sustainable entrepreneurship and climate change *per se*. The level of republishing might have a connection with information sources. In the first case, the information came from official sources (politicians, government, international and municipality institutions). In the second case, the source of information was less authoritative, such as entrepreneurs and scientific institutions. Such a finding mirrors the conclusions of Anderson (2018) that the official political and administrative sources gain a privileged access to media. In addition, the news that was republished usually originated in the news agencies or public broadcasters, even in the theme of climate change. It indicates that the news produced by the news agency LETA and the public broadcasters LTV, LVR and lsm.lv have more chances to be considered as authoritative media information sources by journalists than the news originating in other media.

The abovementioned suggests that the topics, which have authoritative sources (such as politicians and government officials) or on which prepackaged information is available (e.g. government, business or societal initiatives), spread in Latvian media ecology more efficiently than those which involve independent investigations by journalists. The latter usually remained as single units, published only by one media outlet. From the point of view of strategic narratives, the journalists' reliance on political and governmental sources and republishing of prepackaged information provides an opportunity for official narratives to be projected more easily. On the reception side, however, it has serious implications. As the news is homogenous, there is no contestation in the media space of the representation provided. Alternative opinion is rarely presented in general, and is never available within a single news item, or added to the news item during republishing. As a result, people who disagree with the official position do not find themselves in the media representation, which further on has implications for the legitimacy of the official political narratives. Strategic narratives are formed "to influence the behaviour of others" (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 2), and their persuasive power is higher if there is an alignment between the formation, projection and reception phases (Miskimmon et al., 2013). If there is no representation in media coverage of societal perceptions of climate change and official political positions, the receptive side of the narrative is blurred and the influence of the strategic narrative on the behavior of people may not be as expected.

Further research would be necessary to investigate the causes of the reliance of Latvian media on official political and governmental sources, and the prepackaged material. Though the trend is not unique and reveals a general observation (e.g., Anderson, 2018), such a journalistic practice has serious implications on salience of climate change issues in Latvian society not only because of potential disagreement to official positions but also because of comparatively low trust of the Latvian society to government. Latvia has one of the lowest levels of trust to government (31%) among the countries of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021). As regards information about climate change, a trend is similar: 32% of the Latvian population considers the Latvian government institutions as a trustworthy source (RSU, 2021). It implies that the information, provided by media, which is based on governmental sources, may not be considered as trustworthy by majority of the Latvian population. A significantly higher share of the Latvian population (79%) considers scientists to be trustworthy sources on

climate change (Ibid.). It suggests that scientists are worthy but underestimates information sources by the Latvian media with a potential to increase the salience of climate change issues in Latvian society.

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that the representation of climate change and environment related issues in Latvia, though relatively high in numbers, is repetitive, homogenous and based on official political and governmental sources. On the one hand, it suggests that Latvia's strategic narratives on climate change spread easily in media ecology. On the other hand, scarcity of alternative perspectives – societal, business and scientific – blurs the perception side of strategic narratives. Without the understanding of the resonance of strategic narratives in various audiences the effect of strategic narratives remains unclear. With no visible contestation of official narratives in media space a misconception of consensus may emerge, potentially leading to biased policy making and implementation.

As to agenda-setting, the Latvian media most often invite people to think about international agenda and think of it in terms of international efforts, devoted to address climate change, and normative issues. Protection of environment is a common frame, which is attributed to climate change related topics in other themes, either climate change is mentioned in the article or broadcast or not. Climate change *per se* has received a minor attention of journalists, and is reported more as a fact related to changing weather conditions, than a challenge with causes and consequences. Such findings suggest that climate change is not yet a deliberately domesticated issue by the Latvian media. Instead, a strong trend of internationalisation exists, putting forward a “geopolitically deterritorialized” perspective of climate change. On the other hand, a parallel practice of making no linkages between domestic events and climate change promotes a “geopolitically disconnected” discursive environment on climate change. Efforts would be needed to make interconnections between the global and the domestic in both cases, thus creating a “geopolitically connected” discursive environment on climate change. Given the attention paid to the environmental protection in the Latvia media, it might be considered as a frame, potentially connecting a globally distant phenomenon of climate change with locally specific circumstances.

Further research would be necessary on the factors that hinder the role of media as active agenda-setters on climate change in Latvia, and specifically on reasons what drive media reliance on prepackaged material and official political and governmental information sources. In practical terms, there is an uncovered potential of scientists in the media representation, which could potentially enhance the salience of climate change issues in Latvian society. Research on correlations between the levels of trust to various information sources and perception of climate change as a challenge could also help in efforts to evaluate the persuasive power of the official political narrative.

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